

An Analysis of Pre-Service Teachers' Role-Plays on Religious Issues in Classroom Contexts

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to analyse and discuss spoken language texts in the form of two role-plays on religious themes, performed by pre-service teachers. The research was undertaken as a case study in a South African University, in a particular 3rd year teacher training module entitled "Issues and Challenges in Education". A critical approach to discourse analysis was used to analyse the spoken language texts of the dilemmas identified by the trainee teachers. An analysis of the two role-plays indicates that religious difficulties might be rife in South African schools. This discourse is mainly constructed through the differences between Christianity and Islam where the 'logic of difference' is strongly played out by the teacher. In the 'orders of discourse' in the classroom, texts from outside the classroom are brought in to highlight the differences between Christianity and Islam. These are knowledge statements used for the purposes of moral evaluation, which helps structure Christianity as different from Islam. Thus, the social macro-structures that is South Africa as a predominantly Christian country are being mediated in micro-social practices situations, like in a classroom.

Key words: Diversity, education, multicultural, religion education, religion policy, highlight

INTRODUCTION

The question of religion in schools and education has been a controversial issue in many national contexts since the beginning of public education in Europe as is the case currently in the South African context (Van der Walt, 2011). It is also a field of inquiry in educational sciences that has been marginalised in many parts of the world (Gross *et al.*, 2013). This marginalisation might be ascribed to the fact that religious education is not perceived of as a general subject but that it exists predominantly in confessional schools with a distinct ethos and is therefore, not regarded as relevant in the field of education.

Issues of religion have during the last 20 years, come to the fore in public discourse and research has revealed that religion and faiths are increasing rather than decreasing in the world today (Sweeney, 2008). Religion is a complex phenomenon which is influenced by secularisation, globalisation and consumerism (Woodhead *et al.*, 2001). In multicultural societies in transition, religion plays a pivotal role, not the least in a South African context (Brown, 2009; Chidester, 2003) and needs to be studied from multiple perspectives. South Africa comprises many Christian denominations including indigenised African Churches as well as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and forms of traditional African and Koisan

religious practices (Brown, 2009). However, in spite of this religious diversity within the country and the religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution, many former white schools (ex-Model C schools) still espouse a Christian ethos which leads to the marginalisation of other religions. According to, national media Islamophobia and xenophobia are not unusual (Hayem, 2013; Neocosmos, 2010; Anonymous, 2016). International studies also reveal the same tendencies in classrooms dealing with religion education (Flensner, 2015; Zaal, 2012; Zine, 2006).

Our study provides a perspective on teacher education in South Africa through pre-service teachers' role-plays. The aim of this study was to examine the discursive interactions of pre-service teachers in their constructed role-plays carefully by focusing on dilemmas on religion and religious issues in school settings in a South African context. We explore the following questions:

- What kind of religious dilemmas did the pre-service teachers construct from their experiences in schools?
- How is religion articulated and negotiated in the teacher trainee's role-plays?

The South African constitution of 1996 concerning religious freedom: After the demise of apartheid in 1994

and the adoption of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, religious freedom was not only guaranteed but all religions were promoted. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, for example, guarantees “the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion” (Anonymous, 1996a, b). It is during this period for the first time in the history of South Africa that freedom of religion is fully guaranteed (Coertzen, 2008). The constitution also provides for the right of citizens to create and join any cultural, linguistic, religious or other civil society organization (Minister of South Africa, 1996).

The constitution is formulated in a predominantly liberal, plural and secular discourse based on the Bill of Human Rights (Van der Walt, 2011; Worden, 2012) but it can also be described as somewhat paradoxical, since, its constitutional rights are not so, well defined (Coertzen, 2008). It states, for example, that the court can impose some restrictions on religious groups and its ideals if they are “exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights” (Coertzen, 2008). As can be deduced from this citation, the constitution does not contain an “establishment clause” that constitutes a formal separation between state and religion (Van der Walt *et al.*, 2010) which might be problematic. There exists as, Van der Walt *et al.* (2010) “tensions between the stipulations of the Constitution and the Bill of Human Rights”. They also point to the divide between the requirements of the constitution and the Bill of Human Rights as there is a gap concerning many religious and ethical issues between the new political elite and the ordinary South African citizen (Van der Walt *et al.*, 2010; Worden, 2012). As a consequence, the constitutional court has had to address the issue of religious freedom on numerous occasions, even though the South African Constitution has only existed for a short period (Coertzen, 2008; Van der Walt *et al.*, 2010).

Religion education in South Africa: The issue of religion and public education has been widely debated in South Africa, since, 1994. Van der Walt (2011) states: “While the rest of the educational sector had undergone substantial changes by 1996, the matter of religion within education was held in abeyance until 2003”.

According to the constitution (Anonymous, 1996b), “every learner and every member of staff of a public (state) school shall have freedom of religion”. It furthermore states that the governing body could determine religious observances provided that such observances are equitable and “attendance of them by learners and staff shall be voluntary” (Anonymous, 1996b). The act also re-iterates that “no child shall be

refused admission to any state school on the basis of race or religion or because the child does not subscribe to the mission, goals and objectives of the school” (Anonymous, 1996b).

Contrary to the above-stated regulations in the constitution, many schools continue to espouse a specific religious ethos which entails that a confessional or sectarian religious education can still take place (Van der Walt, 2011). The adoption of such an approach, according to Ferguson and Roux (2004) is unconstitutional and detrimental to inclusive practices (Roux, 2005).

In attempting to clarify religious education issues more comprehensively in 2003, the Department of Education promulgated the National Policy on Religion and Education under the umbrella of the South African Schools Act (Anonymous, 1996b). In the National Policy on Religion and Education, a model referred to as a “co-operative model” is applied to the study of religion education. The model makes provision for “creative interaction between schools and faith whilst protecting young people from religious discrimination or coercion” (Anonymous, 1996a). The co-operative model should be enhanced in the subject religion education which forms one part of the life orientation learning area of the national curriculum which comprises five broad outcomes: health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development and movement and an orientation to the world of research (senior phase only) (Anonymous, 1996a; Abraham, 2010).

The policy document of religion and education highlights South Africa’s plurality and diversity of religions and world views but stresses that at public schools “no particular religious ethos should be dominant over and suppress others” and the “religious views of students must be recognised and respected” (Anonymous, 1996a, b). Thus, religion education should, according to the policy document, enrich the whole school curriculum with the aim of creating religious literacy among all learners (Anonymous, 1996a, b).

To achieve these goals, the policy document recommends that teacher education programmes “provide appropriate training for prospective teachers by introducing suitable courses in the study of religion and religions” (Anonymous, 1996a, b). Furthermore, these teacher training courses should be of two types: “General basic training in the study of religion with attention to both content and teaching methods, applicable to all prospective and serving educators in both the GET (General Education and Training band) and FET (Further Education and Training) bands and specialised training for religious studies for teachers at the FET band” (Anonymous, 1996a, b). In spite of this promulgation,

however, constructions of relevant courses in teacher training in religious studies are lacking in many teacher training universities and time allocated to studies in this field is wholly inadequate (Chidester, 2003).

As is evident in the document entitled the national policy on religion and education and also concluded by Van der Walt (2011) “the state has strived for schooling that is as mixed, plural and secular as possible”. Thus, a discourse of plurality and diversity is strongly articulated in the document. However, there are tensions in the policy as it clearly states that South Africa does not have a state religion but at the same time is not a secular state where there is a very strict separation between religion and the state (Anonymous, 1996a, b). Thus, the borders of religion and the state can be said to be blurred and not so well-defined which could give rise to tensions and different interpretations.

In a South African context, The National Policy on religion and education differs markedly from the religious education, instruction and indoctrination of the past under the previous regime. According to Chidester (2003) Christian National education that was implemented in South Africa during the apartheid era was characterised by ‘a narrow set of religious interest’s aimed at the promotion of ‘a Christian triumphalism’.

Given this background concerning the religious landscape and religion education in South Africa, we now turn to our research on articulated themes on religion and education in one particular university module (issues and challenges in education-PGED) that forms part of the B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) teacher training programme. It is worth emphasising that this is not a specific training module on religion and education but rather an analysis of religious dilemmas within school contexts based on intermediate phase (grades 4-6) pre-service teacher’s teaching practice experiences.

Theoretical framework; An approach of critical discourse analysis: In our research we apply an approach of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Rogers, 2011) which enables us to analyse texts as social practices in the pre-service teacher’s performed role-plays. Thus, the overall aim is to explore social events in the form of texts (role-plays) in a social practice (teacher education) and to examine how they are constructed, upheld and articulated by different actors (Fairclough, 2003). An approach of critical discourse analysis is especially significant when analysing the domain between social events and social structures, mediated through various social practices. Since, the focus of this study is on

discourses based on religious dilemmas, the application of Fairclough’s theory of critical discourse analysis is of particular relevance and significance for the purposes of this study as it serves as a lens through which the relationship between discourse and power could be interrogated more critically. Furthermore, in qualitative research it is common practice to use a theoretical framework espoused by one researcher in this case Fairclough whose framework is widely used in studies on discourses and which has developed over a long period of time. His theory is a rich toolbox for developing discourse analysis.

The emphasis on language and in-depth examination of language in use, i.e., textual form, structure and organisation at all levels are important in discourse analysis as language is viewed as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1995, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, we especially examine the spoken language in pre-service teacher trainee’s performed role-plays. The spoken utterances are organised in a traditional and highly structured turn-taking routine which is often the case in South African classrooms and also in teacher education (Griffin, 2012). For this research, we are inspired by Fairclough (2003) who orients his analyses towards relationships or levels between social events, social practices and social structures. Social events bring together various elements such as different forms of activities, persons, narratives and social relations to form the event in time and place (Fairclough, 2003). Social practices are perceived here as articulations of social life being mediated between the social events and social structures (Fairclough, 2003). Two such examples from social practices in South African classrooms through role-plays are discussed in this study. In social practices, discourses are articulated and networked together with other non-discoursal elements in various ways in “orders of discourse” (Fairclough, 2003). “Orders of discourse” as posited by Fairclough is a certain combination of genres, discourses and styles, shaping and controlling the discursive aspect of a network of social practices (2003). Certain discourses not only include what is said and articulated but also determine what actually can be said and what is silenced what is acceptable and what is forbidden. According to, Fairclough discourses are ways of representing processes, relations and structures of the material world which depends on people’s positions in the world, their social and personal identities and the social relationship in which they stand to other people (2003).

Thus, discourse in this sense is a whole domain within which language, perceived as a form of social practice is used in certain ways to represent different perspectives of the world as well as relations and identities. Furthermore, discourses are historical, linked to speakers across time and place and are always intertextual. Intertextuality is a significant concept in many texts on approaches to critical discourse analysis as it draws the attention towards discourse as existing beyond the level of any particular social event on which the analysis is focused. A social event can accommodate various types of complex intertextuality in texts such as different genres, discourses and styles (Fairclough, 2003).

Social structures of which language is a key structure, construct a dialectic relationship with the particular social event that takes place in social practice such as in classroom teaching, for example but as we all know, what happens between social structures and specific, concrete social events is complex (Fairclough, 2003). This mediation between structure and event is realised by different types of social actions such as interactions, representations through language and ways of being (Fairclough, 2003). Thus, through an analysis of social practices, we can examine how actors on a micro-level articulate and uphold macro-structural discourses as well as how the structural level constitutes articulations on a micro-level in a dialectical relation (Fairclough, 1995, 2003).

The meaning of a critical approach: As mentioned earlier, this applied framework adopts a critical discourse analysis approach. The word ‘critical’ in this approach signifies an analysis of structural relationships of dominance, power and control as manifested in language and what social effects such discourse practices can have (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). Power is therefore, as highlighted by Fairclough (1995) a central concept in critical discourse analysis as it “differentiates and selects, includes and excludes” (Blommaert, 2005; Rogers, 2011).

As pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (1999) critical discourse analysts emphasize the role of critical language awareness in developing sociopolitical consciousness. Fairclough (1995) believes that critical language awareness “can lead to a reflexive analysis of practices of domination implicit in the transmission and learning of academic discourse”. The conscientisation of learners in this way engages them in the struggle to “contest and change such practices” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). He also emphasises that language learners can learn to challenge practices of domination only if the relationship between language and power is made explicit to them.

Various approaches to critical discourse analyses in education have been a growing field of research over the past 40 years, since, language and ways of enacting and interpreting talk and text in classrooms are central for both teachers and students. Furthermore, as pointed out by Rogers (2011) such educational practices are viewed as communicative events. Bernstein and Bernstein (1996), who similarly explored such practices in their research on pedagogic discourse, argued that pedagogic discourse includes a discourse of skills referred to as an instructional discourse of various kinds and their relation to each other and a discourse of social order which he named the regulative discourse. They regarded the regulative discourse as the dominant discourse since, it always embeds the instructional discourse (Bernstein and Bernstein, 1996; Abraham, 2010).

Learners in South African classrooms as well as across the globe, represent a diversity of identity constructions that intersect in complex ways on both individual and collective levels to language, culture, ethnicities, religions, gender and many others. Therefore, research with a specific focus on a critical investigation of text and talk: i.e., social practices with spoken language within the field of teacher education is highly relevant.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methodology and design

The case-study; Working with pre-service teachers in teacher education: The qualitative case-study is conducted within an education module (PGED, 302) entitled ‘Issues and Challenges in Education’ which is a compulsory 15 credit 3rd-year module that is part of a B.Ed programme of study for all pre-service teachers at a teacher training university. The module comprises three sections namely HIV and AIDS, multicultural education and professional educators shaping democratic schooling. The case study focuses on two role-plays that the intermediate phase pre-service teachers conceptualized based on insights gained in multicultural schools (ex-Model C) during teaching practice and that was performed in teacher education classes.

The multicultural education section comprises 5 units namely; Multicultural education: concepts, principles and approaches; Historical background to multicultural education in a capita selecta of countries; The role of the curriculum in multicultural schools; The role of teachers in multicultural schools and the whole school approach to multicultural education.

During the 1st week of lectures with the 3rd year B.Ed (intermediate phase) pre-service teachers it emerged that they espoused divergent views on multicultural

education. Whilst, some students expressed interest in expanding their viewpoints on the topic, others were rather detached and disinterested proclaiming that learners should adapt to the culture of the school and not the other way around. In reflecting on the latter viewpoint, it was evident that issues relating to multicultural education needed to be thoroughly interrogated from the perspectives of the student's experiences.

It should be noted, however that the findings emerging from this study on religious dilemmas cannot be generalised to any other university contexts within South Africa or the world, since, this is a small scale study focusing on two role-plays highlighting religious discourses in a particular module with a specific group of university students. However, discourses articulated in this study might be common as they relate to the discourses in the wider society across many nations in the world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role-plays: It was with the above background in mind that a more learner-centred approach such as drama-in-education was adopted to provide opportunities for students to present their shared experiences to the class through role-plays. Role-plays are used in many disciplines and often viewed as an effective way of learning as students are directly involved in the teaching process and thus, become producers of knowledge and not only consumers (Stevens, 2015; Rao and Stupans, 2012). Furthermore, role-plays constitute a particular genre as they describe a concrete way of interacting discursively (Fairclough, 2003). The use of role-plays for the purposes of this study served a dual purpose; firstly, it served as a vehicle to demonstrate how through the use of discourse social practices could be articulated and secondly, it served as a means of collecting and analysing data generated by using critical discourse analysis.

The procedure for setting up the construction of the role-plays commenced by dividing the pre-service teachers into groups with the brief that they create role-plays based on their observations of how their mentor teachers managed diverse classes and the kinds of discourses articulated. The process commenced with each member in a group relating an incident from his/her teaching practice experiences to the rest of the group. The group discussed the incidents and selected one that they believed best captured the theme that they wished to showcase and interrogate through their role-play presentation. The construction of the role-plays was based on improvisation rather than the use of a written script. Since, improvisation in drama-in-education is a

more spontaneous approach this afforded the participants the opportunity to ad lib where necessary without being bound to a pre-written and memorised script. It should be noted that the use of role-plays was used as a vehicle to enable the pre-service teachers to showcase their lived experiences within the context of how their mentor teachers managed diverse classrooms and not to examine its effectiveness as a strategy for teacher training.

During their role-play presentations the pre-service teachers aimed to capture the atmosphere of the classroom by portraying their roles as realistically as possible. A noteworthy feature of the plays is that all the role-plays tended to focus on religious dilemmas in education with a specific focus on the Christian/Islam dichotomy. It should also be noted that none of the participants in the plays were Muslim but all were practicing Christians. Since, the study was on religious dilemmas in education, we decided to explore two of the role-plays in an approach of critical discourse analysis. The two were selected as they provided rich thick data on religious dilemmas in education. To provide an in-depth analysis of discursive practices on these issues transcribed excerpts from the role-plays were analysed and we paid particular attention to themes articulated as religious discourses as well as implicit assumptions, classifications and differentiations (Fairclough, 2003).

Role-play one; Farina in her new classroom: In role-play one, Farina Abrahams, a Muslim girl attends an ex-Model C school that espouses a Christian ethos. Three learners greet Farina and welcome her before the teacher enters the classroom.

Teacher enters:

Teacher: Good Morning class

Students: Good Morning, Mam

Teacher: How was your weekend?

Joshua: Fine

Teacher: Let me just take the register. Abrahams?

Farina Abrahams raises her hand:

Teacher: Oh! We have a new student in class, so I'll get back to you now, Connery

Connery raises her hand:

Teacher: Can you stand please and tell us a little about yourself!

The new student stands up to introduce herself:

Farina: Hi! My name is Farina Abrahams. I'm new to this school

Capra: Yey!

Teacher: Tell us what your hobbies are and everything

Farina: I like reading and hiking
Teacher: What do you read?
Farina: I like literature and stuff like that
Teacher: Thank you. No man! Is your father Faizel?
Farina: Yes, Mam
Teacher: I thought, so (Looking away and playing with her pen). You still look like him also. Well, I'm just telling you, I won't take your crap in this class if you have that would be darker ok. Um, you know every morning we start off with Bible reading, so, let's just start off with a little hymn. Chelsea can you start first?
Chelsea: Must I stand Mam?
Teacher: No, please you don't have to stand
Chelsea: (start singing) Give me oil in my lamp keep me burning (everyone else joins in but Farina)
Capra: Please sing with please sing with (talking to Farina)
Teacher: Ok thank you. Farina, can you read the first verse please (and gives her the Bible passage to read). You can start here because we are going as according to, the class list and you are Abrahams, so, you read this morning for us
Farina: I'm just feeling a bit uncomfortable Mam because this is the Bible and clearly you can see that I'm Muslim (Farina wears a headscarf)
Teacher: This is my classroom which means it's my rules, so, whatever I say goes
Joshua: Why don't you read the Bible!
Capra: Can I just say something? You can't force her to read the Bible; it's not part of her religion
Chelsea: It's not your class; it's the teacher's class
Capra: Yes. It's not my class but I'm just defending my friend here, this is not part of her religion or culture to read the Bible
Teacher: I just feel that you two should leave my classroom if you still don't read the Bible and then you can go to the head principal and explain why I put you out of the classroom. And then you will also answer to Jesus 1 day
Farina: At my former school I didn't have to read
Teacher: Well this is not your former school
Capra: Teacher (inaudible) I don't agree with that
Teacher: So, then you can leave with Miss Abrahams and you can get your father also, I'm ready for him

As is evident from this role-play the pre-service teachers construct a scene from an ex-Model C school that espouses a Christian ethos. The ex-Model C schools were initially former Whites-only schools that in the early 1990's were given the option by the then Minister of Education to admit a limited number of learners from other racial groups. These schools which are still very common in South Africa today and which generally adopted a Christian ethos (Van der Walt, 2011) are presently largely multi-racial and multicultural.

The role-play constructs a social practice within a traditional educational genre with questions and responses which are a well-defined and ritualised type in most educational settings. The teacher's voice articulates an authoritarian and regulative discourse in activity exchanges through clauses such as "my classroom", "whatever I say goes" and demands such as "go to the head principal" and "you can leave". Such, a discourse, following Bernstein, creates order, relations and identities and ultimately control over the instructional discourse (Anonymous, 1996a, b).

The dilemma in this social practice is the reading of the Bible which in the context of this school is assumed as a natural and common-sense practice. Assumptions are taken for granted and link this practice to the outer world in a kind of intertextuality; i.e., the presence of the Bible as a text brought into the classroom (Fairclough, 2003). It is not possible to alter this social practice of Bible reading as the teacher claims it is "my classroom" and "whatever I say goes". Also, the teacher legitimates and authorises her claims by referring to the head principal with the utterance "then you can go to the head principal and explain why I put you out of the classroom". The head principal provides the institutional authority, in this case, to the teacher's claims of reading the Bible (Fairclough, 2003). Moral evaluation is also made by the teacher as she refers to the Christian value system by saying: "And then you will also answer to Jesus one day".

In the social action, we can also see the orientation to difference (Fairclough, 2003). Early in the dialogue, Farina positions herself as a Muslim, not wanting to read the Bible as it doesn't belong to her faith. The teacher doesn't comment on that at all and shows no openness, acceptance or recognition of difference. Instead one learner, Capra, articulates resistance and tries to negotiate between the two to overcome difference but her comments are also dismissed. Another boy doesn't understand why reading the Bible is an issue at all, giving a voice to those who don't know how different texts can be differentiated in status and meaning. Thus, an altercation ensues in the class between those learners who are committed to the promotion of the Christian

religion and the lone, single learner who is supportive of the new Muslim learner and her rights. Through language interaction in this classroom, the Muslim girl is constructed as “the other”, a social identity that is not accepted in the social practice in this classroom. Furthermore, it is interesting that it is Islam that is identified by the pre-service teachers as “the other” religion. Incidentally, none of the participants in both plays were Muslim.

Islam is only one of several minority religions in South Africa but prejudices and Islamophobic discourses are not uncommon in South Africa as in many parts of the world (Esposito and Kalin, 2011).

It is also evident in the social practice highlighted above that the teacher has some former relation with Farina’s father which the students also wanted to stress in their role-play. As this is not a religious dilemma, it is not commented on any further here, more than this relation also becomes part of the teacher’s legitimization of power and control in the social classroom practice.

Role-play number two; Negotiations on religion in the classroom:

The second role-play also focuses on a religious dilemma where understandings of Islam and Christianity are negotiated. The language in this classroom practice is overall within a traditional educational genre with questions and responses in turn-taking, well-defined and ritualized as in many educational settings. An action that makes this practice a bit more relaxed from the outset is that the teacher walks into the classroom whistling and he allows the learners to ask and respond to questions, albeit in a somewhat autocratic manner. The teacher enters the class whistling:

Teacher: Good morning class
Learners stand up
Learners: Good morning teacher.
Teacher: How are you?
Learners: We are fine thanks and you teacher? (All in chorus)
Teacher: I am fine
Learners sit down
Teacher: Today we are going to talk about religion. What do you know about religion?
Alshabar: Religion is to worship Allah
Learner2: Religion is to believe in God
Teacher: Let me just give you a few minutes to just discuss about that
Learners discuss
Learner2: Alshabar, I heard you were saying religion is to worship Allah

Alshabar: Yes, of course, it’s to worship Allah
Learner2: Who is Allah?
Alshabar: Allah is the Creator of Heaven and Earth
Learner2: Is a Creator of Heaven and Earth?
Alshabar: Yes
Learner2: He is your God?
Alshabar: Of course, you can say he’s my God but there is a difference. We, the Muslim, we call him Allah
Learner2: Or do your read the Bible?
Alshabar: No, I read the Koran
Learner2: Oh, which means you don’t believe in Christ. Do you?
Alshabar: No, no, no! Actually, we do recognise that Christ is like any, ...
Teacher comes in:
Teacher: What are you talking about?
Alshabar: Sorry, Sir. I was just telling my colleague that Allah, in fact, ...
Teacher: WHAT! (shouts)
Alshabar: Sir, I was telling her that Jesus Christ is like any other prophet like Daniel, ...
Learner2: (exclaims) any other prophet!
Alshabar: Any other prophet like Daniel, like Ezekiel so we don’t worship him
Teacher: No, no, no! Jesus Christ, who died for your very sins, you say He’s like any other prophet. How?
Alshabar: But, Sir, I was just
Teacher: (interrupts Alshabar) Yes, Jesus Christ is the Lord of Lords, soul of Kings. The King of (inaudible) of Mohammed!
Alshabar: Sir, ...
Teacher: How can you say that!
Learner2: I told you!
Teacher: You are the very same people who are busy killing Christians in the media (then he charges at the learner and continuously beats him). Get out of my class... Stupid boy!

The boy leaves the classroom

In this role-play a Muslim boy, Alshabar, tries to explain the concept of Allah to another learner through several knowledge exchanges (Fairclough, 2003) like “Allah is the Creator of Heaven and Earth” and “you can say He’s my God”. Through these exchanges in questions and responses between the two learners, the difference between Christianity and Islam is established. Implicit in the text is the assumption that the “normal” religion is Christianity, since, it is out of this perspective that difference is constructed; Islam is different from

Christianity as is stated by Alshabar. Assumptions as Fairclough states, opens up differences by bringing in other voices into the text (Fairclough, 2003). Here, Islam and different conceptions of Allah and Christ are brought in as well as in differences in not reading the Bible but the Quran.

However, the dialogue between the learners opens up space for exploring the faith traditions and there seems to be openness and curiosity to enhance their knowledge about each other's religions. This dialogue is abruptly disturbed when the teacher enters and inquires what the learners are talking about. In the ensuing dialogue the learners attempt to encourage the teacher to listen and to establish a common ground by saying "Sorry Sir" and "Sir" which position the teacher as the dominant person in the dialogue. The teacher reduces the dialogical perspective and diminishes the learner's voices by answering "No, no, no". The teacher also brings in a moral evaluation by stating that "Yes, Jesus Christ is the Lord of Lords, soul of Kings; The King of (inaudible) of Mohammed". Evaluative statements are proclamations about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable (Fairclough, 2003). In this dialogue, the teacher establishes Jesus Christ as the King of Mohammed which implies that Christianity is superior to and more important than Islam. The dialogue culminates abruptly when the teacher declares that "You are the very same people who are busy killing Christians in the media". Here, the teacher brings in media as another text by which to texture his statements and to add a new meaning on Muslim adherents. This intertextuality provides "a logic of difference" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Fairclough, 2003) even more pronounced which classifies Muslims as "the Other" in the social practice of the classroom.

The role-play constructs a teacher who, through, his discursive actions, reduces the dialogue and marginalises the learner's voices. Furthermore, he makes moral evaluative statements by using a monocultural Christian discourse where his understanding of the Christian religion is the only truth that is permitted within the classroom context. The teacher proceeds summarily to beat the learner because he dares to espouse a different faith tradition from that of the teacher. The use of corporal punishment as administered in this case is according to the South African Schools Act (Minister of South Africa, 1996) entirely forbidden but is still inflicted on learners in a number of schools within the country as a whole. In the wider South African society, however, since, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion all citizens are allowed to practice their religions without intimidation, fear or restrictions imposed on them from the government.

The government has distanced itself from religious bigotry and is in the process of promulgating a new anti-discrimination law to ensure that harsh punishment is meted out to religious bigots.

In this example the pre-service teachers draw on their understanding of the South African context to highlight a crucial religious issue that focuses on the bias of a teacher towards a particular religion that he espouses. This example is one that could be extrapolated internationally as well, especially given the rapid spread of Islamophobia across the globe.

The two role-plays analysed for the purposes of this study within an approach of critical discourse analysis were chosen as they problematise religion and religious discourses experienced in classrooms in South Africa. Even though the role-plays, in this case are not "authentic" texts from specific classrooms as they are seen and constructed through the teacher trainee's eyes they can still be regarded as authentic, since, they play out spoken language and negotiations in pre-service teachers teaching practice experiences.

An analysis of both plays indicates that religious dilemmas appear to be widespread in many schools in South Africa as the theme that most of the groups considered to predominate focused on religious dilemmas. The analyses through texts (spoken language) in social practice (in classrooms) reveal a traditional and high regulative educational discourse where the teacher's voices in both cases predominate and which in both role-plays, articulate a strong anti-Muslim discourse. This discourse is mainly constructed through differences of Islam as compared to Christianity where disparaging remarks and intolerant assumptions as well as moral evaluations on Islam are articulated by the teacher. Thus, the logic of difference is actively played out by the teacher. Learners in both classes struggle with the teacher for a space to articulate their views but are regularly brushed aside and belittled as the teachers exercise their authority over the learners and keep them under control. In the "orders of discourse" in the classroom, texts from outside the classroom are brought in to highlight the difference between Christianity and Islam. These are knowledge statements used for moral evaluation purposes which help structure Christianity as different from Islam. Thus, the macro social structures, i.e., South Africa as a predominantly Christian country are being mediated by micro social practices like a classroom.

Various sections of the constitution (Anonymous, 1996a, b) guarantee the right to freedom of religion in South Africa. These include chapter 2 of the constitution of South Africa contained in the Bill of Rights that states

that ‘everyone has the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion’ (Anonymous, 1996a, b), Section 9 (6) ‘that prohibits unfair discrimination on various grounds including religion’ and Section 15 (Anonymous, 1996) that ‘allows religious observances in state and state-aided institutions provided they follow public authority rule’s. If these rights are to be applied within a school setting, then the religious views of the majority cannot supersede the rights to religious freedom of a minority. Furthermore, various religious observances at school should be entirely voluntary and the religious beliefs of all the groups should be treated equitably and respected. However as highlighted by Meier and Hartell (2009), the approach adopted by most ex-Model C schools is assimilationist, since, the learners from multi-ethnic backgrounds are expected to adapt to a religious ethos, a school culture and a hidden curriculum that were implemented in the past for a mono-ethnic school environment. Since, most ex-Model C schools in South Africa still espouse a Christian ethos, there have been numerous instances where schools and teachers have discriminated against learners from other religious backgrounds by forcing them to assimilate into the school’s culture and religious ethos. Such discriminatory practices, we believe are extremely disadvantageous to learners from other religious groups particularly as it strips them of their religious identity and makes them believe that their religion is inferior. It is thus incumbent on the school to ensure that teachers are appropriately empowered with the necessary skills through training workshops to expand their knowledge on religious diversity within their schools, so that, they are able to embrace multiple perspectives of reality.

The educational model, namely the “cooperative model” introduced in South Africa aims at the possibility and creative interaction between schools and faiths. With such an aim in education, we believe that it is imperative that appropriate training courses on religious education be developed as part of teacher training programmes.

We argue from our research, that since, these cases highlighted here are related to discourses on Islam in society (Fairclough, 2003) they might create these kinds of discourses in the classroom. As this is a qualitative study dealing with discourses on religion with specific reference to Islam it does not reveal every possible interaction between learners and teachers in South African schools. There might of course be both secularist and Muslim teachers making learners uncomfortable but then most possibly through other kinds of discourses related to a secularist or other ways of talking in the classroom. Discourses on Islam, we argue

as also other research has shown are related to wider societal discourses which currently depict Islam negatively.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the two role-plays by using critical discourse analysis highlights the nature of religious intolerance in multi-racial South African schools. Although, the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and the National Policy on Religion and Education emphasizes the importance of upholding all faiths within school contexts, it does appear as if Christian hegemony within, especially the ex-Model C schools, tends to predominate thereby determining the religious ethos of the school. The adoption of a specific religion creates tension amongst the multi-ethnic learner population who espouse various religious beliefs. To avoid such tensions, it is incumbent on schools to take cognisance of their learner’s religious diversity and implement measures to create a more inclusive learning environment, so that, all learners feel valued and respected.

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