

Religious Intolerance: The Case of Principals in Multi-faith Schools

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Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative study framed in a phenomenological research design and aimed at investigating how school principals describe their mediating role when implementing religion-in-education policy at schools. Data were collected by means of narrative interviews. Stories of twelve school principals pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of Pretoria, all of whom had been in education for at least fifteen years at the time of the study, were collected, transcribed, analyzed and interpreted. Research findings indicate that, irrespective of the laws and policies laid down for them in implementing the policy, these school principals were unable to reconcile the requirements of the constitution with their own traditions and school rules.

Keywords: multi-faith schools, policy implementation, religious intolerance, religious tolerance, teacher training

1. Introduction

In recognising not only the existence of deep-rooted historical inequalities in South African education in general and in religion in particular, but also the diverse nature of the South African population in terms of culture, language and religion, the post-1994 government found it necessary to address past inequalities while simultaneously developing a unity of purpose and spirit that

cherishes and celebrates diversity. This initiative is well expressed in Section 15(1) of the Constitution (No: 108 of 1996), which states that '[e]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion'. Section 15 (2), in particular, points out that religious observances may be conducted at State or State-aided institutions, provided that (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities, (b) they are conducted in an equitable manner, and (c) their attendance is free and voluntary (RSA 1996).

With regard to education, Section 7 of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) clearly indicates that,

subject to the Constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the school governing body (SGB) if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and if attendance of such observance by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary.

This provision is further emphasised in paragraph 58 of the National Policy on Religion and Education which stipulates that the governing bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances provided that this is also done on equitable basis. The policy also gives the SGB the power to determine the nature and content of religious observances for educators and learners (DoE 2003). By implication, the religion-in-education policy does not promote or protect the religious interests of a particular faith. Instead, its aim is, on the one hand, to promote constitutional values while protecting everybody's right to religious freedom. On the other hand, it wants to use religion in education to attain specific objectives (i.e. tolerance); exposing learners to different religions, in order to make them more tolerant of those whose religious orientations differ from their own, for example.

It is however important to point out that regardless of the democratic government's attempts to ensure that all religions are treated equally, also in education, and that learners should be taught to respect religious diversity in their interaction with others, some school principals are unable to reconcile the requirements of the constitution with their own traditions and school rules. This reality is best explained by the fact that it has become common for schools to describe and advertise themselves as being of Christian, Islam or Hindu character. The admission policies of these schools welcome learners of all

religions and belief systems (including Muslim, Jewish, Jehovah Witness, Christian and atheist) to enroll at these schools. Should learners (or their parents) of their own free will choose to enroll at those schools however, they do so with the knowledge and understanding (and by implication, agreement) that the schools operate according to for instance, a Christian ethos and Christian values, as determined by their school governing bodies. Participation in any Christian practices or activities (including attendance of sermons, prayer, evangelism opportunities, etc.) for example, are said to be completely free and voluntary at all times, no learner or staff ever being forced to participate in any of these against his/her will or that of the parent/guardian.

Debates on religion in education have led to schools faced with lawsuits for violating the religious rights of both learners and staff by refusing to tolerate and accommodate their religious beliefs and practices in organised school religious observances. The charges, which are costly to the school, could include back pay, job reinstatement, overtime tutoring and other costs. Whether it is because school principals do not know how to implement change policies, or because the training they received from both the department and the university did not equip them with the skills to do so, is the focus of this article.

We begin this article by first briefly addressing the following question: ‘What, according to research, is tolerance – religious tolerance?’ Next, we attempt to determine the rationale for tolerance – religious tolerance in education, paying special attention to conditions, options and processes which led to the development of the religion-in-education policy in South Africa. We then discuss the experiences of school principals in this study with the aim of determining the extent to which they fulfilled the mandate of the department in their role as policy implementers at their schools. Finally, we recommend pre-service and in-service training that strengthen educators and principals’ skills, values, and attitudes to promote religious tolerance as absolutely essential.

1. Tolerance – Religious Tolerance

For the purpose of this article, the concepts of tolerance and religious tolerance will be discussed concurrently. Theorists define the concept of tolerance in different ways. Some view tolerance as an appreciation of diversity and the ability to live and let others live, the ability to exercise a fair and objective

attitude towards those whose opinions, beliefs, practices and religions differ from one's own (Yusuf 2013). Others describe tolerance to be the ability to adhere to one's convictions while accepting the right of others to adhere to theirs and the ability to enjoy one's religious rights and freedoms without infringing on those of others (Goolam 2000).

While we are in the process of getting familiar with this concept, we are cautioned that the denotative meaning of tolerance is neither positive nor ideal (Parker 2010). According to Parker, the etymological meaning of tolerance is 'the action or practice of enduring or sustaining pain or hardship; the power or capacity of enduring'. Viewing tolerance from this angle equates it with 'forbearance', a synonym which implies that, in being tolerant, one is prepared to put up with something inferior or unpleasant. This is to say, in cases where individuals or communities have been deeply entrenched in violent conflicts, for instance, being tolerant helps the affected groups endure the pain of the past and resolve their differences. Tolerance can therefore be viewed as critical to the interaction of different groups in a respectful and understanding way (Yusuf 2013).

Informed by the above given descriptions, religious tolerance, requires a conception of the true or the good (Clark 1997). It is only out of such a conception that our own beliefs and practices emerge and take form, and without these beliefs and practices we are incapable of judging the beliefs and practices of others. In other words, without disagreement there is no burden to bear, nothing to tolerate. It is the weight of disagreement about matters of fundamental human concern that makes tolerance possible. It is only when one is faced with belief/practice competitors that the virtue of tolerance can be called upon to resist the temptation toward dogmatism, arrogance, and intolerance (Clark 1997). For this reason, tolerance should meet two conditions: first, there has to be a situation of difference or plurality, and second, there has to be some reason for passively or actively accepting (even appreciating) this situation of difference (Knauth 2014).

In addition to disagreement, religious tolerance requires an element of caring which is usually rooted in a deep commitment to the belief or practice in question (Clark 1997). The principle is therefore that, the sort of caring relevant to tolerance must be deep enough to create a burden, which is why tolerance usually arises in connection with matters of fundamental human concern. The presence of this element of caring signifies absence of indifference. The argument goes further that a person who practices tolerance

is someone who does not exert any pressure on another in order to change his/her belief; instead such a person respects an opposing view without prejudice (Agius & Ambrosewicz 2003).

Viewed from a legal perspective, Article 1 of the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance describes tolerance thus:

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

Tolerance is not a concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and states.

Based on the principles proclaimed above, tolerance can also be looked at as the willingness of an individual to accept another's right to be different and to respect this right without being judgmental (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013). Should it be looked at through this lens, tolerance has a high potential to contribute in the shaping of human rights, pluralism, democracy and the law. This best explains that humans are naturally different in terms of appearance, character, and behaviour and that they have the right to live peacefully without interruption of their rights (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013). In other words, tolerance is not just agreeing with one another or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every person (Yusuf 2013).

Instead of the term tolerance, other scholars prefer the term 'hospitality' (Keet 2010). In his explanation, Andre Keet narrates that tolerance designates an acceptance of something less than oneself, whereas hospitality signifies pure and unconditional openness to someone who is neither expected

nor invited. Thus, the notion of hospitality in its purest form is more rooted in the practices of African traditional societies than in other parts of the world (Keet 2010). It is however, not the purpose of this article to discuss and decide on a preferred concept; rather, its aim is to use empirical evidence to point out those factors that seem to perpetuate intolerant/inhospitable occurrences in schools. This brings us to the fact that the opposite of tolerance is intolerance. Intolerance is seen to be a notion which originates from the belief that one's own actions and way of life is superior to or better than those of others (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013). In the same vein, intolerance is described as the failure to appreciate and respect the practices, opinions and beliefs of other religious groups (Yusuf 2013). The implication behind these definitions is that intolerance results from lack of knowledge about other people's customs, beliefs, and rituals (American Academy of Religion 2010). Thus, intolerance between individuals is often perpetuated because individuals base their impressions and opinions of one another on assumptions rather than on factual knowledge (Yusuf 2013). That 'religious illiteracy' has become 'widespread', and one of its many consequences is increased prejudice and hostility toward those of different faiths is a common phenomenon (American Academy of Religion 2010).

In conclusion of this argument, research evidence indicates that intolerance drives groups apart, creating a sense of permanent separation from others (Yusuf 2013). As a result, people with different practices and beliefs often face dismissal, alienation or persecution (Clark 1997). The negative effects of intolerance include oppression, ethnic cleansing, apartheid and genocide that deny the needs and rights of others (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013). Going a step further, intolerance in multi-ethnic, multi-religious or multicultural societies, leads to violations of human rights, violence or armed conflict (Goolam 2000). Discussions of religious tolerance in education follow.

2. Religious Tolerance in Education

Tolerance is not only seen as a political or legal requirement but also as an educational one. Looking at it from the educational perspective, we would argue that tolerance is one of the moral virtues instilled through knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013). Based on this argument, we view schools as the place, above

everywhere else, where learners' future is rehearsed; as the engine rooms of multiculturalism and integration; places where children learn the grammar of cooperation and respect and gain the social tools to understand and accept one another (Erebus International 2006). Concurring with this argument the school can also be referred to as a transformative resource which assists learners in the double process of socialisation and individuation, helping them to become competent members of communities of practice (Miedema 2014).

This argument is extended with a quote that 'no religion is an island' (Heschel 1996). What this quote denotes is that, to study one's own religion in isolation from its historical interactions with other faith communities is to distort the historical record and deny the evidence of how deeply interlinked an individual religion has been with its neighbouring communities of faith. Grounded from this line of thinking, there are ongoing doubts that single faith religious schools can prepare students how to live with 'difference' (Kymlicka 2001). This argument is concluded with a statement that:

The religions of the world are no more self-sufficient, no more independent, no more isolated than individuals or nations. Energies, experiences, and ideas that come alive outside the boundaries of a particular religion, or all religions, continue to challenge and affect every religion (Heschel 1996).

Schools, whether religious or non-religious could instil in learners distinctive values that equip them with the skills used in evaluating others' values (which can, and indeed should, include negative criticism) and also to provide them with reasons to place a higher premium on other integrative social values such as tolerance and 'civic respect' (Halstead & McLaughlin 2005). Schools would, therefore, have to create secure identities in their learners as well as build communities of empathetic citizens committed to the common good. The aim of such religious citizenship education should be to foster understanding of religious difference beyond stereotypes and conventional ritualistic behaviour, enabling students to 'negotiate with the perspectives of 'others' and integrate such perspectives into their own actions and reflections' (Miedema 2006).

Educators should therefore accept the responsibility of creating in their schools opportunities for learners to open up through 'dialogue' in preparation

to decision making forums (Miedema 2014). Schools should also be places where both learners and educators engage in knowledge exchange (Mthethwa-Sommers 2014). In this way, the ‘formational stuff’, brought in by the educators, but also embodied by learners’ peers, should invite learners to accept responsibility for their self-formation and/or self-actualisation both from an individual and from a societal perspective (Miedema 2014). In fact, learning should be a complex process of meaning making through *interaction*, bringing together previous and new knowledge, experiences, action and interaction in-between educators and learners (Knauth 2014).

In the manner presented above, learners’ understandings and acceptance of religion indicate a presence (rather than absence) in terms of having access to subjective positions in which they can speak and be heard, where each one becomes ‘the author of their own multiple meanings and desires’ (Davies 2000). Put differently, but with similar meaning, transformation should be an activity authored by the learners, and necessary for them, in order to acquire their own personhood (Miedema 2014). In actual fact, learning to be a tolerant individual implies the readiness to learn something new with regard to ways of thinking and behaving (Mohamad & Khadijah 2013).

In the same line of thought, South African government insisting that public schools are institutions with a mandate to serve society as a whole, it is determined to equip learners with knowledge of religion, morality, values and diversity. Schools are therefore required to strive towards the cultural enrichment of all learners as a means of introducing them to the religious diversity of the world and to prepare them for living in such a world. This approach has two implications for the relationship between religion and education. First, it discourages schools from having one specific religious ethos. Second, it discourages schools from inculcating any single, specific religion in their learners. Rather, schools are expected to acquaint learners with the entire spectrum of religions prevalent in society with the aim of promoting understanding and tolerance towards others.

Bearing in mind that the school principal remains the key change agent in any planned school innovation, also in the transformation of national religion policy implementation, he/she is supposed to ensure that the policy of the school is implemented as developed and adopted by the SGB, of which he is a member. Our research was aimed at examining how a selected group of

school principals mediate religion policy implementation at their schools as a necessary element of societal transformation.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

The study followed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research enabled the researchers to explore and understand how school principals mediate religion education in their schools, hence qualitative investigations focus on the experiences of participants as they are lived, felt and narrated (Saldaña 2015). Due to the limited work done on the phenomenon described above, the study employed the phenomenological research design, seldom used to study principals' experiences that influenced their thoughts, actions and choices of strategies when implementing the policy (Grey 2014).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed in this study. School principals, who were postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria, were purposefully selected as research participants (McMillan & Schumacher 2014). One main reason for the choice of this sampling technique is that, since it is not the intention of the study to generalise findings, but rather to enhance understanding of principals' experiences of different religion policies as well as of their mediating role in implementing such policies in schools, purposive sampling was the answer. These principals participated in their private capacity, not as spokespersons of specific schools. That is, they narrated their stories as they experienced implementation of religion-in-education policy, not as per the expectations by their Departments of Education. When fieldwork took place, these school principals were a) engaged in leadership and management training at postgraduate level; b) had been in education for at least fifteen years; c) had been exposed to various religion-in-education policies, and d) were from various religious orientations, language and cultural groupings.

Participants

School principals who were postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria,

who met the above criterion and were willing to participate were invited to do so. Twelve principals became the sample of the study. The sample comprised of school principals from Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal. Although they appeared to be from one region (Northern region), their leadership backgrounds and experiences would be very different from one another's. Moreover, even though this was not the focus of the study, it would be of the audience interest to note that the study was gender and race balanced. Only three religions were represented. These were Hinduism, Islam and Christianity was dominant.

Data Collection

Data were collected by means of narrative interviews, with school principals' stories being recorded, transcribed, analysed and interpreted. Religious issues are usually debated and discussed at a sentimental level or are elevated to litigation through the courts as stated in the introduction. Thus, the subject is rarely explored scientifically. Contrary to this, the researchers made use of narrative inquiry to examine principals' experiences about religion that are not clouded by emotions / sentiments. In doing so, we were able to go beyond probing what principals like or dislike about the religion-in-education policy (Farrell 2012). Data were collected over a period of 4-5 months.

Ethics Considerations

Ethics approval that granted us permission to involve the principals / postgraduate students in the study was obtained from the Faculty of Education. Invitations were then directed at school principals - through direct and / or e-mail contact - who were willing to participate regardless of gender, province, historic origin and the type of schools (secondary or primary) in which they worked.

Data Analysis

We transcribed principals' tape-recorded interviews and analysed transcriptions in terms of the initially identified categories (Babbie 2014). These included principals' understanding of their mediating role in religion

policy implementation from which themes such as policy development, learner admissions and educator appointment, teaching about religion, as well as religious observances emerged.

Trustworthiness of the Results

The raw data (tape-recorded interviews), interview transcripts, interview guides, list of participants and their profiles, as well as our field notes, were audited throughout the study period to validate their accuracy and authenticity. In addition to this, we sent transcriptions to participants, asking them to correct errors of fact. This ensured that we represented them and their ideas accurately (Major & Savin- Baden 2010). Finally, the study went through the program called Turnitin, as per the university's requirements, to ensure its originality.

4. Study Findings

From the data presented it became evident that principals in this study had both positive and negative memories of the way in which religion was dealt with during their own education, but that it had a major influence on how they dealt with religion in education in their own schools. Principals with Christianity orientations regard a single-faith approach to be the only way to deal with religion in education as, according to them, it allows them to promote moral values and acceptable norms and principles to learners and staff. For this reason they resist the new policy, arguing that it causes confusion and conflict in schools. Principals with Hindu and Islam orientations were not openly negative about the new religion in education policy. To them, the greater equality between religions, at a policy level at least, would ensure that today's learners would be spared their negative experiences. The new policy would allow them to create a different type of environment for the learners who attended their schools, and environment where free association was the norm.

The data also indicates that principals regard it as their function and responsibility to draft and implement the religious observance policy of their schools. Informed by this perception they take the liberty to either make unilateral decisions or to do so in conjunction with the members of the School Management Team (SMT). While the SMT might therefore have some say as regards religion policy and practice in schools, educators, parents and learners

do not: they simply sub-contract into the policy as the principal implements it. For instance, they become part of the assembly where particular religious devotions are followed whether they like it or not. The SGBs of these schools, so the study indicates, do the same: they act only as rubber stamps to make such policies official in the eyes of departments of education.

Indications from the data presented in this study are that most of the principals who participated in the study have ignored the new religion policy. Consequently, Christian religious education is still dominant in most South African schools since it is the religion of the majority. Another conclusion, based on the same data, is that there is no indication of any mediating discussions. Put differently, principals in this study did not use mediation as a leadership strategy when dealing with conflicts that erupted as a result of religion policy implementation in schools although they had received training up to a post-graduate level and had been exposed to conflict management and resolution theory. It could be inferred, therefore, that the skill of applying their knowledge of these strategies in their own schools may not have been developed adequately.

When confronted by tensions and dilemmas, the data indicates, principals preferred to avoid them by either ignoring them or partially sub-contracting into the policy directives to show compliance with legislative instructions. The data presented in this study clearly indicates that in managing conflicts related to diverse religious interests, school principals selectively adopt certain legislative clauses for technical or administrative purposes that may help them align with the directives of departments of education, not necessarily for their application to the day-to-day running of their schools. Indications from this study are further that, in dealing with religion policy implementation in schools, principals ignore the policy in favour of maintaining the *status quo*. When faced with conflicting religious interests, they partially sub-contract into the policy. Principals therefore do not acknowledge or use transformative mediation as a leadership strategy for conflict resolution in existing religious context in schools. There seem to be two possible reasons for this. One, principals have not received training or are not skilled in the use of transformative mediation. Two, they lack the requisite set of knowledge, skills and attitude particular to transformative mediation processes.

There were exceptions, though. Some of the principals who participated in this study were confident, open and generous; they had the

integrity, ability or potential to use their past religious experiences to transform the quality and nature of interaction in their schools. Some of these principals see themselves as spiritual beings having a human experience rather than as human beings who may be having a spiritual experience. Should they receive proper and adequate training, these are the principals who could assist the South African government in its attempts to facilitate the implementation of policies fraught with tensions, policies that could cause moral dilemmas in schools as regards people's understanding and expression of spirituality, diversity, morality and human nature. The section that follows discusses study findings.

5. Discussion

The findings presented above clearly indicate that most of the principals in this study could not accommodate differences and as a result their actions perpetuated religious intolerance in areas such as policy development, learner admissions and educator appointment, teaching about religion, as well as religious observances.

5.1 Policy Development

One of the functions of a school governing body, as stated in Section 20 of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), is to develop and adopt school policies, including those pertaining to religion. In describing the way in which policies are developed and implemented in their schools, it is clear that the majority of the principals in this study *sub-contracted* into the policy by becoming the *appropriate authorities* that crafted the religion policy of the schools. By sub-contracting, this study refers to a strategy in which the school principal implements the intended educational change according to the wishes of a particular interest group or department of education. Our study found that a number of schools adapted some of the clauses from the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and the national religion policy into their school policies, not necessarily with the intention of applying them in their daily school lives, but to technically or administratively comply with the directives of departments of education.

In so doing some of these school principals owned the task of policy

development fully while others involved the SMT. Those that involved the SGB would agree with decisions taken but would either practise the opposite or manipulate SGB elections with the intention to have people from the same faith in majority. It is in terms of such practices that, in *accordance with the Constitution, section 22 (1) of the Schools Act (84 of 1996)*, the participating principals adapted some clauses into their school policies and the SGB acted as a ‘rubber stamp’ without any guarantee that such clauses would in fact be implemented. The implication is therefore that although the policy preaches the message of tolerance, in practice, intolerance prevails. As indicated earlier on, the practice does not only make the conflict destructive, but also increases or sharpens differences that lead to irresponsible and harmful behaviour.

5.2 Learner Admission and Educator Appointment

Principals in this study were aware of religious changes that came about with the Constitution after 1994. Some of the changes they mentioned were that, although morning assemblies remained the responsibility of the principal, they were no longer compulsory but free and voluntary; that no learners may be refused admission to a school, and that no educator may be refused appointment on religious grounds. It is because of these changes that principals in the study who grew up in the Hindu and Islam faiths were appointed to predominantly white, Christian-oriented schools, regardless of the fact that they were non-whites. Nevertheless, religious intolerance still prevails in this regard. The majority of the schools led by principals in this study still describe themselves to be of Christian character during the admission and appointment processes.

This implies that although parents and appointees’ fears are allayed by being told that they should feel free to invite their religious leaders to come and address learners as part of their different religious observances, we doubt that the manner in and the level at which these conversations take place, leave room either for debates or objections. The parent or educator concerned either obeyed or forfeited the space. Learning from the fact that these principals are a product of schools in which they were exposed to for instance, one religion only, it would be very difficult for them to change their perceptions of and attitudes towards people of other religions (Ferguson & Roux, 2003). Because of this, their right to make decisions on religious matters in schools, including

decisions on morning devotions, were seldom if ever questioned, hence stakeholder groupings had no say in this regard. This then leaves us with the conclusion that religious intolerance in these schools still prevails. Although, for example, there is record keeping about religions that are represented in a school, nowhere in school practices or processes such information is effectively utilised, besides that it can be used in a manner that is uncalled for.

5.3 Teaching about Religion

The principals' narratives indicated that educators in their schools did not give Religion Education the attention it required. One reason for this was their ignorance of other religions: all they knew was for example, Christianity. It is imperative while at this juncture to mention that there are principals in this study who admitted that in every religion there is something good. What remains an obstacle, is for someone who belongs to the Islam faith to teach about Christianity *vice versa*. Although these principals have a positive outlook towards differences, they could not help transform the teaching and learning of Religion Education in their schools. In this manner, they promoted religious intolerance.

The second group of principals is of those that admitted that each religion worth learning about. These principals do not end there, they went further and played their leadership role by either securing support material/resources and/or staff development opportunities. In so doing, these principals demonstrated tolerance towards religious 'Other'. The third and last group of principals is of those that ignored the behaviour of educators towards the teaching of Religion Education because they themselves admitted that they were having difficulty imagining the teaching of religions different from theirs arguing that there is nothing 'good' in other religions, hence his reluctance of educators to teach them to Learners. It might be attitudes like these that lie at the heart of persistent intolerance against other religions at the schools where these principals are based.

5.4 Religious Observances

The principals' narratives revealed that morning devotions continued in the Christian way while other, minority, religions were marginalised. In some

schools learners and educators subscribing to other religions were not allowed to observe their religions either in terms of dress code or in terms of worship whereas in others classrooms were provided for use by minority groups and Muslims were released to go to mosque on Fridays. It is the interpretation and understanding of the majority of principals who participated in the study that permitting, for instance Muslim learners to go to mosque without considering their lost time or sparing them a classroom was in a way, *conducting religious observances on an equitable basis* as well as *availing their facilities for such observances*.

It is however important to bring to light that although these learners are granted permission, some school principals in this study regard these as special demands, or privileges, claimed by Muslim learners and that they are potentially undermining school discipline and/or complicating school management. As a result, lost teaching time was never recovered and learners simply had to catch up on their own. Also when looking at the lost time that could hardly be covered due to attendance of the Mosque on Muslims' side, no parent would insist in this regard. Such practices weaken the voices of victims and strengthen those of perpetrators. For these reasons, parents and educators had no option but to comply with what they were offered as the religious ethos of the school or else they would be victimised one way or another. Perhaps this is why, in some schools, although that is permitted, very few of them asked to be excused on Fridays for Mosque and religious intolerance remains.

It is indicative however that while some schools opt for a multi-faith approach in which provision is made for parallel programmes in religious instruction, albeit for a selected number of religions, most of the schools represented in the study, on the other hand, regard a single-faith approach to be the only way to deal with religion in education. As indicated earlier, in schools where religion education is offered, if offered, the religion of the majority dominates, hence religious intolerance, inequalities, social injustices and unfair discrimination are still at the order of the day.

6. Conclusion

Religions other than one's own are not tolerated in these principals' schools. As a result, whatever is deemed necessary is done to ensure that other religions are not acknowledged or promoted on school premises. Included in steps to

inhibit the existence of other religions were solely at policy development level where the school principal is the key agent in crafting and implementing the religion policy of the school. The other marginal line is drawn during learner admission and staff appointment where although discussions seem open and involving, the reality is that they do not leave room for debates or objections. Teaching about religion where learners are not taught about religions other than that of the majority is also used to inhibit the existence of other religions in these schools. Lastly, it is more difficult for learners and staff in other faiths to observe their religions than observing that of the majority.

It is evident that tensions and dilemmas are inevitable when one or the other party feels marginalised. It is clear from this study that educators, parents and learners showed their dissatisfaction with the ways in which principals handled the whole process differently. For instance some assemblies and religion education lessons are boycotted, either by learners or educators. Because of the lack of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, these principals use whatever means they can to avoid existing religious conflicts in their schools. Some would adapt a certain clause to the school policy for it to appear in line with what the Department of Education requires and implement a different version while others would opt for the principle of religion in the majority within the vicinity of the school at the initial stage — crafting of the policy. In so doing, they run the risk that conflict could drag on overtly or covertly.

We therefore recommend that pre-service and in-service training that strengthens educators and principals' skills, values, and attitudes are absolutely essential to the promotion of religious tolerance in schools.

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