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The Religious Dimension to Intercultural, Values and Citizenship Education: A call for Methodological Re-Consideration in Zimbabwe's Religious Education Curriculum.

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Abstract

Because of her history, post colonial Zimbabwe is characterised by diverse and heterogeneous religious and cultural beliefs and practices. Some of these beliefs and practices, as well as norms and customs, are inextricably bound to particular religious traditions and philosophies such as African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Bahai Faith, Taoism and Confucianism. Despite the multiplicity of this country's religious contours, the religious education curriculum has sadly remained neo-confessional to a large extent. In this pluralistic environment, the inhabitants have to grapple with issues of moral decadence, individualism, identity crises, intolerance, cultural concubinage, among others, yet the Zimbabwe's religious education curriculum cosmetically rather than radically addresses these vices. The curriculum is not consistent with the cultural diversity of this society. It is against this backdrop that this study assumes that a paradigm shift in terms of methodology in the teaching and learning of religious education can promote intercultural, values and citizenship issues with the view of counteracting the aforementioned anomalies and disorientations. Informed by 'modern' approaches in the teaching and learning of religious education, such as phenomenology, dialogue, multi-faith, interpretive and religious literacy, this paper explores the religious dimension to intercultural, values and citizenship education. Although these concepts are related to several other disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, anthropology and history, this study is solely interested in their relationship to religious education.

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Background

The pluralistic nature of Zimbabwe's culture-religious landscape can largely be attributed to her history of colonisation, internal and international migration, missionary activities, intermarriages, industrialisation and technological developments. Diverse cultures have met and cross-pollinate on Zimbabwean soil. Being a secular state (constitutionally), Zimbabwe has not only attracted but has also become a fertile ground for the blossoming of various African, Asian, European, Semitic and Arabic cultural beliefs and practices. In this jungle, a strange paradox in which the amazing marvels and achievements of acculturation, science and technology contradict the audible sighs of discontent and confusion is visible. While the domain of comfort is expanding, the very people and communities for whom such comfort is intended are becoming more and more unhappy and insecure. This is however, not peculiar to Zimbabwe. Thus, Zimbabwe like other nations such as South Africa, United States of America,

Canada, Britain, Wales and Australia, must relook and revisit her curricula with a view to align it with pluralistic trends and realities. It is better for Zimbabwe to genuinely face this reality of pluralism, particularly through the teaching and learning of religious education and other subjects deemed relevant.

Because of the pluralistic nature of many societies the world over, teaching and learning of subjects like intercultural, values and citizenship education have become inevitable. Reasons for introducing these subjects invariably relate to pluralism and include the desire to: strengthen personal and national identity; promote democracy, patriotism, individual rights and responsibilities; reduce moral decadence; cultivate social cohesion and tolerance as well as intercept young people's disengagement with political processes. Depending on how loaded the curricula of a particular country is, these subjects have been introduced either as academic disciplines in their own right or as an appendage of some selected career subjects like religious education and history. With regard to Zimbabwe, minimal developments have taken place in this direction despite the constitutional declaration of the country's secularistic nature as well as her visible cultural and religious diversity.

The racial, ethnic, cultural, political and religious diversity of Zimbabwe is not debatable. This cosmopolitanism is most visible in large urban centres, mining and farming communities like Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru, Banket, Glendale, Chakari, among others, where the locals mix and mingle with people of European, American, Asian, and other African origins. These non-Zimbabweans have carried with them their cultural practices and beliefs into this country. Literally they have become ambassadors of their culture as evidenced by numerous religions in Zimbabwe today. Some such religions that are competing for space with the indigenous Shona or Ndebele Traditional Religion include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Baha'i Faith. These people of different cultural persuasions often come face to face through business transactions, political and social activities. The cultural barriers which used to isolate different cultures have been obliterated by pluralism. Even though rural areas appear isolated they are not insulated from pluralism. Thus, it is no longer possible for Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims or Hindus to quarantine themselves from other faiths.

Mutual borrowing between and among different cultures have become the order of the day. Sadly, in connection with this development, the locals are rapidly losing their identity and morals. Increased cases of homosexuality, abortion, incest, murder, family disintegration, promiscuity, violence and suicide are indicators of loosening social fibre and moral decadence. Religious syncretism and backsliding are typical behavioural characteristics of people experiencing identity crises as observed by Mbiti, (1969: 258). This situation may be rescued and addressed by making values education a component of the religious curriculum. Denigration of cultural and religious beliefs and practices not familiar to us and the classification of people into 'them' and 'us' may be

gradually eliminated by in cooperating intercultural issues into religious education. Issues to do with political disengagement, labelling, and intolerance may be solved through the teaching of religious elements that relate to citizenship education. The most ideal subject to carry these topical issues at secondary school level is religious education, this paper argues. At tertiary level these subjects may exist independently.

This article is not in any way suggesting that no attempt has been made to address the aforementioned issues. In tertiary institutions, subjects like national strategic studies have been introduced to address some of the above mentioned socio-economic problems. This subject was, however, introduced under controversial political circumstances hence most people take it as a tolerated extra and is suspiciously regarded in some quarters. In some universities like the Catholic University in Zimbabwe, ethics is a faculty wide course and the idea is to turn out graduates with both the technocratic view of the world as well as its moral underpinnings. The direction of religious education, since the early 1990s, is intended to promote moral uprightness, tolerance and co-existence among people of different cultural or religious orientation. This noble intention is hardly being realised because the approaches being commonly employed in the teaching of religious education are largely confessional although they appear cross-cultural or multi-faith in outlook.

This study, therefore, presupposes that a radical transformation, in terms of methodology, in the teaching and learning of religious education will embrace intercultural, values and citizenship issues thereby helping learners to appreciate not only their values but also those of others they interact and consort with. Approaches like phenomenology, interpretive, dialogue, liberal and religious literacy, if 'properly' and honestly employed, religious education can be used as the host subject for intercultural, values and citizenship matters.

Religious Dimension to Intercultural Education

Intercultural education is one of the recent approaches to education in many pluralist democracies despite the fact that it is notoriously difficult to define. This difficulty may be attributed to the fact that ever since its inception in the 1960s, intercultural education has been transformed, refocused, reconceptualised and is in a constant state of evolution both in theory and in practice. It is also often used interchangeably with the term multicultural education. This research, however, prefers the term intercultural because, as noted by Jackson (2004:127), the term is consistent with the idea that cultures are not discrete or static but dynamic and constantly interacting, and that cultures can learn from each other, creating new fusions.

Intercultural education is a concept built on the principles of justice, freedom, equality, equity and human dignity (Gollnick and Chinn, 1990:29). It is based on the recognition of racial, cultural, gender and religious diversity as well as the need to co-exist peacefully. The concept is also informed by the notion that educational institutions can foster democratic values and tolerance in plural

societies. In this regard, some authorities define it in terms of classroom environment, others in terms of teaching-learning styles and some focus on the curricula and policy issues. For the purpose of this study, intercultural education assumes a definition adapted from Dahnke and Clatterbuck (1990:213) that, it is a process of symbolic interaction involving individuals or groups who possess recognised cultural differences in both perception and behaviour that will significantly affect the manner, the form, and the educational outcome.

As a systematic effort towards debunking cultural monopolisation of education, intercultural education, like the aims of interpretive, religious literacy and phenomenological approaches to religious education, seeks to inculcate; (a) a better understanding of the various cultures, (b) a greater capacity to communicate with persons of other cultures, and (c) a more positive attitude towards the various cultural groups of society (Ouellet, 1986: 16). In the Zimbabwean context most classrooms resemble an assortment of beliefs and practices ranging from Traditional, Christian, Islamic to those of the Indian subcontinent. In this regard, if schools are to make meaningful contribution towards promoting collaboration and better relations between members of various cultural groups, intercultural biased religious curriculum must be prioritised. Education and religious education in particular, is incomplete if pupils do not learn to deal with the problem of religious and cultural diversity.

Intercultural education, therefore, help learners to develop a positive self concept by exposing them not only to knowledge about their historical experiences, culture-religious traditions and ideologies but also the contribution of other cultures and belief systems to the civilisation of the world. To this end, it can be argued that intercultural education prepare learners to fit and work efficiently and effectively in culturally diverse milieu. In Zimbabwe, recognition of the society's pluralistic nature is demonstrated by a paradigm shift, especially at primary school, to the multi-faith approach in the teaching and learning of religious education. This shift, however, remains cosmetic in the sense that religious education for intercultural understanding means more than simply giving factual information about other religions, rather it assumes a serious attempt to gain understanding of other religions and to define one's position in relation to them. Because intercultural education radically addresses matters of racism, classism, sexism, language superiority or inferiority and religious intolerance, it directly relates to the ideals of multi-faith, phenomenological, interpretive and dialogical modes of religious education.

The phenomenological approach enables the teacher to reflect critically upon his or her prejudices and 'bracket' them. It also primarily aims to "provide accurate, value-free descriptions of religions under study" (Chitando 1997: 5). This helps the teacher to ensure that his or her cultural and religious standpoint does not influence class proceedings and content. Moreover, Kristensen's position that the "believer is always right" (Chitando: 6), helps the teacher to take keen interest in every learner's cultural background. Different and contradicting cultural practices

and beliefs are looked at and cross examined empathetically. From a phenomenological point of view no cultural belief or custom is true or false and superior to others. Thus, a strong grounding in religious education and its methodologies enable teachers and learners to operate effectively in diverse cultural settings. This also make religious education practitioners ideal practitioners of and for intercultural education. The religious dimension to intercultural education include the notion that students are: prepared to work in a culturally diverse environment; groomed to appreciate the positive aspects of cultural diversity; helped to accept and learn from cultures that are different from theirs; equipped (especially the minority) with knowledge and skills on how to co-exist and compete with the dominant group. Religious education's intentions are strikingly similar to those of intercultural education hence my humble submission that 'modern' approaches to religious education relate to intercultural education.

Religious Dimension to Values Education

Values is also a highly contested term with differing meanings ascribed by different cultures and ideologies. This is aggravated by the fact that the term is often used interchangeably with terms such as morals and customs. According to Harman (1977:57), whilst morality involves a number of requirements and prohibitions, values are a set of beliefs about the way people should behave; moral principles and both depends to some extent, on external sanctions which could be divine or social. Rath, Harmin and Simon cited in Straughan (1989:92) behaviourally reserves the term value for the individual beliefs, attitudes, activities or feelings that satisfy the criteria of having been prized and cherished, incorporated into actual behaviour and repeated in one's life. Similarly, for Mbiti (1975:12) values and morals are religious aspects which deal with ideas that safeguard and uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the surrounding world. By contrast Ormell quoted in Straughan (1989:92) suggests that a person who holds certain values will be imbued with certain motivations and that valuing needs to be seen in behaviour and not merely in a passive form of assent. Thus, values can be defined in behavioural or motivational terms.

The study of values navigates topics such as justice, equality, beauty, decency, right and wrong, good and evil, respect for people and property, praise and blame, crime and punishment, rights and responsibilities, character integrity. Thus, values can be cultural, religious, political, social, economic, moral, aesthetic, etc.

In broad terms, values deal with human conduct and this conduct has two dimensions, namely personal and social conduct. Personal conduct, Mbiti (1975. 174) avers, is restricted to the realm of individual's life. Within this realm, individuals are expected to understand and appreciate their proper place in society and to be aware of duties and responsibilities incumbent upon them. By contrast, social conduct deals with the life of the whole society and the conduct

of an individual within the group, community or nation. This, according to Mbiti (:174) is of immeasurable significance because the basic human guiding philosophy in African culture and religion is that "individuals exist only because others exist."

The inversion of foreign cultures into Zimbabwe ever since the arrival of the first missionaries, voyagers and colonialists coupled with more recent waves of western technology have resulted in the local people undergoing radical cultural transformations. At independence in 1980, the enunciation of the reconciliation policy and the constitutional declaration of Zimbabwe as a secular state opened the floodgates for exotic cultural and religious values. In this melting pot, indigenous values are under threat, if not in the intensive care unit. Foreign values have permeated this society and are spreading like malignant cancer under the banner of modernity. In this diversity, the locals ought to survive in harmony and in mutual respect with the aliens. It is in the light of this development that this paper calls for values, (both indigenous and foreign, personal and social) to become an integral part of the country's education system.

Religious education is the best vehicle for values education because world religions provide models for both personal and social conduct. Founders of particular religions, for example Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, Bahauallah and practitioners like Nehanda, Martin Luther King and Gandhi were typical moral, political and social models. The same can be said about the Chinese religions or philosophies such as Yen and Jen. As noted by Peil (1977.215), religion socialises believers and provides them with a 'collective consciousness' of what is right and wrong in their society. Religion, through its supernatural sanctions, aids and nourishes values such as justice, honest and generosity. Thus, in most societies religiously sanctioned values and customs are the rulers of the people to the extent that individual likes and dislikes are overshadowed.

Given the diverse cultural and religious character of Zimbabwe today, it is not proper to promote a particular religious view. Thus, schools should help to develop an understanding of values that is both critical and reflective of the country's religious contours. Through the dialogical and multi-faith approaches, different religio-cultural values are allowed to interface and be cross-examined. In this regard, values education would help pupils to develop their own skills of moral thinking and decision making. If these approaches are upheld then the ethical teachings of various religions become source material for study and reflection rather than sources of authority which all learners are expected to follow.

In addition, Jackson (2004.140) posits that because of dialogical approach, the learner's own stance on certain values, some of them grounded in religion, become material for analysis and reflection, while students from different religions and non-religious backgrounds might work together in exploring and developing positions on particular moral or social issues. To this end, this research contends that if the religious education curriculum is genuinely transformed, as opposed to the current cosmetic scissor and paste modifications,

to make values its integral constituent, the moral rot of this society could be reduced. It is also my submission that school and college graduates who are thoroughly grounded in values can make better citizens.

Religious Dimension to Citizenship Education

There is no universally agreed definition for citizenship education and this according to Fouts, quoted in Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999:4) is due to the fact that the concept of citizenship depends upon individual and societal considerations relating to geography and culture as well as the people's historical circumstances. For Davies, Gregory and Riley (:58) citizenship implies "enjoying certain political, civil and economic rights and the proper task of citizenship education is to bring students to an awareness of those rights." For Kabeer (2005:1) citizenship entails common core values, including an impulse for social justice and self-determination, both of groups and individuals and a sense of horizontal solidarity with others. Thus, in simple terms citizenship education is an attempt to equip learners with skills that helps them to comprehend and express their rights and obligations.

From the above definitions, it can be surmised that the primary goal of citizenship education, like the human rights and democracy approach to religious education, is to create a health society whose citizens are aware of their freedoms of association and expression. Such citizens are able to tolerate each other, participate in society's activities and accept authority and responsibilities. Citizenship education is the seedbed of democratic principles. Gundara, quoted in Lawton, Cairns and Gardner (2000:23) avers that a curriculum that denies learners of aspects of citizenship education produces ill-educated and inactive members who are dangerous to society because they can misrepresent the complexity of humanity and often opt for simplistic solutions based on populist politics that encourages authoritarian and undemocratic solutions to complex societal issues. However, some authorities are sceptical about this subject particularly in 'young democracies' like Zimbabwe because it can be easily manipulated by politicians to produce a pathetically docile and amenable society. This means the subject must be carefully crafted so that it may not become an alter upon which people's rights are sacrificed under the guise of patriotism.

The religious dimension to citizenship education is implied in Crick's observation quoted in Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999:1-2) that citizenship education manifests itself in three ways, which are: the learning of children to be confident and behave responsibly socially and morally in and beyond the classroom towards those in authority and each other; learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities; as well as learning about and how to effectively involve themselves in public life through knowledge, skills and values. These manifestations are strikingly similar to the intentions of religious literacy, interpretive, dialogical and liberal approaches to the teaching and learning of religious education. This paper, therefore, assumes that proper integration of these approaches at the expense of the current neo-dogmatic tendencies may produce 'good citizens.'

Good citizen,' according to Gross and Dynneson quoted in Davies, Gregory and Riley (:4), is a "label commonly used to describe people who consistently do the right thing according to a formal or informal list of values and behaviours." In other words, 'good citizens' are identified as individuals who have a high level of concern for the welfare of others, who conduct themselves in a strongly moral and ethical manner, who are very conscious of their community obligations and who participate in the community within which they live. Founders of various world religions, for example, Abraham, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius can be regarded as archetypes of 'good citizens.' Like the religious modes of phenomenology, dialogue and multi-faith, citizenship education places great emphasis on tolerance of other's opinions and views as well as the acceptance of diversity within society. These approaches enable learners to go beyond the current conservative religious and moral education aims of developing 'good characters' in which goodness is defined in religious terms such as the will to resist evil, or the duty to sacrifice self in the service of others. In this regard, Lawton, quoted in Lawton, Cairns and Gardner (2000:11) contends that the conservative or passive view of citizenship education which intends to train for conformity and obedience, is inadequate and ought to be supported with the active view of citizenship which seeks to educate for active participation and reflection. Citizenship education, like most anti-confessional approaches to religious education, argues Rowe, quoted in Best (2000:72) enable learners to explore ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, rights and responsibilities more critically.

Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999.44) categorises features of good citizenship as social concern, knowledge and conservative. Social concern characteristics view good citizenship as meeting community obligations, that is, every member is supposed to be a good neighbour who can function meaningfully by meeting the community's expectations. It also regards citizenship as a matter of morality, that is, being conscious of the interests of others and the wider society and act accordingly. While 'good citizens' are caring, co-operative and respectful, 'bad citizens' act in a way contrary to the interests of other individuals and the community as a whole, for example, promiscuity, robbery, cheating, witchcraft. Good citizenship as a social concern also entails tolerance to multiplicity of cultural, political and religious views. Thus, good citizens are ready to accept other people's values and practices. Through the phenomenological principles of epoche, empathy and intuition community or world's pluralism may be perceived by learners as a platform for sharing rather than fighting. The approach also encourages learners to be emotionally detached, bracket preconceived ideas about other peoples cultural values, rationally reflect and appreciate views different from theirs. Dialogical approach to religious education resembles another social concern characteristic which stresses the importance of participation.

As a knowledge characteristic, good citizenship means a grasp of political issues. The focus is on the enjoyment of political, social, and economic rights. It covers issues to do with freedom of speech, press, association or political affiliation as well as racism and sexism. Emphasis is also on critical thinking

and possession of relevant knowledge so that citizens can question freely. Similar concerns are shared by the phenomenological principle of naming or classification. This principle condemns the use of uncritical, biased, populist and judgemental labels to classify social groups, for example, civilised versus uncivilised, men are intelligent/stronger than women, white race is superior whilst black is inferior, doctor versus witchdoctor, Christianity is true whilst other religions are false or equating patriotism to supporting the ruling party and affiliation with opposition to selling out.

On the other hand, conservative characteristics stress acceptance of authority, implying that 'good citizens' are law abiding and respect institutional rules. However, acceptance of authority should not be confused with docility and questioning should not be equated to insubordination. Furthermore, in its conservative mode, good citizenship involves acceptance of assigned responsibilities as moral obligations and being patriotic for the good of the nation and not blind patriotism.

It ought to be emphasised that citizenship education commences long before a child formerly enters the classroom. Thus, parents and guardians are some of the key influences in the development of good citizens. These are usually models of decency, social responsibility and social justice. However, due to high rates of divorce, broken homes, dysfunctional families and splintering of the once solid nuclear family, the development of good citizens is becoming a serious challenge. This is aggravated by current societal problems of drug abuse (perceived glamour of a drug-related lifestyle), negative role models, family conflict, peer pressure, unearned rewards, community environment and excessive leisure time. It is against this background that this study agitates for the inclusion of citizenship related issues to the current religious education curriculum. Schools must become the ideal places for moulding good citizens.

The religious dimension to citizenship education is explicit and evident in a number of ways. The dialogical approach to religious education that maximises pupil participation makes an uncontested contribution. Interpretive and religious literacy approaches to religious education deal with the need to understand the language of religions. Thus, inter-communal and inter-religious tensions in countries like Australia, Britain, United States of America, Israel, Palestine, Nigeria and Sudan are clear demonstrations that religion is not just a private, but a public concern and that it will benefit society if pupils in our schools are conversant with its language. Moreover, the flexibility that is a vital ingredient of dialogical and interpretive approaches involve learners in becoming aware of how some of their own prejudices are formed and developed. These approaches relate experiences of pupils to wider issues, both local and global, thus, opening up issues of human rights as well as duties and rights. Jackson (2004:139) posits that the very nature of religious thought, that is, its engagement with 'ultimate questions' and the different answers it presents make religious education an appropriate forum for the development of skills of dialogue and negotiation, and

of the intellectual and moral awareness that is a key element of citizenship ideal. In addition, the interpretive and dialogical approaches to religious education explore issues of identity and belonging in a pluralistic society by challenging the traditional representation of religions and cultures as closed systems, thus, giving a religious dimension to citizenship education.

Summary

In a nutshell, this research submits that religious education's contribution to intercultural, values and citizenship education is immeasurable. With regard to intercultural education, religious education can deal with questions of religious and cultural identity. Religious education also provides an opportunity for learners to analyse religious elements in racism, what some scholars call 'cultural racism,' thereby bringing together both multi-cultural and antiracist concerns. With relation to values, religious education promotes collaborative exploration of moral issues by learners with religious and non-religious orientations. Learner's personal moral convictions, be they secular or religious, are not a matter of whim, but should be internally consistent and justified rationally in the context of dialogue, negotiation and debate with others. Finally, with respect to citizenship education, the skills of listening, negotiating and formulating a position that essentially characterises the dialogical approach to religious education are necessary to the moulding of 'good citizens.' Similarly, the skills of dealing with plurality, difference, interpretation of unfamiliar religious language, positive criticism of other people's positions, empathising and bracketing one's own preconceived ideas profoundly contribute towards citizenship education. Thus, instead of being conducted in a moral vacuum, religious education should occur in an environment that upholds a democratic social morality reflected in the ethos of the school and the society at large.

Conclusion

Given the diverse cultural and religious atmosphere prevailing in Zimbabwe today, its high time the responsible authorities re-visit the current religious education curriculum with the view of not only modifying but action it to address pertinent issues such as intercultural, values and citizenship education. Failure to address these issues the nation will continue to sink deep into the socio-political quagmire. Exposing learners to world religions enables them to appreciate values, beliefs, and practices of others thereby fostering the spirit of tolerance, identity, mutual borrowing as well as positive and peaceful co-existence. The current situation whereby intercultural, values and citizenship education are implicit rather than explicit (in religious education) is not healthy in a pluralistic society like Zimbabwe.

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