

**STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING RELIGION IN COLLEGES OF
EDUCATION**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

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ABSTRACT

The revised norms and standards for teacher education requires an understanding of the beliefs, values and practices of the main religions of South Africa. However, many pre-service teachers have emerged from backgrounds of monoreligious education, or from schools where Religious education was discarded from the curriculum. This situation implies that pre-service teachers may lack the knowledge and skills to cope within a religiously pluralist school environment. This study argues therefore that the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers towards Religious education in particular and religions in general will be positively influenced by means of a programme of intervention.

The main aim of this study is to examine strategies for teaching religion to pre-service teachers to equip them for the religious and cultural diversity of South African classrooms. Feuerstein's theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) is examined as a vehicle for initiating new and creative ways of thinking about religions. Ten criteria for MLE are implemented within a context of co-operative small group learning on the grounds that learning about religions should take place in a constructivist paradigm. The potential influence of a tutor/mediator on the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own is therefore a significant theme in this study. The influence of a programme of intervention on student attitudes towards religion and Religious education was determined within an action-enquiry research model. The empirical research indicates that active participation in the learning process not only enhanced student participants' knowledge and understanding of religious concepts, but also fostered the value of an unbiased, positive approach to the study of religions.

ABSTRAK

Hersiende norme en standarde vir onderwysersopleiding verg 'n kennis van die geloof, waardes en praktyke van die hoof religieë van Suid-Afrika. Nietemin kom baie studentonderwysers uit 'n monoreligieuse opvoedingsagtergrond of van skole waar religieuse onderrig van die kurrikulum verwyder is. Hierdie situasie impliseer dat studentonderwysers nie die nodige kennis dra, of die nodige vaardighede het, om in 'n pluralistiese religieuse skoolomgewing aan te pas nie. Hierdie studie argumenteer dat die houdings en persepsies van studentonderwysers teenoor religieuse onderrig in die besonder en religie in die algemeen positief beïnvloed kan word deur middel van 'n intervensieprogram.

Die hoofdoel van die studie is om verskillende strategieë in religieuse onderrig vir studentonderwysers te ondersoek om hulle toe te rus vir die religieuse en kulturele diversiteit in Suid-Afrika. Feuerstein se teorie van *Bemiddelde leerervaring* (Mediated Learning Experience, MLE) word ondersoek as 'n middel waardeur nuwe kreatiewe denkmetodes oor religie geïnisieer kan word. Tien kriteria van *MLE* word geïmplementeer binne 'n konteks van koöperatiewe leergroepe op grond daarvan dat religieë binne 'n konstruktivistiese paradigma moet plaasvind. Die potensiële invloed van die fasiliteerder op die persepsies en houdings van studentonderwysers teenoor ander religieë is dus 'n belangrike tema van die studie. Die invloed van 'n intervensieprogram op studentehoudings teenoor religieë en religieuse onderrig was bepaal deur middel van 'n aksienavraag navorsingsmodel. Die empiriese navorsing motiveer die feit dat aktiewe deelname in die leerproses nie net die deelnemende studentonderwysers se kennis en begrip van religieuse konsepte verdiep het nie, maar ook 'n onbevooroordeelde positiewe benadering tot die studie van religieë gekweek het.

Dedicated to Gordon, Kyle and Shannon

and Gavin, my friend and colleague.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

As changes in education have begun to take root in South Africa, tertiary institutions engaged in teacher education have had to reconsider the nature and value of courses offered. Religious education is one of those areas of learning that has come under close scrutiny. Traditionally, colleges of education in South Africa offered courses in Bible Education, designed to prepare pre-service teachers for the formative Christian orientated subject, also known as Bible Education, which was taught and continues to be taught in many South African public schools. The validity of a Christian orientated Religious education in colleges of education becomes questionable considering that pre-service teacher education is determined by:

- revised criteria for educators as laid down in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (September 1998);
- a reformed education system driven by a Constitution that seeks to promote democratic values, such as respect, tolerance and freedom to practise the religion of one's choice (*The Constitution of South Africa*, 1996:7,8);
- the religious diversity evident amongst the student population at colleges of education and in public schools.

In the light of these introductory comments, this chapter comprises the following:

- a discussion of the problem related to teaching religions in colleges of education and the school environment;
- the subsequent aims and hypothesis for this study;
- a preview of the research design and methodology used to test the hypothesis;
- clarification of concepts elemental to the study.

1.2 The problem outlined

The problem, which this study attempts to address, is related to at least three broad areas: namely, the requirements set down in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* document for teacher education (1998); the place of religion in the learning area *Life Orientation* in Curriculum 2005 (1997:220); and the cultural and religious diversity of students at colleges of education and in public schools. These areas will be outlined and discussed below.

1.2.1 Norms and Standards for educators

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (1998:67) provides the details of the practical, foundational and reflexive competences required for initial teacher education qualifications. The following are listed amongst the practical and foundational competences associated with the community, citizenship and pastoral role of an educator:

Showing an appreciation of, and respect for, people of different values, beliefs, practices and cultures (1998:74).

Knowing about the principles and practices of the main religions of South Africa, the customs, the values and beliefs of the main cultures of South Africa, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights (1998:75).

Such requirements as those mentioned above, imply that all pre-service educators, regardless of their cultural and religious backgrounds or demographic situations, ought to have knowledge and understanding of the belief and value systems practised by different communities in South Africa. The multicultural and therewith multi-religious representation in the school environment has determined that teacher training institutions can no longer assume religio-specific training as if all students belonged to one specific

religion, or to the dominant religious group (Moore & Habel, 1992:45). A change of mindset, or paradigm shift, is therefore implied for educators in South Africa.

1.2.2 Religion and Life Orientation

A change of mindset, or paradigm shift, is also associated with a movement away from religion as a separate focus or subject area in the school curriculum. Curriculum 2005 is structured around eight learning areas, each of which integrates former subject areas. Life Orientation is one of these eight learning areas, and embraces Religious education. Knowledge of diverse beliefs and values are listed amongst the Specific Outcomes in Curriculum 2005, Life Orientation in particular (Curriculum 2005, 1997:220). Educators, both pre-service and in-service, have however, emerged from a background of either single-faith Religious education, such as Bible Education, Islamic Studies or Hindu Studies, or in some cases, no Religious education at all.

The rationale and the Specific Outcomes for Life Orientation clearly indicate that religion will not be disregarded from the curriculum, but must be seen as part of the holistic development of the learner. The rationale for Life Orientation (1997:220,221) states that Life Orientation:

Works for a transformation of society in the interests of promoting a human rights culture underpinned by:

- striving for a fully inclusive, egalitarian society free of all unjust discrimination as laid down by the Constitution;
- a unified co-operative society in which diversity is cherished;
- the individual's appreciation of their own beliefs, values and practices, and at the same time, respect for the rights of others to do likewise.

Such philosophical changes in the education system as described above have implications for the way in which teaching and learning about religions is approached in colleges of education and in schools.

1.2.3 Cultural and religious diversity in colleges of education and in public schools

Various educationalists have recognised the problems associated with teaching religions in a multi-cultural society (Wielandt, 1993:50; Orteza y Miranda, 1994:23). Issues such as religious identity, diverse perspectives on reality, conflicting truth claims, prejudice and mutually incompatible value systems are inherent in a religiously pluralist society. Such issues, as well as the complexity of knowledge related to religions confronts pre-service teachers with the task of processing and understanding such knowledge. Yet, the *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (1998) and policy documents for Curriculum 2005 (1997) assume an automatic educational and social paradigm shift for all educators in South Africa. The problem is related to the probability that educators, both pre- and in-service, will carry with them the culture, beliefs, ideologies and attitudes imposed upon them by families, religious institutions, communities and even previous educators (cf. Sharron, 1987:36). These various influences may or may not include misconceptions or prejudices about cultures and belief systems other than their own.

According to Tamminen (1991:70,72), one should take into account that students of religion have their own belief systems that guide or direct their attitudes and their acceptance of new information. Citing Fishbein and Ajzen, Tamminen (1991:70) maintains that beliefs form the basis of attitude. Attitude is defined as

a learned disposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object.

Although Tamminen refers in his study to beliefs and attitudes toward one's own religion, the above definition of attitude can be applied generically, to include dispositions toward religions other than one's own.

In spite of the perceptions and attitudes held towards belief systems by pre-service teachers, educators in colleges of education are obliged to prepare them for the reality of religious and cultural diversity in the classroom. Such philosophical changes in the education system would require a programme of positive intervention whereby pre-service teachers examine the function and meaning of beliefs for adherents in an educational rather than an evangelical setting (cf. Tamminen, 1991:72). Furthermore, strategies for teaching religion ought to empower students with those skills and attitudes that will enable them to embrace multiculturalism and its numerous challenges (Hook, 1994:14). The nature and guidelines for such a programme will be outlined and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The aim and hypothesis defining the focus of this study are stated below.

1.3 The aim of the study

The aim therefore is to examine two main themes inherent to the study, viz:

- (i) The potential of Feuerstein's theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) as a vehicle for initiating within pre-service teachers new and creative ways of thinking about religions. The role of a tutor/mediator as a potential agent of change in this regard is particularly significant (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980; Sharron, 1987; Skuy, Mentis *et al*, 1990; Skuy, Mentis *et al*, 1991; Osman, 1992; Van Vuuren, 1996) .
- (ii) The efficacy of co-operative small group learning within a MLE framework as a strategy for teaching religion. Small group learning allows students to engage socially in learning new ideas, making meaning of new ideas, articulating their own points of view and learning to listen to the points of view of others (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995; Bitzer, 1994:40).

The study argues therefore for the redefining of teaching and learning in relation to Religious education. *Teaching* implies that mediation plays an important role in influencing the cognitive skills of students and the way in which they view the world around them. *Learning* takes place most effectively when educators work together in a reciprocal relationship (cf. 2.3.3).

1.4 Hypothesis

The research is guided by the following hypothesis:

The application of Feuerstein's criteria for Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) to teaching religion in colleges of education will positively influence the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own. Furthermore, the skills and self-confidence of pre-service teachers towards teaching religions may also be enhanced.

Feuerstein claimed that people have the potential to change and are modifiable if provided with the right kinds of interaction (Skuy *et al*, 1991: i). Under certain conditions, the organism will become receptive to internal and external sources of stimulation (Feuerstein, 1980:9). MLE will therefore form the theoretical basis for the interaction between tutor and students, to stimulate and encourage learning about religions in terms of content, practice, lifestyle and values. Furthermore, the research will demonstrate how criteria for MLE can comfortably be applied to co-operative group learning to enable students to actively participate in the learning process.

1.5 Research Design

The research design for this study can be described as experimental action research (McNiff, 1988; McKernan, 1996; McLean, 1995). Quantitative and qualitative data was obtained for the research by means of a set of questionnaires. In order to determine student attitudes and perceptions towards belief systems, as well as towards compulsory

Religious education in the college curriculum, student participants in the research projects would complete a questionnaire before and after a programme of intervention. The frequency of responses to questions on the questionnaires, both quantitatively and qualitatively, would provide insight into the design of the intervention programme for Religious education for pre-service teachers (cf. 3.4.3; 3.5.3; 3.6.3).

The intervention programme would comprise a study of some of the principal religions practised in South Africa. The design of the intervention programme would be underpinned by Feuerstein's criteria for MLE operationalized in a context of co-operative group learning. A post-intervention questionnaire would be completed by participants to assess the influence of MLE and the outcomes of co-operative learning on the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards belief systems other than their own.

The research was motivated by a pilot study conducted in 1996. Based on the findings of the pilot study, the research project would be repeated twice more, in 1997 and 1998, following a spiral action research model (McNiff, 1988:44). The empirical research would be repeated to determine the validity of results obtained from the previous year (cf. 3.1).

1.6 Conceptual framework

The various concepts and terms used in this dissertation have appeared in numerous texts and contexts. However, the terminology may assume different meanings and it is therefore necessary to clarify these for the purposes of this study. The following terms will be explained: religion, religious, belief system, Religious education, religion education, multi-religious education, multi-cultural education, pre-service teacher, student and learner.

1.6.1 Religion; religious

The terms *religion* and *religious* can be fraught with the meanings that individuals assign to them. Each individual has an understanding of religion depending on his or her particular frame of reference. One's concept of religion may be determined by various factors such as the religious commitment of parents, peer group, school community and the type of Religious education in the school curriculum (Moore & Habel, 1992:3; Tamminen, 1991:75).

In South Africa, religion has always been associated with Christianity, since the majority of South Africans are taken to be Christian. In addition, the influences of Christian National Education enforced the teaching of Christianity, to the detriment of any other belief system (Summers, 1996:4). However, in a society that is recognised for its cultural and religious diversity, an explicit reference to one religion in the curriculum at colleges of education denies pre-service teachers the right to education concerning an important dimension of human experience. Such programmes also fail to equip teachers with the necessary social skills to deal effectively with the religious diversity that may be experienced in the classroom.

It is not the purpose of this study to debate the various definitions of religion. However, dogmatic¹ or essential² definitions are considered to be inadequate and inappropriate in an educational context where religious diversity is a social reality. Definitions that are restrictive, exclusive or prejudicial will therefore be avoided (Chidester *et al*, 1992:26).

According to Moore & Habel (1992:4,5), a definition of religion should function as a summary statement of an educational programme in religion. Such a definition will then determine how educators select content for a study of religion. A definition of religion should also provide guidelines for activities. If one's definition of religion is confessional

¹ Definitions of religion that draw from the context of a particular community of faith.

² Definitions of religion that attempt to identify the essence of religion (cf. Chidester *et al*, 1992:26)

in nature, then the contents of a course in religion and the associated activities will be faith related and exclusive, facing the possibility of being indoctrinating (Moore & Habel, 1992:6).

The course in religion upon which this study is based, is underpinned by such definitions which view religion as an important human activity (Chidester *et al*, 1992:15). The approach taken therefore, will be a generic study of religion in all its many forms. This type of study belongs to the school of philosophical phenomenology of which Ninian Smart is a major exponent. Smart defines religion as follows:

A religion, or the religion of a group is a set of institutionalised rituals identified with a tradition and expressing and/or evoking sacral sentiments directed at a trans-human focus seen in the context of the human phenomenological environment and at least partially described by myths or by myths and doctrines.

(Moore & Habel, 1992:13)

1.6.2 Belief system

Smart (1996: 8) holds that any given religion is an internally complex *system*. A system implies dynamic and structural relations between component parts. Smart calls these *parts* the dimensions of any given religious system and defines them as doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential and social (Smart, 1996:8; Moore & Habel, 1992:14). According to Tamminen (1991:71), a belief system comprises various beliefs linked together by various bonds to form larger units. An individual's different beliefs and units of belief form his/her belief system.

As with the definition of religion (1.6.1), the academic debate surrounding the use of the term *belief system* as a valid term is acknowledged. The term will be used in this study in the sense that both Smart and Tamminen use it. Belief system refers to specific religious systems, such as the religion of the Zulus or the Tswana or Sunni Islam or Protestant

forms of Christianity. The specific use of the term does not preclude the idea that religions are complex, varied and dynamic (cf. Geaves, 1998: 21, 22).

1.6.3 Religious education; religion education

The meaning of the term *Religious education* must be differentiated from *religion education*. *Religious education* is commonly used as an umbrella term embracing an array of programmes including (cf. Moore & Habel, 1992:26):

- evangelical programmes aimed at bringing students to a particular faith commitment;
- formative programmes which are instructional programmes designed for students within a particular religious context to develop their faith and to engage in acts of worship;
- moral programmes which may or may not be anchored in a particular religion, but designed to enhance personal and inter-personal attitudes, moral behaviour and values;
- religion in education programmes designed to increase student-awareness, knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and religious phenomena.

It is possible therefore to differentiate between two general approaches to the teaching of religion:

- formative or catechetical programmes designed for students in a particular system of belief to develop and express their faith; and
- programmes designed to increase student-awareness about belief systems as described in the last option above.

The term *Religious education* is related to the former. In some cases the educational process itself may be religious (Chidester *et al*, 1992:25). The term *religion education* or *education in religion* refers to the latter and implies that students study religions without

necessarily being committed to any one (Wilson, 1992:13,14; Moore & Habel, 1992:22). Faith, therefore, cannot be a precondition or goal of religion education in the sense that students will not be expected to participate in any first order religious activities of religions other than their own. This does not mean, however, that the faith of students is disregarded in relation to the dimensions studied. Since many students would be deeply committed to their religions, the skills of empathetic understanding are also brought to the fore. In Smart's words (Moore & Habel, 1992:14,15), the study of religions needs to be *warm and vibrant* and calls for *imaginative participation*.

Education as a concept needs further clarification at this point. Once again, individuals and communities will determine the meaning assigned to it, especially when *religious* is combined with *education*. For some, educational goals may be synonymous with religious goals, and Religious education would therefore be concerned with teaching dogma and with religious training. The inclusion of religion in the curriculum on these grounds in a religiously diverse pre-service teacher community would be unrealistic and have limited value.

According to Grimmitt (1978:15), for an area of learning to be educationally valid, it must contribute uniquely to the student's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. Moore & Habel (1992:14) point out that in assessing a programme in religion one ought to consider the values and goals of both the particular institutional setting as well as the wider social setting.

To justify the inclusion of religion in the curriculum on educational grounds, a course in religion should therefore meet the following criteria:

- (i) A study of religion must not serve explicitly religious goals, but goals consistent with the goals of other academic subjects (Chidester *et al*, 1992:16, 44; Wilson, 1992:10).
- (ii) Students must become "thinking people", who are well-informed, understanding and reasonable (Wilson, 1992:11).

- (iii) A study of religions should widen and deepen the student's cognitive perspectives so as to contribute to his/her total development, to ensure understanding and to actively foster the individual's capacity to think for himself or herself (Grimmitt, 1978:9,10).
- (iv) Various transferable skills must be demonstrated as the outcomes of the learning experience. Studies in religion are educationally valid if students are provided with opportunities to think critically about moral and religious problems, to identify issues involved with religious diversity, to examine issues of personal morality as well as issues of social concern (Chidester *et al*, 1992:12).

The term *religion education* will be used throughout this study to denote activities in which students are engaged in a disciplined study of religion and to the methods of study appropriate to this field as described in points (i) to (iv) above. The term *Religious education* is used generically to refer to the array of religious education programmes offered at schools. *Religious education* is used in all questionnaires since this is the term most familiar to students.

1.6.4 Multi-religious education

The term *multi-religious education* refers to a multi-tradition model for religion in education. This model adopts an open, pluralistic, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of religions, as opposed to a single-tradition model, such as a study of Islam only or the Christian, Bible-based instruction which was the norm promoted by Christian National Education (Chidester *et al*, 1992:12,15). *Multi-religious* education is used synonymously with *religion education* (cf. 1.6.2).

1.6.5 Multicultural education; religious pluralism

This study lies within a broader framework of multicultural education. It therefore acknowledges the reality of religious pluralism and related issues. It is necessary to

clarify terminology in this regard as well, since the terms culture and multicultural are also laden with problems of interpretation (Moore, 1994:242).

The term *culture* has generally been used to refer to the shared experiences of a particular group, in language, behaviour, values, traditions and religions (Roux, 1998:85). A society is said to be multicultural when it reflects ethnic, social, economic, political and religious diversity (Thompson, 1988:12). Thompson (1988:13) emphasises that as one becomes aware of cultural pluralism, one must face the issues and problems of that pluralism as it pertains to the various religious backgrounds of the groups that constitute that particular society. In a culturally pluralist or multicultural society therefore, a common religion may be found among different cultural groups, or, religious diversity may exist in the same cultural group (cf. Roux, 1998: 87). Furthermore, pluralism recognises not only a variety of religious viewpoints, but a range of secular viewpoints as well (Grimmitt, 1995:133).

Various commentators have indicated a certain wariness towards the use of the terms *culture* and *multicultural* on the grounds that these terms have been artificially constructed or invented to justify the segregation and separate development of people on ethnic and racial lines (Moore, 1994:243; Sieborger & Alexander, 1996:41). Yet, self-defined groups exhibiting certain collective cultural identities do exist and is a fact that cannot be ignored. According to Versveld (Moore, 1994:253,254), a model of education that aims to transform ought to value cultural differences. Educators should deal creatively with the issue of cultural plurality in South Africa by devising curricula in which diversity, tolerance and appreciation of cultural differences is valued. Such curricula should enable students to manage differences productively. Furthermore, multicultural education has the task of bringing people out of their isolation so they can relate to one another without suppressing their differences.

Versveld's perspective on multicultural education informs the approach towards the teaching of religion upon which this study is based. Programmes for religion therefore need to be transformed to reflect a broader multi-religious perspective, free of bias or systems of domination.

1.6.6 Pre-service teacher; student

Prospective teachers will be referred to as *pre-service teachers* when their professional training is being referred to. Pre-service teachers are otherwise referred to as *students* in their capacity as undergraduate learners.

1.6.7 Learner

Learner will apply to school-going children.

1.7 Conclusion

An overview of the scope of this study has been presented in this chapter. The contents of the remaining chapters can be summarised as follows:

Chapter Two will focus on the major themes upon which this study is based. Feuerstein's criteria for Mediated Learning Experience are explained, as well as the co-operative learning strategies within which MLE will be implemented.

Chapter Three will provide a description of the empirical research associated with this study. The target group, the research design and the methods used to obtain data are described. A summary and analysis of the results are presented.

Chapter Four will provide an interpretation of the research data. In this chapter an evaluation will be made of the approaches and strategies used to influence the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own. The influence of the tutor/mediator on the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own will also be reviewed.

Chapter Five will provide recommendations and guidelines for religion education in the college of education sector in the light of the results of the empirical research.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING: A FRAMEWORK FOR RELIGION EDUCATION.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the following:

- Background to Feuerstein's theory for Mediated Learning Experience (MLE);
- MLE as a theoretical framework for teaching religions;
- a description of co-operative learning strategies;
- theoretical justification for co-operative learning and knowledge acquisition in religion education;
- the relationship between MLE, co-operative learning and religion education.

2.2 Mediated Learning Experience as a theoretical framework for teaching religion

2.2.1 Background to Feuerstein

Reuven Feuerstein, an Israeli psychologist and a researcher in the field of child development, conducted his work mainly with disadvantaged adolescents who had survived the trauma of the Second World War. Many of the young immigrants to Israel indicated poor intellectual functioning as well as an inability to function in mainstream culture and society (Skuy *et al*, 1991:i; Sharron, 1987:22). An important aspect of Feuerstein's work amongst these low-performing adolescents, were the methods which he developed to teach basic thinking skills and thereby to raise intellectual performance (Skuy *et al*, 1991: i; Sharron, 1987: 24; Savell, Twohig & Rachford, 1986:382).

Two key concepts in Feuerstein's programme are structural cognitive modifiability and mediated learning experience (MLE) (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980; Osman, 1992:34). Feuerstein introduced the theory of MLE as the underlying theoretical basis for the concept of

modifiability (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980:13). Feuerstein uses the term *cognitive modifiability* to refer to the potential to enhance the thinking abilities of a learner. This cognitive enhancement or modifiability is brought about by a deliberate program of intervention that will have the effect of increasing the learner's ability to interact with or respond to various sources of information in the environment (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980:9). The efficacy of a programme of intervention is dependent upon a human mediator who is the facilitator of such a programme of intervention.

Greenberg (1990:33) maintains that Feuerstein's theory of MLE provides insight into the effects of social interaction on both domain specific (or content) knowledge and general/strategic (cognitive processing) knowledge. Greenberg perceives a significant relationship between MLE and the way in which the learner acquires and transfers knowledge. When MLE occurs at a sufficiently high level, that is, when teachers explicitly mediate certain factors, then MLE becomes an effective instructional model that will lead to independent thinking (Greenberg, 1990:33,35). These factors have significant implications as students acquire and process knowledge in the context of religion education.

2.2.2 The role of the mediator in Feuerstein's theory of MLE

According to Feuerstein (Sharron, 1987:36), MLE refers to a specific type of interaction, in which one person in the interaction assumes the role of the mediator for the other. The role of the mediator may be assumed by a teacher, parent, grandparent, sibling or peer. The mediator focus's the learner's attention on specific stimuli and thereby interprets and gives meaning to the learner's encounters with the stimuli (Skuy *et al*, 1991:ii). The mediator selects objects, events or thoughts and interprets, guides and gives meaning to these stimuli in such a way that the learner is able to adapt to new situations efficiently and effectively (Greenberg, 1990:34; Skuy *et al*, 1991: ii; Sharron, 1987:36). Hence, Feuerstein challenged the Piagetian premise that a child learns simply through contact with stimuli provided by its environment. The quality of learning is improved when a

human mediator intervenes between the world of stimuli, the organism and the response to stimuli.¹

To elaborate, Feuerstein maintains that MLE occurs when an individual is shown or taught cognitive methods for interpreting information, for solving problems, or for knowledge acquisition (Savell, Twohig & Rachford, 1986:384; Greenberg, 1990:34). The mediator therefore, plays a significant role in determining the learner's development. MLE aims to promote effective and productive thinking and learning. It is a type of interaction that ensures that the learner is an active participant in the learning process and not merely a passive recipient of knowledge and information (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980:23; Osman, 1992:35; Greenberg, 1990:34). Furthermore, Feuerstein believed that by providing children with MLEs they would become more aware of their cognitive processes and abilities and consequently develop an awareness of their own ability to think (Feuerstein *et al*, 1980:25; Savell, Twohig & Rachford, 1986:385).

Similarly, Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator (Bellet, 1998:133), differentiated between a *banking concept of education*, a process whereby participation in thinking and learning by students is limited to the storing or filing of knowledge which has been *deposited* or transferred by the teacher; and the *problem-posing method*, whereby students become critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (Bellet, 1998:134,135; Hook, 1994 :14). Freire believed that the development of what he referred to as a *critical consciousness* within learners, is the antithesis of banking education. Teaching strategies therefore that do not encourage student interaction, are in danger of perpetuating systems of domination, indoctrination and prejudiced thinking (Hook, 1994 :21; Bellet, 1998:134).

Feuerstein identified at least ten criteria or types of interaction essential for classroom mediation that differentiates MLEs from other teacher/learner interactions (Sharron, 1987:41; Skuy *et al*, 1991:ii; Greenberg, 1990:35ff).

¹ Piaget's formula to illustrate the direct approach to learning: S-O-R or Subject-Organism-Response, was adapted by Feuerstein to include a human mediator between the world of stimuli (S), the organism (O) and response (R). Thus, S-H-O-H-R, where H stands for the human mediator (Skuy *et al*, 1991:ii; Sharron, 1987:35).

Three universal criteria for MLE (Blagg, 1991:19): the mediation of intent, meaning and transcendence must be present in a tutor-learner relationship to constitute a mediated learning experience. The remaining criteria are less constant, but are nevertheless vital features of MLE.

The following ten criteria for MLE, as outlined by Feuerstein, are essential to this study (after Skuy *et al*, 1991; Sharron, 1987; cf. Greenberg, 1990):

- the mediation of intent and reciprocity or responsiveness;
- the mediation of meaning;
- the mediation of transcendence;
- the mediation of competence;
- the mediation of sharing behaviour;
- the mediation of self-regulation and control of behavior;
- the mediation of individuality;
- the mediation of goal planning or goal directedness;
- the mediation of challenge;
- the mediation of awareness of change.

Greenberg (1990:36) stresses the mediation of *affective value* as a significant aspect of classroom practise. Affective value refers to the teacher's behaviour in terms of communicating the importance of the learners in the learning process, what they think and feel as well as what is being studied.

The essence and implementation of these criteria will be elaborated upon below (cf. 2.5), in relation to the teaching of religions and co-operative learning strategies.

2.2.3 Feuerstein in context

Feuerstein's criteria for MLEs have been applied in various situations to improve or modify the cognitive functioning of children. Although Feuerstein worked mainly with

disadvantaged adolescents, his programme for teaching thinking skills has been applied in various other contexts outside of this domain. Empirical research on Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (FIE) programme has been well documented. Savell, Twohig & Rachford (1986) provide comprehensive coverage on research projects conducted in Israel, Venezuela, Nashville in the U.S.A. and Toronto in Canada.

In South Africa, educators and researchers have also applied MLE in various research and training programmes. The Division of Specialised Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, which seeks to develop the cognitive abilities of children, has applied Feuerstein's theory of structural cognitive modifiability and of MLE in its cognitive research programmes (Skuy *et al*, 1991: Preface). Skuy, Mentis *et al* (1990) implemented intervention programmes underpinned by MLE to counteract the effects of deprivation amongst disadvantaged, gifted Sowetan youth (Skuy, Mentis *et al*, 1990).

Osman (1992) applied MLE and Instrumental Enrichment as a means to teaching thinking skills to pre-service teachers. Berkowitz (1993) developed a model for the implementation of MLE as part of a teacher inservice training programme. Her research investigated the claim that MLE serves a potentially valuable approach for the professional development of teachers, as well as for enhancing teacher self esteem. The results of this research indicated that MLE is effective as a teacher inservice training programme (Berkowitz, 1993:50,53). Van Vuuren (1996:12,16) attempted to demonstrate the transformative potential of MLE by presenting it to teachers as a set of guidelines for more effective teaching, and with the view to bringing about changes in the attitudes and practices of inservice teachers.

The present study focuses upon Feuerstein's theory of MLE only. It does not include Instrumental Enrichment as a means to promote thinking skills as have other studies in this domain (cf. Skuy, Mentis, Arnott & Nkwe, 1990; Osman, 1992). The transformative potential of MLE (Van Vuuren, 1996:12; Osman, 1992:35) makes it an appropriate vehicle for teaching religions. MLE underpins the interaction between tutors and pre-service teachers in this study, to stimulate and encourage learning religions in

terms of content, practice, lifestyle and values. In addition, MLE enables pre-service teachers to communicate newly learned concepts as meaningfully as possible and to develop critical thinking skills around religion and religious issues.

2.2.4 The significance of MLE and religion education

According to Moore & Habel (1992:3), many people have a concept of religion determined by the prototype or model of religion with which they are most familiar. This appears to be the case in South Africa, since 'religion' is generally equated with Christianity in spite of the fact that South African society reflects a plurality of cultures and religions (Summers, 1996:1). For many South African students therefore, Christianity will provide the model for defining religion. This may however, also be true of adherents of any of the minority religions practised in South Africa. The primary mediating agencies in the family will be the persons through whom cultural and religious norms are transferred. The mediating agency in schools must be teachers or the educational institution itself (MacDonald, 1990 :57). Consequently, that which has been mediated concerning religion in the home environment may be in conflict with that which is mediated by a teacher or tutor in the school or college environment.

Feuerstein, however, claims that people have the potential to change and are modifiable if provided with the right kind of interaction (Skuy *et al*, 1991: *i*). This idea can be extended to include the way in which students understand and respond to religions other than their own. Tutors in colleges of education therefore play a vital role in facilitating a process of transformation and change in relation to the perceptions that pre-service teachers may have of religions other than their own. Mediation requires that the mediator purposefully and intentionally focuses the mediatee on the stimuli (Skuy *et al*, 1991:1). In the domain of religion education, tutors provide students with information about a range of religions from which to generate greater social understanding and respect. Tutors ought to foster a process of cultural and religious exchange so that students can learn from and be enriched by one another (Moore, 1991:48ff).

Tutors provide the structures therefore, whereby students are actively engaged in dialogue, sharing knowledge and experiences of beliefs and practices in a secure and unprejudiced environment. Co-operative small group learning is well suited to a MLE instructional model in which the tutor or teacher adopts the role of facilitator rather than of dispenser of knowledge, guiding students to develop the knowledge and skills required of a competent educator (cf. Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1992:74; Thousand, Villa & Niven, 1994: 124). Each of the ten criteria of MLE (cf. 2.2.2) encourages some kind of response from students as they engage in learning about religions. The face-to-face interaction encouraged by small group learning allows students to compare their beliefs and to monitor the understanding of religious concepts with the assistance of their peers. The elements of co-operative learning related to this study and revealed in relevant literature will be discussed below.

2.3 Co-operative Learning

2.3.1 Understanding co-operative learning

Co-operative learning has been described as:

the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.

(Johnson & Johnson, 1994:78; Holt, 1993:5).

The term *co-operative learning* refers to a family of instructional practices in which the educator gives various directions to groups of learners about how to work together. In co-operative learning activities a class would be divided into groups of three to six students, ideally differing in ability, culture, religion and gender. The educator directs the students in some way so that they work together as a team on an academic task (Murray, 1994:6).

A review of literature on the subject of co-operative learning demonstrates the favourable light in which educators view co-operative learning strategies. Traditional methods of teaching, such as Whole-class Question-Answer or direct lecturing methods are enhanced

considerably when learners follow co-operative learning procedures (Kagan, 1990: 12; Murray, 1994:6).

Various co-operative learning practices have been researched and well documented (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Thousand, Villa & Niven, 1994; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995). A brief overview of some well known co-operative learning practices used in relation to the transfer of knowledge about religions in the intervention programme has been provided below.

2.3.1.1 Jigsaw

Each member of a group or team is assigned unique information on a section of a topic to be studied. Students research and discuss their sections with counterparts from other teams who have been assigned the corresponding sections of a topic. Thereafter, students return to their original groups and teach their own team members what they have learned about their particular sections, thereby contributing to the topic as a whole (De Villiers & Grobler, 1995:127; Kagan, 1990:14).

2.3.1.2 Learning Together

This technique was designed and developed largely by David and Roger Johnson (1984; 1994; Davidson, 1994:15). *Learning Together* means that students work together in small groups to present a common response to a task for which the group receives recognition. Students work together, discuss, listen, question, explain and share ideas and resources. Ideally, group interaction should continuously be evaluated to ensure the successful functioning of the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1994: 79; Davidson, 1994:16,17).

2.3.1.3 Group Investigation

Group Investigation as a co-operative learning model has been used extensively in Israel in the research of Sharan & Sharan and Sharan & Hertz-Lazarowitz (Davidson, 1994:17; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992). The *Group Investigation* model is an example of an array of small group methods called *Small-Group Teaching* (Sharan, Kussell *et al*, 1984:4). Students are expected to work in small groups numbering between three and five students each. Groups plan their own strategy of study and organize complex topics into subtopics for which individuals or partners within a group will take responsibility. A class engaged in a Group Investigation project will ideally proceed through six phases: topic selection, co-operative planning, implementation, analysis and synthesis, presentation of final product and evaluation (Davidson, 1994:17; Sharan, Kussell *et al*, 1984:4,5).

2.3.1.4 The Structural Approach

Spencer Kagan is a significant protagonist of the structural approach to co-operative learning (Kagan, 1990:12; Brandt, 1990:10). This approach is based on the creation, analysis and systematic application of structures, or ways of organizing social interaction in the classroom. Structures usually involve a series of steps with proscribed behaviour at each step. Structures can be used repeatedly at different stages in a lesson to deliver different kinds of academic content. Different structures may be combined innovatively to form more complex lessons (Kagan, 1990:12,13).

The structural approach incorporates procedures from other models of co-operative learning, such as Jigsaw and Group Investigation (cf. 2.3.1.1 & 2.3.1.3). *Think-Pair-Share* is an example of a structure useful for concept development, for introducing topics and for eliciting student opinions. This structure, as with all other structures, offers all

students an opportunity to participate and to express their responses to a question posed by the teacher (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:57; Kagan, 1990:14; Davidson, 1994:19).

Think-Pair-Share involves the following procedure:

- the teacher poses a question;
- the students are given time to think about a response individually;
- thereafter, students share their responses with a partner;
- students share their combined responses with the rest of the class.

This kind of structure benefits students in numerous ways. According to Kagan (1990:14), students are given opportunities to hypothesize, reason inductively and deductively and to apply knowledge and skills already acquired. Furthermore, as students test out their ideas with their partners, the quality of the whole-class discussion is likely to improve (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:57).

There are numerous approaches to co-operative learning. The examples noted above by no means cover the entire spectrum. However, the point to note, is that regardless of the model or combination of co-operative learning models implemented by the teacher, the emphasis would be upon actively engaging students in their own educational experiences. As students combine their efforts, the capacity to learn is therefore potentially increased (Bitzer, 1994:40).

Moreover, the success of co-operative learning regardless of the model used, the structure, or the size of the groups, depends on the successful execution of five essential elements, viz: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1984: 5; 1994: 81; Bitzer, 1994: 41; Kagan, 1990:13).

These five elements will be discussed below since they form the basis of the implementation of small group learning in the intervention programme (cf. 3.4.3; 3.5.3). These elements are usually associated with the *Learning Together* model, but are often cited by other educationalists such as Kagan, in relation to their own models (Davidson, 1994:19; Kagan, 1990:10).

2.3.2 Basic elements for successful co-operative learning

2.3.2.1 Positive Interdependence

Johnson & Johnson (1994:82; cf. Udvari-Solner, 1994:64) stress that the core of co-operative effort begins with structuring positive interdependence. Positive interdependence implies that students are linked by a common purpose and work together to accomplish their goals. It also creates two responsibilities within the group: to learn the assigned material, and to ensure that all members of the group learn the assigned material (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:82; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:70). Positive interdependence highlights that each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success. Each group member has a unique contribution to make, not only in terms of resources and/or task responsibilities, but also in terms of their own personal performances, and of the group as a whole. This implies that, should there be one weak person in the group, the other members assist so that after working together, the individual will be capable of working alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:82, 86).

There are various ways in which activities can be structured so that students become positively interdependent. These can be categorised as follows:

- **Goal interdependence:** occurs when a common purpose has been established between team members. According to Johnson & Johnson (1994:82), learning must be structured so that team members know that they can only attain their goals if their team mates attain theirs. Each team member contributes towards the completion of

one product, which in turn contributes towards the achievement of common academic goals for the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:82; Udvari-Solner, 1994:64; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:72).

- **Resource interdependence:** exists when group members share materials in order to complete a task (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:73; Johnson & Johnson, 1994:83). Tutors assign each group member only a portion of the information, materials or resources required to complete a task. Team members have to combine their portions to effectively complete the task. The Jigsaw method is an effective way to ensure that students make a separate contribution to a joint product (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:84; Kagan, 1990:14).
- **Role interdependence:** is structured when each team member assumes a specific responsibility which becomes interconnected to the responsibilities of other members of the team. Thus, to ensure that co-operative interdependence takes place, each group member is assigned a role complementary to the team's activities as a whole. Roles adopted by team members may be those of recorder, reader, resource manager, checker (of understanding), or group spokesperson (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:83; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:74).
- **Incentive or reward interdependence:** this type of interdependence results when the same reward, grade or advantage is given to team members for the successful performance of all team members (Udvari-Solner, 1994:64). Regular celebrations of group efforts are an essential component of this structure and encourage students to appreciate their efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:82).
- **Communication Interdependence:** exists when all team members communicate directly with one another in order to complete a task. Communication networks in the group should be structured so that all team members have equal opportunity to interact with one another (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:75).

Abrami & Chalmers *et al* (1995:70) indicate that it is incumbent upon tutors to structure positive interdependence in such a way that students will be encouraged to work co-

operatively. However, positive interdependence must be perceived by students as being beneficial to their successes as a team. It is only when students are aware of how positive interdependence works to the advantage of the group that they are more likely to engage in co-operative patterns of behaviour.

The different categories of positive interdependence can be combined in a variety of ways to promote co-operation between team members and between teams (Johnson & Johnson, 1994: 81).

2.3.2.2 Face-to-face promotive interaction

According to Johnson & Johnson (1994:89), face-to-face promotive interaction means that students meet face-to-face and work together to complete assignments and promote one another's successes. There are certain interpersonal dynamics that will occur only if students interact with one another. Promotive interaction contributes towards improved relationships between students. The more students communicate with one another the more students are likely to trust, share and support one another (Johnson & Johnson, 1975:28; Slabbert, 1992:441). Promotive interaction results from positive interdependence when team members assist one other, exchange resources and process information efficiently and effectively. Students should also provide one another with feedback to improve subsequent performances. Students should challenge one another's conclusions and reasoning to promote higher quality decision making (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994:30; Johnson & Johnson, 1994:90).

2.3.2.3 Individual accountability/personal responsibility

Individual accountability involves two components (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:82; Johnson & Johnson, 1994:79): first, each group member is individually responsible for his or her own learning, and second, each group member is responsible for helping the other members of the group to learn. Individual accountability exists when the

performance of each individual is assessed and compared against a standard of performance. Students should develop feelings of personal responsibility towards the group in which they work (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:84). Team members may therefore hold one another accountable for contributing to the group's success.

Johnson & Johnson (1994:86) maintain that the purpose of working in co-operative groups is to ensure that each team member becomes a stronger individual in his or her own right. Individual accountability is the key to ensure that co-operative learning strengthens all group members. After participating in a co-operative lesson, group members should be better prepared to complete similar tasks on their own, thereby demonstrating personal mastery of the material (Johnson & Johnson, 1994: 86).

2.3.2.4 Interpersonal and small group skills

Johnson & Johnson (1975:186; 1994:90) point out that group skills are not inherent in students. It is necessary to teach students the social skills required to work effectively with each other in a group. Interpersonal and small-group skills become the *engine that powers co-operative learning groups* (Johnson & Johnson, 1975:186). Social skills are the key to group productivity and such skills as leadership, effective communication, conflict resolution and the building and maintenance of trust must be taught to students to improve the quality and quantity of their learning. If teamwork skills are not learned, it is unlikely that tasks will be completed satisfactorily.

2.3.2.5 Group Processing

Effective group interaction is influenced by whether or not groups reflect on how they have functioned (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:91). Group processing means that groups reflect on their sessions which includes identifying and describing those actions that were most useful or helpful as the team worked on a project. The team also identifies those members who fail to contribute adequately to the learning and review the quality of communication

amongst themselves as they work at analysing and synthesising information. The group would also make decisions about which actions to continue or change. The purpose of group processing therefore is to clarify and improve the effectiveness of members in their efforts to achieve the group's goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:91).

2.3.3 Theoretical justification for co-operative learning and the implications for knowledge acquisition in religion education

According to Murray (1994:5ff), the various approaches to co-operative learning may be determined by distinct theoretical perspectives. However, numerous practitioners argue that the most compelling theoretical rationale for co-operative learning is social constructivist theory, Vygotskian theory in particular (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:17; Murray, 1994:9).

Lev Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist (Sharron, 1987:301), maintained that knowledge is constructed as a result of social interaction amongst individuals or that mental functions and accomplishments have their origins in one's social relationships. New mental structures therefore, which form in the human intellect, are derived from the internalization of those processes of learning that were originally experienced in a social context (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:44; MacDonald, 1990:6; Murray, 1994:9). Dialogue between students and more knowledgeable adults or peers become the vehicle for internalizing the social world (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:32). The more opportunities there are for dialogue, the more likely internalization is to occur. In Vygotsky's view, learning is a co-operative venture and is achieved through co-operation with others in a variety of social settings, with teachers, parents or peers. The capacity to learn therefore is embedded in the individual's capacity to learn with the help of others (cf. Feuerstein in Sharron, 1987:36; Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:44).

A central concept in Vygotsky's theory is the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the distance between the student's actual level of development and the

potential level of development under the guidance of an adult or more knowledgeable peer. Vygotsky believed that what can be achieved with the aid of a more knowledgeable *other* is different to what can be accomplished alone (Murray, 1994:9; Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:45; Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:17; McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:18). Hence, Vygotsky and Feuerstein reflect similarities in terms of the significant role played by a mediator in determining the course of an individual's development. According to Macdonald (1990:59), Feuerstein's theory of MLE can be seen as a *descriptive explication* of Vygotsky's ZPD. Feuerstein's criteria for MLE can be viewed as *mediational operators* that serve as effective inputs controlled by the mediator and which ultimately influence the way in which students acquire and process knowledge within the ZPD (Macdonald, 1990:59).

Based on these theoretical perspectives therefore, learning about religions within a constructivist paradigm affords students the opportunities to participate in the construction and application of knowledge related to religions. Co-operative strategies provide the opportunities whereby justifications, principles and explanations are socially fostered, generated and contrasted (cf. Greenberg, 1990: 34; Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:43). The relevance of the application of constructivist theory to strategies for teaching religion cannot be over emphasised. Heubner (1996) and others (Walker, 1996; Siejk, 1995) attest to the importance of dialogue for sound interreligious and multi-cultural education. Dialogue provides opportunities for interreligious exchange whereby students engage in sharing life experiences, exchange opinions and provide answers for one another to questions raised in relation to religious differences and differences in perspectives (Knauth & Weisse, 1995:242).

Non-denominational, multi-religious education presents pre-service teachers with the daunting task of learning, inter alia, new religious concepts, the language and terms of religions, principal beliefs, religious responses to contemporary moral issues and the meaning and role of authority in religions (Tulasiewicz, 1993:25). On these grounds,

dialogue within the context of co-operative small group learning is undeniably far more effective than the traditional classroom model which functions as a single social system and tends to isolate students from one another (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1992:73,74). Student interaction around issues of religious diversity and experiences becomes particularly meaningful when students guide one another through the learning of new concepts. Mastery of basic information can be achieved more effectively when students engage in the *speaking patterns* associated with religion education as a discipline (after Nevin, Smith & Udvari-Solner, 1994:116).

Some ideas from Vygotsky's notion of student interaction in the ZPD outlined by McCarthy & McMahon (1992) and Hertz-Lazarowitz (1992) informs the implementation of Feuerstein's mediational criteria within a co-operative learning model for religion education. The following principles are to be noted:

- (i) In co-operative small-group learning there is no designated capable peer who always assists less capable team members. Students work at constructing knowledge together and should not attempt to transfer control from one student to another (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:31). For this reason, all team members are required to research and acquire information about the belief systems which are being studied in order to raise questions, contribute to discussions and projects, and generally to become proficient in the use of specific religious terminology.
- (ii) A corollary to (i) however, is that for any given task, there will be a more capable or knowledgeable peer who assists others and thus helps peers develop their understanding of religious concepts and terminology (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:31; Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:45). Students who are adherents of a particular belief system will invariably assist other team members towards understanding foreign concepts or practices. Students

must be made conscious that expertise and responsibility in the group will continually change as specific tasks change and as the study of belief systems changes.

- (iii) Discourse, which takes place in a co-operative group, ought to reflect different patterns of interaction appropriate to the knowledge of individuals. Reading and research becomes a prerequisite in order to prevent a unidirectional flow of knowledge. While one or more students may display personal experiences of a particular belief or practice, each member of a co-operative team is perceived as being a potential source of knowledge. Students who may not have first hand knowledge and experience of a belief system may contribute to the dialogue by presenting what they have read, by evaluating problematic issues, or by weighing up the quality of contributions made by peers (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:31,32).

In the next section, the above principles will be explored in more detail in relation to the ten criteria for MLE (cf. 2.2.2).

2.4 Mediated learning experience, co-operative learning and religion education

In this section, the efficacy of MLE in a co-operative learning context will be examined as an approach to teaching religion. The tutor or lecturer is referred to from this point onwards, as the *tutor/mediator*. The emphasis on student participation in the learning process implies that learning is facilitated by the tutor/mediator in a context of open enquiry.

2.4.1 Mediation of intent and reciprocity

The mediation of intent can be defined as *the imposition of the mediator on the mediatee* (Blagg, 1991:19), or the conscious intention of the tutor/mediator to control access to stimuli (Sharron, 1987:42). According to Feuerstein (1980:20), the mediation of intent occurs when the mediator deliberately guides interaction in a chosen direction by selecting objects or events and focuses the student's attention upon them (Greenberg, 1990:35; Skuy *et al*, 1991:1). Mediation only occurs when the tutor stands between students and the environment.

For an activity to qualify as a mediated learning experience, a degree of intent on the part of the mediator is required, and must be shared by the recipient of mediation as part of an interactive process (Feuerstein *et al*: 1980:22). This means that the tutor and student are engaged in a reciprocal relationship. The tutor/mediator isolates the stimuli and presents them in such a way that the learner responds (Skuy *et al*, 1991:1). Hence, framing of the stimulus in religion education could entail a selection of material from Smart's dimensional analysis of worldviews, such as the mythical or narrative dimension, the ritual or practical dimension, the ethical dimension or the material or artistic dimension (Smart, 1996:10,11; Cole, 1988: 83).

The mediation of intent and reciprocity implies that the mediatee becomes orientated towards and shares in the goals sought by the mediator (Sharron, 1987:42). According to Cole (1983:81), the goal or purpose of studies in religions in a multi-religious context should be to understand its place and function as an aspect of human activity and its importance in the lives of those people who practise them. The tutor/mediator therefore steers the process of learning about religions by conveying accurate information about a particular belief system or secular philosophy in an objective and empathetic manner (Summers, 1997:59).

Reciprocity is clearly related to intent and occurs when the recipients of MLE respond to the intervention from the mediator and indicate a willingness to co-operate (Skuy *et al*, 1991:1). To ensure reciprocity from students, the purpose and intent must be clearly communicated by the mediator so that students are attracted to the issues at hand. Bolton (1993:16) points out the value of a student-centred philosophy for teaching religions:

It enables variety to thrive and affirms each student in his or her inherited world view. It reminds me always to emphasize the worth and integrity of each young person. It enables exploration and development of rigorous skills of scholarship. Its relevance brings partnership and democracy to the classroom.

It is essential therefore to structure learning about religions so that students are motivated to reciprocate. When topics are perceived as being relevant, students are willing to be partners in the learning process (Skuy *et al*, 1991:2; Knauth & Weisse, 1995:241).

The mediation of intent and reciprocity may well occur in traditional whole class or direct teaching approaches. However, co-operative learning techniques allow students to work actively with information in what Hertz-Lazarowitz (1992:75) refers to as *multilateral communication networks*. When learning follows a whole-class or lecture format, interaction tends to be limited to comments between the teacher and individual students. Effective teaching and learning may occur under such conditions and students may respond to the teacher or lecturer's prompting. However, in a religiously diverse context, there would be far less opportunity for all students to generate ideas and to participate in the construction of knowledge in whole-class teaching than would be the situation in small group learning.

Opportunities for reciprocity or purposeful student interaction are enhanced when students take a more active role in the learning process (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*,

1995:2). The mediation of meaning discussed below enhances the success of intent and reciprocity in relation to religion education.

2.4.2 Mediation of meaning

Feuerstein (Sharron, 1987:41) firmly believes that the mediation of meaning is one of the key features that defines and sets apart MLEs from other tutor-student or teacher-learner interactions. The mediation of meaning occurs when the mediator conveys the significance and purpose of an activity or endows the learning experience with a purpose (Blagg, 1991:19; Skuy *et al*, 1991:6). Skuy *et al* (1991:6) explains that the mediation of meaning goes beyond intent and reciprocity as it is

concerned with charging the activity or object with value and energy which makes it relevant for the mediatee.

Greenberg (1990:37) states that an effective mediator will ensure that

students experience an inner meaning for every activity in which they engage.

Furthermore, without meaning, students may miss the rest of the mediation, because neither the mediation, nor the issues at hand will have any value for them.

In Feuerstein's view (Sharron, 1987:41), a student cannot be left to discover meaning in stimuli on his or her own. In the context of religion education in the college curriculum, the mediation of meaning could occur on at least two levels:

- (i) The cognitive and professional level, whereby the tutor/mediator helps students find value and significance in a study of religions in the college curriculum in preparation for the religious and/or cultural pluralism in the school environment.

- (ii) On a personal level, since the tutor/mediator assists the student in working out his or her own self-understanding in relation to the self-understanding of others (Hausmann, 1993:15). Hausmann (1993) points out that religion and self-understanding are inextricably linked which may limit the extent to which students would be open to a study of belief systems other than their own. Related to the issue of self-understanding is the problem of religious toleration. In some cases, religious groups attempt to insulate themselves from religious pluralism and regard the study of religions as a threat to their own religious identity and faith commitment. That pre-service teachers unpack these issues for themselves within their training, also ultimately, contributes towards their professional development.

Feuerstein (1980:13) emphasises that the mediator cannot remain neutral or aloof towards the material being conferred upon his or her students nor in one's relationship with students in the learning process. The mediator should express interest and emotional attachment to what is being learned and help students to find value and significance in the learning activities (Greenberg, 1990:37; Skuy *et al*, 1991:6; Sharron, 1987:41).

In the light of these comments, in order to enhance the mediation of meaning in relation to religion education in the curricula of colleges of education, the following could be taken into account:

- Religion education is not satisfied by teaching *about* religion only. Wilson (1992:11) for example, draws attention to the idea that a religious outlook involves directing one's emotions in certain ways and towards certain objects. These emotions may be love, awe, reverence, fear and the like. A meaningful study of religions therefore, includes exploring those emotions invested by believers in their religious practices even though students may not actually share them.

- Students should be allowed to feel *at home* in their own religious or philosophical outlook. The tutor/mediator therefore affirms the religious identity of each student by allowing students to explore and share the essence of their own particular identity in a pluralist society (Knauth & Weisse, 1995:246).
- The tutor's enthusiasm, behaviour and attitudes will influence the nature of a student's reciprocity (Greenberg, 1990:36). Greenberg refers to this as the mediation of affective value. Students should feel that they are not being manipulated and that the tutor will not ascribe to any student a religious identity to which they do not wish to be committed (Knauth & Weisse, 1995:247).

The process of investing meaning will be all the more effective if students are actively engaged in the construction and negotiation of meaning. In the context of co-operative small group learning, all students are perceived as being potential sources of knowledge (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:30). This potential may be augmented in classes where religious diversity is evident. When knowledge is sought and constructed as a team, opportunities are created for interreligious and intercultural dialogue (Skeie, 1995:90). Students should, in addition, be challenged by the tutor/mediator to provide alternatives to interpretations of religious doctrines, experiences and practices should they not accept those interpretations communicated by the tutor, fellow students or interpretations provided in resource materials.

This means that learning is structured in such a way that students highlight and discuss doctrinal differences and those distinguishing characteristics that make a particular religion what it is, as well as differences in truth claims and value systems (Orteza y Miranda, 1994: 32). Skeie (1995:90) emphasises that educational institutions ought not to become *refuges* from cultural and religious differences. Working with pluralism rather than against it, consequently empowers the student as a prospective educator to confront and deal positively with a diversity of religious perspectives.

2.4.3 Mediation of transcendence

Transcendence is closely linked to intent, since an interaction that provides mediated learning must include an intention by the mediator to transcend the immediate needs or concerns of the recipient of the mediation (Feuerstein, 1980:20; Sharron, 1987:42). Blagg (1991:19) has stated that transcendence refers to the need to embellish the learning experience with a purpose and significance that goes *beyond the particular needs of the task*. Greenberg (1990:37) states that the mediator should help students to connect domain specific knowledge (content) to numerous other contexts. Feuerstein referred to this as *bridging* in that transcendence develops within the student a perception of how issues, activities or information are interconnected (Skuy *et al*, 1992:11). The mediatee becomes capable of transferring knowledge from the immediate to the global.

In the context of religion education, the mediation of transcendence means that the tutor/mediator helps the student apply knowledge about belief systems to a broader context of belief and practise (cf. Greenberg, 1990:36). Thus, the tutor/mediator determines the structures that encourage students to enquire and seek explanations for new concepts and information which they encounter. The student becomes capable of understanding how different religious dimensions such as worship, ritual, myth and belief are interconnected. Furthermore, students engage in reflective thinking concerning their own personal expression of faith and practise in these domains. These personal reflections are given expression in a context of interreligious dialogue with the view to overcoming prejudice, misconceptions and stereotyping (Siejk, 1995:228).

Transcendence therefore implies that students are willing to explore the basis of different religious perspectives and points of view and to reflect on their own in the process without feeling that their religious commitments are at stake (Hayden, 1993:19).

In the process of learning about beliefs and the communities that give expression to such beliefs, the tutor/mediator seeks to develop within students the skills of ideological

criticism. Grimmitt (1994:138) argues against a value-free, ideologically neutral study of religions and for a model of religion education that becomes the vehicle through which the skills of ideological criticism are communicated. An approach to religion education that merely attempts to preserve each religious community as a separate, distinct and exclusive community serves a limited purpose (Grimmitt, 1994:141). Skills of ideological criticism include the following:

- increased critical consciousness of the student's own cultural/religious perspectives and those of others;
- awareness of how ideologies influence attitudes, values and beliefs, and thereby shape the human person and society;
- willingness to engage in dialogue with those who are ideologically divided around areas of mutual concern and certain core values, such as the value of human life, the value of a just society, of exercising moral responsibility, and of commitment to interpersonal relationships (Grimmitt, 1994:138, 143; Kitshoff, 1994:320).

Interaction in small groups provides a constructivist context which allows students the opportunity to articulate their opinions in relation to religious knowledge, ideologies and core values with their peers (cf. 2.3.3). Face-to-face interaction in small groups provides a suitable context for students to explore religious differences together and to search for the reasons behind those differences. Small group learning also promotes interpersonal processes and enables students to become independent, active and responsible participants in the learning process (Osman, 1992:129).

Knowledge about religions and positive attitudes towards learning about the religions of others are inextricably linked to transcendence. Knowledge empowers pre-service teachers to function responsibly in the face of religious pluralism and would increase their confidence or self esteem for classroom practise.

The development of self-esteem is also an important mediational criterion and will be elaborated upon in the next subsection.

2.4.4 Mediation of competence

The mediation of competence involves developing the mediatee's self-confidence and self-esteem. This can be achieved by helping students develop an awareness of their ability to successfully engage in a task (Greenberg, 1990:38). Feuerstein's perception of competence involves instilling within the mediatee a positive belief in his or her ability to succeed. The mediation of competence can be empowering for students since they are encouraged to engage in independent thought and motivated action (Skuy *et al*, 1991 :16). MLEs furthermore, instill the need to set and achieve goals which contribute to the psychological well being of the student. Mediation of competence will be a natural outcome provided the criteria of intent and reciprocity, meaning and transcendence have been effectively mediated.

In the domain of religion education, the tutor/mediator ought to ensure that appropriate teaching strategies allow students to feel that they have contributed towards the learning process. Feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence are inculcated within students by reassuring them that they are not being compelled to undertake a personal search for meaning nor that the student's own belief system, or lack of one, is regarded as being inferior, inadequate or superficial (Cole, 1988:82; Wilson, 1992:12).

Students should also understand that the aim is not to become religious *Masterminds*, as Cole (1988:83) puts it. This implies that detailed factual knowledge of belief systems is not the sole measure of a student's competence in the field of religion. The tutor/mediator should aim to put students in touch with, *inter alia*, religious concepts and issues, the place and significance of religion in human life, insights into religious faith and experience, the use and meaning of symbolism and the use and meaning of religious terminology (Cole, 1988:33,34). Furthermore, the tutor/mediator could guide students

towards an understanding of the broader religious dimensions. For example, students should be able to explain the place of rites of passage in religious life, rather than exact details on initiation or marriage ceremonies.

Not only should the tutor/mediator put students in touch with religious concepts and issues, but should also provide students with opportunities to respond to religious phenomena and to inquire into religious issues (Cole, 1988:82). Such opportunities are created when students are encouraged to contribute to their learning in the form of reading, conversing or being engaged in discourse with peers, questioning, debating and explaining religious language or terminology (cf. Slabbert, 1992:440). Hence, student interaction with the broader issues of religion in resources and through personal contact with adherents may lead to an ever increasing knowledge of the finer details of religious belief and practice.

Co-operative learning provides concrete situations that allow students to work together to increase their own learning and that of their peers (Nevin, Smith & Udvari-Solner, 1994:125). When task interdependence and individual accountability are included as dimensions of co-operative group learning, students will have ownership over part or even all of the information required to complete a project (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:29,30). The competence to deal with new information as well as areas of potential conflict will only be acquired if students, in their pre-service phase, have actively confronted issues in direct and frequent collaboration with both tutors and peers (Nevin, Smith & Udvari-Solner, 1994:124).

Working co-operatively with peers, and learning to value such co-operation in the context of religion education, may contribute towards greater insight and understanding of one another's beliefs, lifestyles and values. Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1994:23) found that the more individuals worked with each other in small groups, the more

inclined they were to see themselves as worthwhile and valuable. This point is particularly relevant in the context of religion education.

2.4.5 Mediation of sharing behaviour

The theoretical background to co-operative learning as well as the basic *modus operandi* for co-operative strategies was outlined earlier in this study (cf. 2.3). Points made in relation to co-operative learning regarding the behaviour and status of students within their groups will serve as a point of reference in this section to highlight the essence of the mediation of sharing. A basic premise of this study is that the mediation of sharing behaviour can best be operationalised using co-operative learning techniques. The mediation of sharing therefore, finds a practical outlet in co-operative small group learning.

The mediational criteria discussed thus far, viz. mediation of intent and reciprocity, meaning and transcendence drive the way in which learning should be structured. These particular mediational criteria give purpose and direction to the way in which the tutor/mediator coordinates the learning process. The learning process itself is underpinned by sharing. It is for this reason therefore, that the order in which these criteria occur in the literature has been reversed, namely, mediation of sharing behaviour has been placed before self-regulation and control of behaviour (cf. Skuy *et al*, 1991: 21, 26; Sharron, 1987:45, 46). The interpersonal skills upon which self-regulation relies can be developed more effectively within a context of sharing.

According to Feuerstein the mediation of sharing behaviour is a basic component of mediation and occurs when the mediator and mediatee or a group of students focus on an activity together (Skuy *et al*, 1992:26; Sharron, 1987:46). Skuy *et al* (1991:26,27) explains that the mediation of sharing relates to the interdependence of the mediator and the mediatee and of individuals in general. Sharing entails a mutual need for co-operation

at a cognitive and affective or emotional level. On a cognitive level, sharing requires students to verbalize their understanding of concepts and to provide team members with explanations of concepts or problems (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:43). Affective outcomes should also be achieved through co-operative interaction, since students are encouraged to provide a supportive climate for learning. Students learn to exchange positions and proposals, to view situations from different perspectives and to demonstrate sensitivity to the feelings of others (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994:82).

Co-operative learning techniques such as *Learning Together* and *Group Investigation* are particularly conducive to interaction in religion education. Sharing behaviour is enhanced in small groups when students confront and seek out creative ways of dealing with the complexities of religious diversity together. Mediation of sharing behaviour in a co-operative learning context entails disciplined implementation of the five elements of co-operative learning outlined earlier in this study (cf. 2.3.2) (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:80). For example, communication interdependence, which is one of the categories of positive interdependence, must be seen to lie at the heart of the communication network in a co-operative group (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:75). The tutor/mediator must therefore ensure that students have equal opportunities to interact. The merits of exchanging ideas, clarifying concepts for team members, raising questions and solving problematic issues in dialogue with one another should be emphasised. Dialogue between team members, between teams and between tutors and teams consequently becomes the vehicle for the internalization of religious concepts (McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:32).

Face-to-face promotive interaction, another of the five elements for successful co-operative learning, provides students with opportunities to *encounter*¹ religion. This means that as students engage with one another and with the learning materials, they will explore the meaning that various beliefs and practices hold in the lives of real people, as Knauth & Weisse (1995:242) have suggested. The mediation of meaning and

¹ *Interreligious encounter* is a term used by Knauth & Weisse (1995:242).

transcendence are thus given impetus as students encounter one another. In this way, pre-service teachers encounter not only the *externals* of religion, but also its *characteristic passions* (Moore & Habel, 1992:36; Shriver, 1987:31)

When classes are religiously heterogeneous or denominationally diverse, the opportunities for interreligious learning are increased since students are encouraged to relate their own experiences of rituals and tradition (Thousand, Villa & Niven, 1994:9; McCarthy & MacMahon, 1992:17). The exchange of personal information is important for forming close relationships between team members and for members to develop an awareness and appreciation of their teammates (Abrami & Chalmers *et al*, 1995:29). The tutor/mediator structures conditions for sharing behaviour by establishing a relationship between the student and domain specific or content knowledge (cf. Greenberg, 1990:33). An effective mediator will ensure that this relationship is ongoing and challenges students to grapple with new information and to arrive at meaningful answers to questions. The process of collaborating with other students not only gives the student more information about a topic, but also confirms those aspects of the topic which the student does understand (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994: 45). This latter point is particularly pertinent to groups where there are no adherents of a particular religion or denomination present.

Within co-operative learning groups the potential exists furthermore, for a process of interpersonal exchange that promotes the use of higher-level thinking, higher-level reasoning and other metacognitive strategies (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994:21). According to Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1994:31) the ability to engage in thinking, to take risks in solving problems, and to engage in open controversy are all aspects of creative interaction.

It must be noted, however, that student interactions can be viewed, as MacCarthy & McMahon (1992:33) have described, as falling along a continuum from static roles to

more dynamic and complex models of interaction. Or as Hertz-Lazarowitz (1992:80) suggests, student interaction may range from low-level co-operation to high-level co-operation. Tutor communication and behaviour on the other hand, may range from *expository unilateral lectures* to *bilateral and multilateral systems* operating on several levels (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1992:77,78). The effective mediation of sharing behaviour therefore should lead students to progress from basic information processing skills to more complex skills which require critical thinking, conflict resolution, decision making and other high-level thinking strategies.

In the context of religion education, students would be required to begin their studies with elementary readings and basic descriptions of beliefs and practices. Students would gradually progress towards analysing diverse opinions, conflicting truth claims and the articulation of abstract concepts associated with religious doctrines. Sharing behaviour is balanced by the student's willingness to co-operate and to accept responsibility for his or her own learning. The development of interpersonal or social skills is essential, since such skills enable students to monitor their own attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, these social skills will be carried out in the social context of the classroom.

2.4.6 Mediation of self-regulation and control of behaviour

Mediation of self-regulation and control of behaviour aims to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. This aspect of MLE involves teaching students to think about their own thinking and behaviour and to choose appropriate responses to a particular stimulus or a given situation (Skuy *et al*, 1991:21; Sharron, 1987:46). Greenberg (1990:37) states that an effective mediator places the responsibility for learning with the student and refrains from regulating a student's behaviour or approach to a task on his or her behalf. Furthermore, self-regulation should be mediated to students by encouraging them to monitor their behaviour independently of the tutor and to suggest that students devise their own approaches to given tasks

(Greenberg, 1990:38). Johnson & Johnson (1994:116) agree that tutors should not intervene any more than is necessary to assist groups when faced with problems. Since co-operative small group strategies provide a concrete context for mediation of sharing, the ability to self-regulate behaviour and attitudes is a necessary consequence for successful social interaction.

According to Johnson & Johnson (1994:91), Group Processing, one of the five basic components of effective co-operative learning, requires students to reflect on the ways in which they function within a group. Group Processing (cf. 2.3.2.5) allows team members opportunities to assess those actions deemed to have been helpful or unhelpful in a group session. Students become aware of their approaches and contributions to activities or tasks and learn to make decisions about actions that need to be continued or changed (Skuy *et al*, 1991:22). Self-regulation and the control of behaviour entail the use of important interpersonal skills which contribute to a climate of acceptance and tolerance in the classroom. As students learn to become accountable for their own learning and that of their peers, they also learn about roles and relationships and how to interact with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:46).

Religion education is however likely to give rise to conflict in terms of viewpoints and interpersonal relationships. It is possible that students may have developed negative stereotypes concerning cultural or religious groups other than their own. Various co-operative learning practitioners report on the value of co-operative learning in curbing prejudice and improving relations between team members (Slabbert, 1992:440; Johnson & Johnson, 1975:34). According to Slabbert (1992:441), when students share their understanding and knowledge of concepts or issues, they tend to respect and value those with whom they had formally been in conflict. Since team members become friends, they tend to help and share with one another, and generally eliminate those tensions that inhibit learning quality. Student discussions around topics

ought to reflect involvement and engagement with resource materials. As students engage in feedback and debate, peers motivate one another to abandon possible misconceptions about religious beliefs and practices other than their own and to search for alternative solutions to conflict situations (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994:58).

Mediating self-regulation in the context of religion education may occur on two levels, the cognitive and affective:

- (i) On a cognitive level, the tutor creates an awareness that more effective learning occurs about and from religions when answers are pursued systematically, by processing information through discussion, and returning to resources if necessary.
- (ii) On an affective level, the tutor also draws attention to negative behaviour or responses in conflict situations which arise from conflicting truth claims, conflicting value systems or differences in particular dogmatic standpoints. Students learn to monitor their responses and to think rationally about their reactions.

To cite Walker (1996:597,598):

Process must challenge the participants (that is, in dialogue) to incorporate their new thinking into the rhythms of their daily lives, including their professional interactions and their relationships within their own group as they speak about the "other".

Skuy *et al* (1990:22) reminds that the various components of MLE are linked or balanced by one another. Self-regulation and control of behaviour should be balanced with mediating competence. Students are able to take responsibility for their own learning when they perceive themselves as competent and will regulate their behaviour to this end.

Mediation of sharing (interdependence) is balanced with individuality where independence of action and thought is encouraged to contribute towards the success of teamwork.

2.4.7 Mediation of individuality

According to Feuerstein (Skuy *et al*, 1991:31) the mediation of individuality involves fostering the development of the individual's autonomy and unique personality. To elaborate, the mediator acknowledges that people are different and possess individual abilities, behavioural styles, motives, emotions and other human traits and talents that contribute to their uniqueness. The mediator assists the mediatee towards independent thought and action, to assume control and to reach his or her own potential (Skuy *et al*, 1991:31ff; Sharron, 1987:47).

While mediation of individuality may seem to contradict sharing behaviour (Sharron, 1987:47), individuality in fact balances and complements the mediation of sharing (Skuy *et al*, 1991:32). Feuerstein claims that there is *a healthy tension* between an individual's need to develop his or her own distinct personality and the need to belong to a group (Sharron, 1987:47). Students therefore must be allowed to assume control in the tutor/mediator interaction by taking responsibility for their own learning. In this context, pre-service teachers will be motivated to take responsibility for developing their own skills as educators.

Co-operative small group learning provides a structured environment for mediation of individuality. The success of a co-operative team depends on the unique contributions made by each team member. Johnson & Johnson (1994:86) maintain that the purpose of small group learning is to make each team member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Whatever students learn together, must ultimately be performed alone (cf. 2.3.2.3) (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994:31; Johnson & Johnson, 1994:86). Being responsible for another's success as well as for one's own, gives co-operative

effort meaning not found in individualistic teaching situations, such as Whole-class direct teaching or lecturing. Students who engage positively in the group will bring to their group different information, different perceptions, opinions, reasoning and practical skills, theories and conclusions (Johnson & Johnson, 1994: 82, 94). Interaction in a co-operative team, therefore, allows individuals to present their particular areas of competence within the framework of a mutually supportive group. Johnson & Johnson (1975:53) argue that a lack of interaction with other students may in fact interfere with a student's awareness of his or her personal capabilities and identity.

As has been noted previously, co-operative small group learning provides a context for intercultural and interreligious communication. The classroom becomes a complex social system in which students from different cultural and religious backgrounds learn to co-exist (cf. Grimmitt, 1994:141; cf. Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1992:72). Mediation of individuality encourages the student to express the uniqueness of his or her religious identity and to communicate those beliefs, practices and values which contribute towards his or her *person* (Knauth & Weisse, 1995: 244). A religion education programme that encourages students to share information from their own religious or philosophical perspectives allows students to become articulate about their own religion or philosophy of life (Hausmann, 1993:20). Furthermore, students may be encouraged to rediscover their own religious backgrounds and the meanings of ritual and practice. Knowledge of one's own beliefs, value systems and traditions are beneficial as students engage in dialogue with peers from different religious backgrounds to their own (cf. Roux & Steenkamp, 1997:86, 87).

Greenberg (1990:34) emphasises the importance of MLE in helping students transfer knowledge. Thus, in the context of religion education, students who are adherents of a particular belief system may enhance the transfer of information pertaining to that belief system by sharing beliefs and rituals as they understand and experience them. Individuality is enhanced and learning increased when members of a co-operative team

have different information and view points to share from different traditional or denominational perspectives (Hindi or Tamil, Roman Catholic or Baptist for example) (cf. Johnson & Johnson, 1975:68). This process is illustrated in the intervention programme developed for the purposes of this study and has been described in Chapter 3.

However, the student who is an adherent of a particular belief system, must not become the sole contributor of information. Individuality is always balanced by sharing. All team members are therefore obliged to become informed about a topic or issue by accessing reading materials or interviewing adherents of a religion outside of the co-operative group context. Reading about beliefs and practices may provide students with perspectives of a religion that may differ from those perspectives or interpretations held by team members who are adherents of the belief system under discussion.

Individuality should however, also be enhanced for those team members who are unable to share from a background of any particular religious experience, or no religious experience at all. Sapon-Shevin, Ayres & Duncan (1994:53ff) stress the importance of providing structures for groups to promote the active, equitable participation of all team members. Consequently, when the mediator assigns a co-operative project and provides individualized programs for various aspects of the project, different group members are afforded opportunities to master different academic or social skills and information for later integration into a group project or presentation (Johnson & Johnson, 1975:68; Davidson, 1994:17). In this way, students who claim to be a-religious, agnostic or non-religious are not prohibited from learning about or from the religious dimension of the human experience. Furthermore, since religion education is an educational activity, the secular views held by some students should also be explored. Secular views may represent a challenge to religious perspectives, just as religious views represent a challenge to secular views (cf. Read, Rudge & Howarth, 1988:6).

Mediation of individuality, sharing and self-regulation are complemented by mediation of goal planning.

2.4.8 Mediation of goal planning

One of the ways in which students may demonstrate their autonomy and individuality is by setting goals and discussing the means for achieving them with both tutor and peers. Mediation of goal planning or goal directedness therefore involves inculcating within mediatees the need to set goals, to plan and to discuss the means for achieving them (Skuy *et al*, 1991:36; Sharron, 1987:47; Greenberg, 1990:39). Skuy *et al* (1991:37) emphasises that mediation of goal planning occurs most effectively when the mediator guides and directs the mediatee through the processes involved in setting, planning and achieving goals by making the process explicit (Sharron, 1987: 48). Greenberg (1990:39) explains that mediation of goal planning helps students approach tasks in an organized manner and to understand the need to select goals, make plans, and exert the effort required to reach goals.

According to Johnson & Johnson (1994:82ff), successful co-operative teamwork is dependent upon structuring positive interdependence (cf. 2.3.2.1). There are three steps in structuring positive interdependence. These are:

- (i) Assign to the group a clear, measurable task so that students know what is expected of them.
- (ii) Structure positive goal interdependence so that team members become united around a common goal. Students require a concrete reason for undertaking the tasks which have been assigned.
- (iii) Supplement positive goal interdependence with other types of positive interdependence, such as reward interdependence, resource interdependence and role interdependence. Resource and role interdependence, for example, help

students define and maintain an effective working relationship with one another in order to realize their goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:83). Students should give careful thought to the processes through which they will work to complete tasks and accomplish goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1975: 6).

The place of religion in an outcomes-based system of education and the way in which pre-service teachers perceive the religious dimension in society, should be determined ultimately by those goals or outcomes associated with the learning area *Life Orientation* in Curriculum 2005 (1997: 220) as well as with the requirements for teacher education in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (1998) (cf. 1.2.1). Co-operative group goals therefore become the means towards a much greater end.

A phenomenological approach to teaching religions may pose problems that prevent students from setting goals and reviewing sensible ways of achieving them. One such problem may be associated with the fact that much of the information about religion education is associated with the British model (cf. Read, Rudge & Howarth, 1988; Erricker *et al*, 1993; Chidester *et al*, 1992; Grimmitt, 1978). Religion education is a relatively new idea in South Africa and the influence of Christian National Education continues to prevail in many public schools in terms of the contents of Religious education (Summers, 1996:5). Furthermore, educators may view an open enquiry into religions other than their own from a biased and prejudiced point of view (cf. Roux & Steenkamp, 1997:22).

While there may be other problems, the tutor/mediator may consider the following possible hindrances to the effective mediation of goal planning:

- Students who are adherents of any belief system may view religion education as an attempt to relativize religious values and beliefs in order to study them in a secular educational context (Grimmitt, 1994:133).

- The idea that religions have equal claims to the truth may be viewed by adherents of religions as a distortion of their own religion's claim to provide absolute or exclusive claim to the truth (Grimmitt, 1994:133; Knauth & Weisse, 1995:240). This situation may lead to derogatory comments from students as they support the exclusivity of their own positions.
- Students fear that values of a particular religion informs religion education, or, that the religious perspective of the tutor or lecturer will inform religion education.
- Students fear that since they are in the minority, their religious beliefs and practices will not be accorded the same respect and consideration given to the religions of majority groups in the class (cf. Hook, 1994:39).
- The idea held by certain religious groups, that there is no value in studying belief systems other than their own.

Any of the situations listed above has the potential of undermining or impeding the achievement of goals set for a course in religion education as a whole, as well as the achievement of individual project or task goals. Whilst it is true that the tutor/mediator may never successfully solve all the difficulties associated with religion education, the fears that students may have should be identified and allayed at the outset. Orteza y Miranda (1994:22,31) argues against the view held by John Hick, for example, that all religions are *different ways of conceiving and experiencing the one Ultimate limitless divine Reality*, or that, *all religions are equally effective or ineffective salvifically*.

Orteza y Miranda (1994:31) points out furthermore, that there is little value in minimizing or neutralizing the differences between religions. She suggests that in order to promote tolerance, it is important for adherents of religions to seek out those issues which cause problems of tolerance, such as doctrinal differences, disapproval of certain beliefs or values, or whatever it is that people perceive to be reasonable or unreasonable about one another's beliefs, practices and values. On these grounds students should have the right to express their different doctrines and values even if these prove to be

exclusivist. There must be opportunity for disagreements, mutually incompatible conclusions and opportunities to express disapproval, for only then will students learn the true meaning of tolerance of one another (Orteza y Miranda, 1994:32).

It is important however, that students understand that effective goal planning should be growth facilitating and not destructive to mediatees, to others or society (Skuy *et al*, 1991:36). Thus, in allowing students the freedom to express ultimate truth or value claims, the tutor/mediator also communicates that in terms of the goals of religion education students do so in a spirit of reconciliation and trust (Kitshoff, 1994:331).

Students need to be informed that the overall goals of religion education do not require them to relinquish their personal beliefs and values. Instead, as Skeie (1995:90) suggests, the goals of religion education include facilitating the ways in which both teachers and students embrace religious and cultural pluralism. The importance of establishing a culture of dialogue has been noted at various points in this study and is imperative to this end. Hook (1994: 40) points out that embracing multiculturalism compels educators to focus attention on the issue of *voice*. Who speaks? Who listens? And why? The goals of religion education are closely linked therefore to mediation of individuality (cf. 2.4.7). It was noted that students should be encouraged to exchange views on religious and ideological positions, as well as to develop and clarify their own (Knauth & Weisse, 1995:246). To encourage this type of exchange, group projects should allow students to explore their differences as well as shared modes of thought and conduct (Wielandt, 1993:56) in a climate that seeks to achieve broader educational goals.

Mediation of goal planning must also be contemplated in relation to other criteria of MLE, such as meaning, competence, self-regulation and individuality, which have already been outlined; as well as mediation of challenge and self-change to follow.

2.4.9 Mediation of challenge

Mediation of challenge occurs when the mediator instills in the mediatee feelings of determination and enthusiasm to cope with novel and complex tasks (Skuy *et al*, 1991:41). Mediation of challenge is closely linked to goal planning and competence, since the satisfaction of achieving goals reinforces a sense of challenge (Skuy *et al*, 1991:37; Sharron, 1987:45). This particular mediational criterion is essential to help pre-service teachers embrace the complexities of a multicultural curriculum in general. The tutor/mediator invokes within the mediatee the motivation to learn, to acquire new knowledge and related skills in order to cope with a diverse world.

The challenges associated with religion education are unlike the challenges which the student faces in other learning areas. This is because within one class, many views, many cultures, many beliefs and many forms of religiosity are elevated to the forefront of discussions. The tutor/mediator can effectively execute the mediation of challenge around the realities of the multi-religious class environment by identifying such realities, and in partnership with students, work out creative and responsible ways of managing them.

The following may be worthy of consideration in relation to mediation of challenge:

- Religion education challenges students to persevere at increasing their knowledge about religions other than their own. The tutor/mediator also challenges students to overcome the fear of learning about belief systems from which they may have been isolated for various reasons. Students, as pre-service teachers, are also challenged to be accountable for their own learning by engaging in self-study and group projects (cf. Skuy *et al*, 1991:41).
- Religion education engages the student in perspective taking. Religiously diverse classes will reflect not only religious and cultural diversity, but diversity *within* religions and cultures as well (Ryan, 1994:27). Students are challenged to seek out for example, the historical origins of such differences, ways in which groups resolve such

differences, how such differences may contribute to a group's identity. Tutors should provide opportunities for presenting various perspectives as a way of helping students appreciate other points of view (Ryan, 1994:27).

- On a more philosophical level, the tutor/mediator assists students to face up to the many questions surrounding the value of their own religion in the face of the many world religions (Knitter, 1985:1). Questions such as: *Are religions all equally true? Do religions all share things in common? How should my religion relate to the others? Can I learn from other religions?* (Knitter, 1985:1) are amongst some of the many questions that students are likely to raise and for which they will require answers.
- According to Moore & Habel (1992:63), one of the major goals of religion education should be not only to help students understand religions in terms that make sense to them, but in ways that do not denigrate the religion for adherents. A related challenge involves learning to *bracket out* one's own scepticism on the one hand, and one's faith perspective on the other (Moore & Habel, 1992:63). The purpose of *bracketing out* is to lay aside possible prejudices in order to hear what a devotee or believer is saying from his or her perspective.
- The skill of empathetic listening may also be a challenge for pre-service teachers. Moore & Habel (1992:64) emphasise that empathetic listening is not that simple and obvious, since most people tend to take in only those aspects of belief that they agree with or feel comfortable with. Empathy involves constructing the religious views of others in such a way that devotees would not view this construction as a misrepresentation (Moore & Habel, 1992:65). As pre-service teachers encounter religious beliefs they are also likely to encounter the embodiment of these beliefs in their peers and in the learners they teach. The challenge for students lies in how to relate to one another not, as Knitter (1985:6) has stated, *to obliterate or absorb each other, but to learn from and help each other.*

Co-operative group projects should be designed to allow for the type of interaction required for the development of important affective outcomes related to *bracketing out*, empathetic listening and perspective taking. Mediating challenge therefore presents students with the need to develop skills *in being human*, that is, persons who can feel and express warmth, trust, caring, openness, honesty, compassion and altruism. Other affective outcomes include valuing a pluralistic, democratic society, freedom to engage in open enquiry into a variety of issues and equality of opportunity (Johnson & Johnson, 1975:34).

2.5.10 Mediation of awareness of change

Mediation of awareness of change is the last of the characteristics for MLE associated with this study. Mediating an awareness of change, means pointing out to students the potential for change and assisting them to recognize and monitor the continual changes that occur within themselves (Skuy *et al*, 1991:46; Sharron, 1987:48). The mediatee also realizes and accepts that the changes that take place within them are part of an entire process designed to enable the individual to develop as an independent and autonomous thinker (cf. Osman, 1992: 35; Skuy *et al*, 1991:46).

The mediation of awareness of change should be a conscious outcome of religion education in the curriculum of colleges of education. The tutor/mediator functions as the agent of change and intervenes to help students accommodate a paradigm shift from a monoreligious, exclusive model of religious education to a multi-religious, inclusive model. Awareness of change in attitudes and perceptions towards religions is inextricably linked to mediation of challenge (cf. 2.4.9). Change will be evident when students are able to recognise the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses to religious phenomena and confidently demonstrate their ability to enquire empathetically into religious issues (Cole, 1988:82).

Siejka (1995:229) points out the following:

We will never really hear each other or be claimed by the value of another's religious tradition if we close ourselves off from the possibility of being pleasantly surprised, challenged and changed by people, events and realities we cannot completely understand.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the relevance of Feuerstein's theory of MLE as a vehicle for presenting religion to pre-service teachers was discussed. MLE was selected for its transformative potential. As the theoretical underpinning for this study therefore, MLE would determine the nature of the interaction between tutors and students as they acquire knowledge about religions practised in South Africa. Furthermore, the ten criteria for MLE as outlined in this study would be applied to stimulate thinking and learning about religions in order to improve the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own.

The ten criteria for MLE namely, mediation of intent and reciprocity, meaning, transcendence, competence, sharing behaviour, self regulation and control of behaviour, individuality, goal planning, challenge and awareness of change, require some kind of response from mediatees. For this reason, the criteria for MLE were discussed in relation to co-operative small group learning as the *mediational operators* (MacDonald, 1990:59) which influence the way students acquire and process knowledge about religions in the students' Zone of Proximal Development.

The benefits of learning about religions in a constructivist paradigm are numerous. The tutor/mediator structures learning so that students interact with resources, articulate their understanding of religious dimensions such as worship, ritual, myth and doctrinal issues.

Furthermore, students are also encouraged to develop the skills of reflective thinking as they interact with team members in co-operative small group learning. Learning about the principal religions practised in South Africa is also balanced by encouraging students to explore their own inherited worldviews while learning about the beliefs and practices of others. Self-knowledge, as an outcome of individuality, is significant to enable students to engage effectively in inter-cultural learning and inter-religious dialogue.

The tutor/mediator is viewed as the agent of change as he/she communicates the mediational criteria to students (Van Vuuren, 1996:9). The tutor/mediator therefore facilitates learning about and from religions to enable students to deal with religious concepts and issues empathetically. The tutor/mediator also assists students to embrace religious pluralism and all the challenges associated with a pluralist society.

The potential influence of MLE and co-operative learning on student perceptions of belief systems other than their own forms the basis of the empirical research described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TOWARDS BELIEF SYSTEMS.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises a description of the methodology employed to obtain data for this study. The main aim of the research was to determine whether the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own could be positively influenced. In the light of the requirements for pre-service teachers (1998: 74,75) in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (cf. 1.1) and current developments in the South African education system, the following would be determined:

- how pre-service teachers would respond to learning about religions other than their own;
- perceptions of pre-service teachers towards the role or value of religion in a secular, multicultural society (*Norms and Standards for Educators*, 1998: 74,75,78);
- the potential influence of MLE and co-operative learning on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own.

The empirical research as a whole comprised three research projects conducted amongst second year Higher Diploma in Education students Intermediate Phase at the Johannesburg College of Education, viz:

- a pilot study in 1996;
- a research project in 1997 based on the findings of the pilot study;
- repetition of the research project in 1998 to validate the findings of both the pilot study and the 1997 project.

The discussion of MLE and co-operative learning strategies in the previous chapter provides a framework within which this research was conducted. The design and methodology of each stage of the empirical research will be outlined below.

3.2 Research design

In order to achieve the aims of this research, an action-enquiry research model was employed (McKernan, 1996: 4; McLean, 1995:8). The research design included the use of pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires which student respondents were required to complete. The pre-intervention questionnaires were designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from student respondents before exposing them to a programme of intervention in which the implementation of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) to the teaching of religion education was applied. The post-intervention questionnaires were designed to gain insight into the attitudes and perceptions of respondents towards belief systems once the intervention process had been completed.

An action-enquiry research model (McKernan, 1996:4,5) was adopted, since action research encourages educational practitioners to be reflective of their own practise. Action research entails participatory procedures in which educational practitioners may collaborate with others to explore and solve problem issues, and alternative teaching styles (McNiff, 1988:1,3; Waddington, 1996:167). McKernan (1996:3) points out that action research offers practitioners *a research stance towards their work*. This means that in practise, there is no distinction made between teaching as a practice being researched, and the process of researching it. A spiral plan of action following the principles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning (cf. McNiff, 1988:44) was adopted and applied to the teaching of religion education as described below:

- workshop material is planned by tutors (plan);
- student participants research and discuss workshop or *station* questions in small groups while tutors facilitate the learning (act);

- tutors observe student participants at work and reflect on the structures for learning as well as the quality of learning amongst participants (observe and reflect);
- tutors make relevant changes to workshop materials and teaching strategies (plan) (Waddington, 1996:168);
- the next spiral of planning and acting is aimed at improving the previous one, based on the tutor's observations and reflections (act).

The researcher and assistant participated in the planning, acting, observation and reflection required to design and implement an effective religion education programme. As participant observers (McKernan, 1996: 62), tutors would be involved in the activities of the action research. Tutors would facilitate learning in co-operative groups, thereby observing and monitoring students as they investigated the practices and principles of religions in the natural environment of the college classroom. Operating within such a naturalistic setting afforded the researcher and assistant the opportunity to engage in systematic self-critical enquiry (cf. McKernan, 1996:3; McNiff, 1988:5). It was therefore possible to bring about relevant changes to courses in religion based on the insight gained from student responses to the questionnaires, as well as the quality of written assignments submitted by participants based on individual research and co-operative interaction.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data from respondents. A questionnaire was selected as the means to obtain information from student participants, since respondents would be able to maintain their anonymity and to respond candidly.

According to McKernan (1996:5), qualitative methodologies are best suited for research in naturalistic settings. For this reason, the researcher designed questionnaires so that respondents would not only respond to questions on a Likert-type scale (cf. McKernan,

1996:123), but also motivate their responses in spaces provided on the questionnaire. In some instances respondents were required to respond to open-ended questions so that insight could be gained into the attitudes of respondents towards co-operative teaching strategies in religion education. Such open-ended questions formed part of the post-intervention questionnaires in 1997 and 1998 in particular.

A Likert-type scale was used in all quantitative questions in both pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires (except for the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire) to determine one or other of the following:

- the strength of attitude or opinion held by respondents on issues related to learning about religions, particularly those other than their own (cf. McNiff, 1988:123);
- the frequency of attitudes and opinions that may exist amongst respondents in the participating student group.

Cumulative percentages were used to represent the data obtained from the questionnaires (Eichelberger, 1989:186). This method was used since it was the simplest way of representing the distribution of student responses to the options on the Likert-type scale. Cumulative percentages also allowed for comparisons between responses to questions on the same questionnaire and between questionnaires.

3.3.2 Target Group

The research was conducted amongst pre-service teachers in the second year of study towards a Higher Diploma in Education Intermediate Phase at the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE). Student groups who participated in the research project were from three different years, viz. 1996, 1997 and 1998. Second year Intermediate Phase students were selected on the following grounds:

- A course in religion is compulsory for all Higher Diploma students implying that not all are willing to participate in Religious education. The selection of student participants would not be based on any preconditions relating to student attitudes towards Religious education. Students may reflect any one of three positions in relation to Religious education in the college curriculum, namely, positive, indifferent or negative.
- Since Religious education is compulsory for all second year Higher Diploma students, the research could be repeated in subsequent years to determine whether similar attitudes existed amongst other student groups.
- Second year pre-service teachers tend to be lacking in teaching skills in comparison to pre-service teachers in the third or fourth year. Students in the second year have also been less exposed to teaching strategies such as co-operative small group learning than more advanced students. It was assumed therefore that co-operative learning would make a greater impact on second year students.

Additional details on the student groups who participated in this research will be provided as the results for each phase of the research are presented (cf. 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6).

3.3.3 Terminology

The term *Religious education* was used in all pre-intervention questionnaires, since this was the term most familiar to student respondents (cf. 1.6.3). Wherever *multi-religious education* was implied in the questionnaires, this was clarified for respondents. *Multi-religious education* is used interchangeably with *religion education* in the analyses of results. The meaning assigned to these terms has been explained in 1.6.3.

3.4 THE PILOT STUDY: 1996

3.4.1 Aims of the pilot study

The religious diversity evident amongst pre-service teachers at the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE) who attended religion education in 1996 motivated the pilot study. The study was deemed essential, because for the first time since the first democratic election in South Africa in April 1994, all second year pre-service teachers at J.C.E. were willing to engage in a compulsory course in religion. This means that for the first time, students who were not associated with Judaism or Christianity, attended religion education. Furthermore, teaching students from outside of the Judaeo-Christian context proved to be a new challenge for tutors who had previously (i.e. prior to 1996) prepared students for Bible Education only. Prior to 1996, students who were not affiliated to Christianity in some way applied for at least partial exemption from the course.

The co-ordinators of religion education were concerned about the social development of students, given that many of the students had not interacted with people of religious, cultural or philosophical backgrounds other than their own, particularly African and White students from Christian¹ backgrounds. The exception lay with Indian and Coloured² students who were segregated during the apartheid era on ethnic grounds rather than on religious grounds. For this reason, students from these groups interacted with people from Christian, Muslim and Hindu backgrounds and demonstrated a greater knowledge of these particular religions than was generally demonstrated by African and White Christian students.

¹ The term *Christian* applies throughout this study to those students who have identified themselves with one or other of the Christian denominations. The term has been used to refer to their religious identity.

² The nomenclatures *Indian* and *Coloured* simply refer to the culture of students. The religious identity of these students may be Christian, Muslim or Hindu.

3.4.2 The pre-intervention questionnaire: 1996.

Fifty five pre-service teachers completed the pre-intervention questionnaire in February 1996 which marked the start of the academic year.

The purpose of the 1996 pre-intervention questionnaire (cf. APPENDIX A (i)) was exploratory and was designed to obtain the following information from respondents:

- religious affiliation;
- information relating to the previous experiences of respondents from diverse religious backgrounds regarding religion in the school curriculum;
- attitudes of respondents towards a compulsory course in religion;
- attitudes towards teaching Religious education at school.

The information gleaned from the questionnaire would guide the selection of appropriate content for the duration of the year.

3.4.2.1 The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire: 1996

A summary of the results of the 1996 pre-intervention questionnaire is presented in this section. An analysis of the results will be presented in the next section (cf. 3.4.2.2). The numbering in brackets corresponds to the numbering on the questionnaire.

Reasons for responses provided by respondents have been stated, as far as possible, in the words of the respondents. Responses were edited only when deemed necessary in cases where English was not the first language of respondents, or to clarify points made by respondents.

(1) What is your religious affiliation?

The religious affiliation of respondents is recorded in Table 1 below.

Table 1

<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Christianity*	44
Islam	5
Hindi/Tamil/Hare Krishna	4
Agnostic	2

- * The majority of the respondents indicated affiliation to Christianity. However, respondents indicated affiliation to a range of denominations or movements, viz. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Assemblies of God, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witness, various Charismatic churches and African Independent churches.

(2) What was the name of the religious period at your school? E.g. Bible Education, Right Living etc.?

All of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of Religious education at school. The religion period was named as follows:

Table 2

<i>Religious period at school</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Bible Education	21
Christian Doctrine	1
Religious Education	10
Religious Instruction	12
Right Living & Guidance	8
Cultural Studies	1
Islamic Studies	2

(3) Rate the value that Religious education (or equivalent) held for you at school.

Respondents rated the value of Religious education or the equivalent for them at school on a five point scale, where 1=none and 5= a lot. The results are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 55)</i>
1 none	13 respondents (23,6%)
2	9 (16%)
3	23 (41,8%)
4	8 (14,5%)
5 a lot	3 (5,45%)

(4) What is your attitude towards Religious education at college?

Respondents again responded on a five point scale, where 1=completely negative and 5= very enthusiastic. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency(of 55)</i>
1 completely negative	5 respondents (9%)
2	16 (29%)
3 neutral	18 (32,7%)
4	8 (14,5%)
5 very enthusiastic	8 (14,5%)

(5) How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

Respondents responded on a five point scale, where 1=strongly negative and 5=strongly positive. The results are presented in Table 5 to follow.

Table 5

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency(of 55)</i>
1 strongly negative	9 respondents (16%)
2	7 (12,7%)
3 neutral	22 (40%)
4	11 (20%)
5 strongly positive	8 (14,5%)

(6) Briefly note what you consider the role of religion to be today:

(6.1) At schools;

(6.2) In society.

(6.1) Student responses relating to the role of religion in schools.

This question was open-ended. Student responses have been clustered according to at least four general types of responses and are set out in Table 6 below.

Table 6

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 55)</i>
Religion has no place in school and should be taught by parents.	7 respondents (12%)
Religion should be taught to evangelize or to educate learners in their own religion only.	7 (12,7%)
Religion should be taught to promote a broad understanding of all religions with a view to promoting respect and tolerance for all.	21 (38 %)
Religious education could promote morals, values and life skills.	16 (29%)
No responses	3 (5%)

(6.2) Responses relating to the role of religion in society.

Responses to the above question reflect a range of opinions from respondents. These were more difficult to categorise and therefore to analyse statistically. Some examples of the most frequent responses have been provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Responses
Religion provides morals, increases hope, provides a sense of fulfilment, a sense of belonging to followers.
Religion promotes a better society, develops morals, influences the moral fibre of society.
Religion influences the way people behave, dress etc.
Religion plays no role in society since it tends to segregate people.
Religion is a basic human right; teaching religion to children should be the responsibility of parents and religious communities.

(7) General comments.

The general comments made by respondents again reflect a range of opinions which, in most cases, clarified responses made to the previous questions (6.1 and 6.2).

Responses reflected the following points of view:

- No one religion or denomination should be imposed upon learners (5 of 55 respondents).
- A sound knowledge of religions is important for teachers in order to be sensitive to all learners.
- Religion is important because it promotes morals and values.

Three Christian respondents indicated that religion is a way of life and personal. They would therefore not feel comfortable teaching a class that was not of

Christian orientation. One of the three added that he/she would not, however, discriminate against learners of other religious backgrounds, even if Christianity only was to be the main focus.

Thirty nine of the 55 respondents did not respond to Question 7.

3.4.2.2 Analysis of the results of the pre-intervention questionnaire: 1996.

An analysis of the results of the pre-intervention questionnaire in the 1996 pilot study reveals that for 45 of the 55 respondents (81%), Religious education at school had very little value (including the *neutral* option on the scale) or no value at all (cf. 3.4.2.1 Table 3). Respondents were also more negative than positive towards Religious education at college. Twenty one of the 55 respondents (38%) indicated that they were not enthusiastic about Religious education at college either. Eighteen of the 55 (33%) indicated (3) on the scale (cf. Table 4). However, a comparison between Tables 3 and 4, indicates that respondents were marginally more positive towards Religious education at college than they were towards Religious education at school.

From the results presented in Table 5, it appears that respondents were less negative towards teaching Religious education themselves, in spite of negative feelings acquired towards Religious education at school. Nineteen of the 55 respondents (34%) indicated that they were positive towards teaching Religious education themselves. Forty percent of respondents selected (3) on the scale, which may indicate that they were not particularly enthusiastic towards teaching Religious education.

Responses to Question 6 (cf. Table 6) indicate that more respondents were positive about the potential role that religion could play in the school curriculum than respondents who felt that religion has no place in schools. Respondents who were positive included those who felt that Religious education in schools should be confessional (7 of 55 respondents). Thirty seven of the 55 respondents (67%) remarked either that Religious

should be taught in schools to promote understanding of all belief systems, or that Religious education could promote morals and life skills. Sixty seven percent of respondents therefore indicated a positive stance towards the role of religion in schools before any form of intervention had taken place.

Reasons for the negative attitudes displayed by respondents towards Religious education at school, may be owing to the way in which Religious education had been approached at the schools which they attended. This assumption is based on the responses to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire. Eleven of the 55 respondents (20%) explained that they were opposed to indoctrination and discrimination against others based on religious affiliation. Thirty eight percent of the respondents felt that religion should be taught to promote a broad understanding of all religions, and 29% said that Religious education could be taught to promote morals and values in society.

In some cases, respondents expressed that religion has the potential to cause conflict, yet Religion education also has the potential to generate understanding, tolerance and respect amongst learners from different religious backgrounds.

3.4.3 Action/course design based on the findings of the pre-intervention questionnaire.

The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire provided the framework within which an appropriate religion education course could be designed to accommodate the religious and philosophical diversity of the participants in the pilot study. The religion education course or intervention phase was conducted over a period of approximately five months, that is, from March to October 1996. An extensive period of time was necessary to allow a reasonable study of four principal religions practised in South Africa, namely Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Time is also an important factor for successful co-operative small group learning. Students attended two forty-minute classes per week.

A series of workshops was designed in which students would engage in the study of these four religions. Student participants would work in co-operative small groups in order to research answers to workshop questions, share answers and reflect on personal experiences of rituals and practices with team members. Face-to-face interaction would allow participants to engage in dialogue with one another. Tutors would facilitate the learning in small groups and encourage verbal communication of concepts between team members. Tutors also had to take into consideration that not all students would necessarily be religious. Students who were not religiously inclined would also be afforded the opportunity to share their own particular philosophies in a non-threatening environment.

The intervention phase was designed along the following lines (cf. 3.2 above):

- Student participants were provided with a series of workshop questions based on a particular religion, e.g. Judaism. Each workshop was referred to as a *station* (cf. APPENDIX D).
- Participants were required to investigate the answers for themselves in preparation for a forthcoming class.
- Participants were placed into heterogeneous groups. As far as possible, each group would reflect those religions or denominations represented in the class.
- Participants shared their answers and discussed religious doctrines, rituals, practices and ethical issues with members of their team.
- Individual research conducted by student participants was reinforced with input from team members, whole class feedback and visual resources, such as slides, video material and religious artifacts such as prayer mats, rosary beads and lamps. Participants provided artifacts themselves.
- A similar procedure was followed for each of the four religions studied.

3.4.4 Observations of student interaction.

Tutors observed that student participants were far more attentive in group discussions when peers explained beliefs and practices from a personal perspective than when whole-class lecturing took place. The following problem areas were identified based on tutor-observations of participants:

- Participants tended to rely on peers who were adherents of the religion being studied for information rather than accessing resources themselves.
- Participants tended not to prepare for group discussions. A peer teaching scenario developed in some groups where one or two more knowledgeable students, or students who were adherents of a religion dominated group discussions.

In spite of the problem areas described above, discussions in small groups or in pairs combined with whole-class feedback, maintained the interest of participants and rendered positive responses from student participants (cf. Question 15, 3.4.5).

3.4.5 The post-intervention questionnaire: 1996

A post-intervention questionnaire was completed by a sample of 47 of the original 55 students who participated in the pre-intervention questionnaire and the intervention phase. The loss of subjects between questionnaires was a problem that could not be anticipated. However, this loss did not influence the analysis of the results. The questionnaire was completed in October 1996 (cf. APPENDIX A(ii)) once the study of the four religions had been completed.

The following areas would be investigated:

- The attitudes of respondents towards religion education (referred to as multi-religious education in the questionnaire) once the course had been completed.

- The relationship between the perceptions of respondents towards beliefs and belief systems other than their own and the teaching strategies adopted by tutors.

3.4.5.1 The results of the post-intervention questionnaire: 1996

The pilot study offset the follow-up study in 1997 and determined the model for the empirical research conducted in 1998. However, for the sake of brevity, a summary of the results of the most pertinent questions from the post-intervention questionnaire will be presented. The responses to questions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 have been clustered and presented in Table 8.

The corresponding questions from the questionnaire have been restated at this point. The numbers in brackets correspond to the numbers on the questionnaire.

- (2) *How did you feel about a compulsory course in Religious education when you started out in February 1996?*
- (3) *What did you think the Religious education course would include?*
- (4) *If you were negative towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?*
- (5) *If you were positive could you explain why?*
- (6) *How did you feel about multi-religious education*
 - (6.1) *when it was first introduced to you?*
 - (6.2) *now that you have completed the course?*

Table 8

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency^{no} (of 47)</i>
<p>Respondents who were negative towards a course in religion if the course focussed on Christianity only, but became more positive when they realized that the course would be multi-religious.</p> <p>Reasons submitted by respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed an interest in religions because they had never been exposed to religions practiced in South Africa; • enjoyed the sharing that took place, particularly from personal experience; • developed greater respect towards people of other faiths than their own; • felt more secure learning about religions when they realized that such knowledge did not in fact mean a compromise or demise of their own belief system; • realized that the tutors would not be imposing their particular beliefs on them. 	14 respondents (29,7%)
Respondents who were negative or neutral towards a course in multi-religious education and became more positive once they were aware of how the course would be approached (i.e. open, unbiased, emphasis on group discussion and sharing).	19 (40,4%)
Respondents who were positive about multi-religious education and remained positive or became more enthusiastic.	10 (21,2%)
Respondents who remained negative or unsure about multi-religious education, because they felt that such a course compromised their beliefs/ could not teach what was perceived to be untrue.	2 (4,25%)
Respondents who were positive and became negative , because a multi-religious approach would entail far too much research.	2 (4,25%)

(10) *If you are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or affiliated to any other religion than Christianity, how did you feel that your lecturers were not affiliated to your particular religion?*

Ten respondents of the 47 responded to this question. These respondents were from the following religious backgrounds: Tamil (2), Hindi (1), Muslim (6) and Christian (1).

The Tamil, Hindi and Muslim respondents indicated that they were insecure at the start of the course, because they believed that Christianity only would be the main focus. However, each respondent indicated that their insecurity dissipated when it became apparent that the tutors were unbiased and fair in the presentation of religions. In the opinion of these respondents, tutors did not always present the content accurately, but this did not disturb them. The Christian respondent who responded to this question, did so on the grounds that his/her views on Christianity differed considerably from the tutor's. However, the respondent admitted that the tutor had *something important to offer*, and had not tried to change his/her faith in any way.

(12) *Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?*

Table 9

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/ % (of 47)</i>
YES	36 (76%)
NO	4 (8%)
UNSURE	5 (10%)

Thirty six of the 47 respondents (76%), as reflected in Table 9 above, agreed that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school. However, at least eight (17%) pointed out that the outcomes would depend on how effectively teachers are trained, or the way in which teachers approach multi-religious education. The remainder of the

respondents maintained that multi-religious education has a significant role to play in overcoming religious and ethnic differences between learners. Respondents who said that multi-religious education has no place in the primary school provided the following reasons:

- Parents would not support such an approach.
- Learners could become confused should the teacher not be well informed.
- Time constraints in the school time table would not allow for adequate coverage of religions.

(13) How would you rate your own confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching multi-religious education?

This was treated as an open-ended question and responses have been clustered according to the most frequent types of responses and presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/ % (of 47)</i>
Respondents felt adequately prepared to teach religions. In two cases, students said they would not be able to teach Hinduism/ and or Islam.	20 (42,5%)
Respondents felt confident, but admitted they would need to do additional research, or believe they will improve with experience.	11 (23%)
Respondents who do not feel confident about teaching religions other than their own provided the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not believe that a one year course prepares them adequately; • cannot teach what they do not perceive to be <i>true</i> and feel that learners should be taught about their own religions only; • do not feel confident, because schools are reticent to introduce multi-religious education; • has no religious background, therefore would not teach enthusiastically. 	11 (23%)
No response	5 (10,6%)

(15) Do you think that the methods applied by tutors would make a difference to the attitudes of college students towards multi-religious education?

Table 11

Responses	Frequency/% (of 47)
YES	32 (68%)
NO or UNSURE	5 (10,6%)
No clear responses given	10 (21%)

Reasons provided for positive responses to the above question are as follows:

- Every one is entitled to their own religion and this was evident in the approach adopted by tutors.
- Respondents enjoyed the emphasis on participation and therewith the knowledge gained from their team members.
- If teachers/tutors are positive and unbiased in their approaches, so too will students/learners learn to be unbiased.
- Students were given opportunities to learn to know one another.
- Feelings of tolerance were created amongst students.

Reasons provided by respondents for negative or unsure responses are as follows:

- Learning about religions other than one's own is far too difficult.
- One respondent did not feel convinced by the idea of religion education in the light of what happens in reality in some schools (i.e. Bible education persists, teacher's lack appropriate knowledge).

- Even though one should respect that people will believe differently, teaching religions other than Christianity means a compromise of beliefs. Christians need to spread *God's message*.

3.4.5.2 Analysis of the results of the post-intervention questionnaire: 1996.

An analysis of the results of Questions 2,3,4,5 and 6 as set out in Table 8 (3.4.5.1), reveals that 14 of the 47 respondents (29,7%) indicated that they had initially been negative towards Religious education on the assumption that Christianity only would be covered. These respondents became more positive towards Religious education when they realized that their course would be multi-religious. Nineteen of 47 respondents (40%) indicated that they had been negative towards multi-religious education, but became more interested when they realized that tutors would be fair and unprejudiced. Ten respondents (21%) indicated that they had been in favour of studying belief systems practised in South Africa and had become more enthusiastic as the course progressed. The data shows a decrease in negativity towards Religious education between the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases (cf. Tables 4 and 8).

The positive attitudes towards religion education at college were echoed in the responses to Question 12 (cf. Table 9). Thirty six of 47 respondents (76%) agreed that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school (Intermediate Phase). The results presented in Table 10 however, reflect that fewer respondents felt adequately prepared to teach religion education themselves (31 of 47 respondents) in comparison to the numbers who indicated that religion education has a place in the Intermediate Phase. It is interesting to note that some respondents pointed out that the success of multi-religious education will depend on effective teacher training, as well as the approaches which teachers adopt. One of four respondents who felt that religion education has no place in the primary school, suggested that learners could become confused, *should the teacher not be well informed* (sic).

Although only one respondent mentioned that learners might become confused by learning about religions, this response will be commented on. In their research conducted amongst 350 primary school children from different cultural backgrounds in 1993 and 1994, Roux & Steenkamp (1995:79) found that children with strong religious backgrounds were able to cope with multi-religious content. Children with no religious background tended not to cope as well with multi-religious content, but learners were able to study religions together in a constructive way. Learners were often unable to recognise or reproduce information about their own backgrounds which made it difficult for them to accommodate new content about religions.

A comparison between the contents of Table 5 (pre-intervention) and Table 10 (post-intervention) indicates that the number of respondents who were not interested in teaching Religious education decreased from 69% (Table 5) in the pre-intervention phase to 34% (Table 10) in the post-intervention phase. The latter figure includes those respondents who did not respond to the related question in the post-intervention questionnaire. The decrease in negative responses to the questions discussed above appears to be related to the inclusive study of religions practised in South Africa (cf. Table 8) rather than the exclusive focus on one religion only. Although Hindu and Muslim respondents comprised a small proportion of the total number of respondents, their presence appears to have positively influenced the attitudes of almost all Christian respondents towards the study of religions. In two cases however, studies of Islam and Hinduism reinforced the negative perceptions of respondents towards these religions. Increased knowledge of religions had not necessarily enabled all student participants to come to terms with religious plurality. Two other respondents indicated that religion education made them feel as if they were compromising their own beliefs (cf. Tables 8 and 10), since they could not teach anything that they perceived to be *untrue*.

Similarly, Malone's study (1998: 7) amongst secondary school students attending Australian religious schools indicated that some students had become more prejudiced as a result of undertaking courses in *Studies of Religion*. The research results indicated that

increased knowledge of religions did not necessarily mean greater tolerance towards those people who practise the religions studied.

Malone (1998:15) also noted that teaching activities and strategies were an important variable in the learning process. In the present study, co-operative learning strategies in which participants interacted with one another, appear to have positively influenced the attitudes of respondents towards religion education (cf. 3.4.5.1, Table 11). The emphasis on participation and reflection on beliefs and practices from a personal perspective, enabled respondents to appreciate the commitment that other people have towards their own belief systems (cf. responses to Question 15). The data indicates that respondents generally reacted positively to decentralised teaching strategies, and tended to be more at ease about religion education once they realized that tutors would not adopt authoritarian roles.

The views presented by respondents in both questionnaires of the pilot study would be used to guide the course design and the role of tutors for the 1997 research project. This includes the views of those respondents who remained negative towards religion education. The reason being that the follow up study could address the reasons for sustained negativity towards religion education. Contents of the intervention phase and related teaching strategies would be adjusted in accordance with student responses, as has been described in 3.5.3 below.

3.5 THE RESEARCH PROJECT: 1997.

3.5.1 Aims of the research project: 1997.

The research project conducted in 1997 followed the same procedures as the pilot study. Student participants also completed a pre-intervention questionnaire in February 1997 (cf. APPENDIX B(i), PART I) and a post-intervention questionnaire in October 1997

(cf. APPENDIX B(ii)). The period over which the research was conducted corresponded with the J.C.E. academic year as did the pilot study. The purpose of the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire (PART I) was the same as the 1996 pre-intervention questionnaire (cf 3.4.2). In addition, it was necessary to determine whether attitudes of respondents in 1997 towards a compulsory course in religion education and towards teaching religion in schools would mirror those of the 1996 respondents.

3.5.2 The pre-intervention questionnaire: 1997

Fifty four students responded to the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire.

The following minor changes were made to the pre-intervention questionnaire since certain questions were limiting in terms of data collection:

- Questions 6 and 7 were rephrased in the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire and Question 8 was added.
- Spaces were provided in questions 6, 7 and 8 so that respondents could qualify their responses.
- Respondents were required to complete a short general knowledge questionnaire on religions practised in South Africa (cf. APPENDIX B(i), PART II). The purpose of the test was to ascertain the level of the students' knowledge of religions practised in South Africa. Awareness of the lack of knowledge of belief systems practised in South Africa by students, may be a means of encouraging positive attitudes towards religion education amongst pre-service teachers.

3.5.2.1 The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire: 1997

The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire are set out below. The numbers in brackets correspond to the numbering of questions on the questionnaire.

PART I: Personal details and attitudes towards religion education.***(1) What is your religious affiliation?***

The religious affiliation of respondents is set out in Table 12 below.

Table 12

<i>Religious affiliation of respondents</i>	<i>Frequency (of 54)</i>
Christian*	39
Muslim	8
Jewish	2
Hindu**	3
African Traditional Religions	1
No religious affiliation	1

* Respondents who indicated that they were Christian, indicated affiliation to a range of denominations including Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Z.C.C and other African Independent Churches.

** Of the three Hindu students, two were Tamil and one Hindi.

(2) What was the name of the religious period at your school? E.g. Bible Education, Right Living etc.

The results to the above question have been summarised and presented in Table 13 to follow.

Table 13

<i>Name of religious period</i>	<i>Frequency (of 54)</i>
Catechism	1
Bible Education	21
Religious Education	11
Religious Instruction	7
Jewish Studies	2
Right Living	10
Islamic Studies	2
Biblical Studies	1

(3) Rate the value that Religious education (or equivalent) held for you at school.

Respondents rated the value that religious education held for them at school on a five point scale, where 1= strongly negative and 5 = strongly positive. The results have been presented in Table 14.

Table 14

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (of 54)</i>
1 strongly negative	15 (27,7%)
2	13 (24%)
3	9 (16,6%)
4	9 (16,6%)
5 strongly positive	3 (5,5%)

The responses set out in the above table reflect that more respondents were negative than positive towards Religious education when they were at school.

(4) What is your attitude towards Religious education at college?

Respondents rated their attitude towards Religious education in the college curriculum on a five point scale, where 1 = strongly negative and 5 = strongly positive.

Table 15

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (of 54)</i>
1 strongly negative	4 (7,4%)
2	6 (11%)
3	20 (37%)
4	17 (31%)
5 strongly positive	5 (9,25%)

Responses to the above question reflect that more respondents were positive or indifferent towards Religious education at college.

(5) How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

Respondents responded to this question on a five point scale, where 1 = strongly negative and 5 = strongly positive.

Table 16

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (of 54)</i>
1 strongly negative	6 (11%)
2	6 (11%)
3	19 (35%)
4	15 (27,7%)
5 strongly positive	9 (16,6%)

The information as set out in the above table indicates that respondents were more positive in terms of teaching Religious education than they were towards the value that

Religious education held for them when they were learners at school. Twenty four of 54 respondents (44%) indicated that they felt positive towards teaching Religious education, while 12 (12%) indicated that they were unenthusiastic. Fifty two percent of these respondents indicated that they had been negative towards Religious education at school (cf. Table 14).

(6) *Reasons provided by respondents qualifying their responses to question 5 (i.e towards teaching Religious education at school).*

Respondents provided the following reasons for their negativity towards teaching Religious education at school:

- Religion is so diverse in South Africa and in schools that it would be too difficult to teach religion to learners from different religious backgrounds without being biased towards one's own.
- Bible Education/Right Living was boring at school, therefore respondents lacked motivation towards teaching Religious education in any form at school.
- Respondents did not feel competent to teach Religious education in schools in a diverse society.
- Each *religion* should be responsible for teaching its own traditions and values.
- Respondents were negative if one religion only was imposed on others.

Of the 12 respondents who were negative towards teaching Religious education themselves, eight were not opposed to attending a course in religion at college. Three of the respondents indicated that they were negative towards teaching Religious education at school only because they would be opposed to teaching religious content that imposed upon learners. They would be positive however, should an objective, inclusive learning programme be compiled.

The following reasons were provided by respondents for indicating that they were uncertain (*3 on the scale*) about teaching Religious education at school:

- Respondents indicated that they were uncertain as to how educators at schools and parents would respond to multi-religious education.
- Respondents felt enthusiastic towards a course in religion at college, but would find it difficult to teach without personal bias themselves.
- Respondents would prefer to teach moral skills and guidance relating to religion, rather than religion itself.
- Respondents indicated that they had no real interest in teaching in this area.

The following are examples of responses provided as reasons for responding positively to Question 5 above:

- Learners should know about their own religions and broaden their knowledge of other religions (2 of 54 respondents).
- It is important to teach morals and values and vital lessons of life (5 respondents).
- Learning about religions would be educational for the teachers as well as for learners.
- Learners should not be *taught in a vacuum* as the respondent had been.
- Children have to be taught to respect one another's beliefs in order to relate to one another in a diverse society (11 of the 54 respondents).
- Learners should be given the opportunity to learn the differences between religions and the richness present in each religion (2 of the 54 respondents).
- Respondents would be enthusiastic only if it means teaching one's own religion, for fear of confusing learners, or for evangelical reasons. In every case these were Christian students (5 of 54 respondents).

In some cases respondents submitted positive reasons towards a course in religion at college, in spite of having selected the neutral category on the scale. Four of the respondents provided the following motivations for their responses to Question 5:

- He/she would like to improve on the way Religious education was taught at school.
- Respondents believe that learners need to be taught to understand the beliefs of others in order to respect them or to get on better with one another. Respondents would like to contribute this process (3 respondents).

(7) Do you think that religion has any value in schools in a democratic society?

This was an open-ended question. Responses have been clustered and presented in Table 17 below.

Table 17

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/ % (of 54)</i>
Yes, religion does have value in schools in a democratic society.	48 respondents (88,8%)
No, religion has no value.	5 (9,25%)
No response	1 (1,85%)

Reasons provided by respondents for responding positively to the above question were as follows:

- As long as all religions are taken into consideration, so that learners can have the opportunity to learn about the differences between religions.
- Learners ought to have the right to choose the religion that *satisfies them*.
- Religion in schools provide exposure to morals and values or encourages morality.
- Religion in schools is a vital part of a child's education, in the sense of learning about others.
- Knowledge of others would lead to respect and understanding.

Respondents who answered no to the above question understood "religion" to mean the Christian religion as was taught in Bible Education. In two of the five cases however,

respondents indicated that they were open to participation in Religious education provided that they were to learn about the religions and lifestyles of others. Respondents indicated that they did not see any value in having Religious education in schools if only one particular belief system was taught and imposed upon learners.

(8) *How do you feel about learning about religions other than your own?*

Of the 54 respondents, 50 said that they wanted to learn about religions to deepen their own understanding of others and to be capable of communicating with others. Knowledge about religions would enable them to become more broadminded and tolerant. Two respondents said they were not willing to learn about religions other than their own. No reasons were given.

PART II : General knowledge questions on religions practiced in South Africa.

Respondents were asked to attempt answers to fifteen general knowledge questions on religions to determine the extent of their knowledge of basic, observable features of religions practiced in South Africa (cf. APPENDIX B(ii)). The results of this test were communicated to the respondents.

Scores on the test have been presented in Table 18 below:

Table 18

<i>Scores on general knowledge test.</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 54)</i>
none correct	6 respondents (11%)
1-7 answers correct (less than 47%)	29 (54%)
8 answers correct (53%)	7 (13%)
9-10 answers correct (60%-67%)	10 (18%)
more than 10 answers correct (70% +)	2 (3,7%)

The scores on the general knowledge test indicate that 66% of the respondents were unable to answer less than half of some basic questions relating to religions practised in South Africa. These responses were not confined to any one particular religious or cultural group.

3.5.2.2 Analysis of the results of the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire.

If the results of the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire are compared to those of the 1996 pre-intervention questionnaire, it becomes evident that the two groups of respondents held similar attitudes towards Religious education in their own schooling and towards a compulsory course in religion at the college. The results of the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire indicate that the number of respondents for whom Religious education held no value ((1) or (2) on the scale) at school was higher than for the 1996 respondents (cf. Table 3 and Table 14). Twenty eight of 54 respondents (52%) in 1997 indicated that Religious education had held no value for them at school, in comparison to 22 of 55 respondents (40%) in 1996. However, the numbers of respondents who indicated (3) or neutral/uncertain on the scale were far higher in 1996 (42%) than in 1997 (17%).

Respondents were not asked to provide reasons for their attitudes towards Religious education at school. This was one shortcoming of both the 1996 and 1997 pre-intervention questionnaires.

In comparison to 1996, respondents in 1997 were more positive towards Religious education at college than their 1996 counterparts had been in the pre-intervention phase (cf. Table 4 and Table 15). Forty percent of respondents in 1997 indicated that they were willing to participate in a compulsory Religious education course, while in 1996, only 29% had indicated that they were willing. It is possible that the 1997 participating student group had some knowledge of what the course would entail beforehand, obtained from participating students from the previous year. This possibility was hinted at by some of the respondents in their responses to the pre-intervention questionnaire. Pre-knowledge of religion education in the college curriculum was a variable that could not be controlled,

and may have influenced the perceptions of respondents towards Religious education in the college curriculum.

In response to Question 5 on the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire (cf. Table 16), 24 of the 54 respondents (44%) indicated that they were willing to teach Religious education at school, while 12 (22%) indicated that they were not willing, and 19 (35%) were uncertain. Most respondents opted for uncertain (3) on the five-point scale. The 1996 responses were only marginally different, in that 34% (of 55 respondents) indicated that they were willing to teach Religious education at school, 29% that they were not willing and 40% were uncertain (cf. Table 5, 3.4.2.1).

The attitudes displayed by respondents towards religion education in their responses to Questions 6, 7 and 8 on the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire, generally tended to be positive. The responses to Question 6 provide some insight into the perceptions that respondents have towards the place of Religious education in the education system. In cases where respondents indicated that they were negative towards teaching Religious education at schools, a small number indicated that they were negative because they were not prepared to impose one belief system only on learners. Respondents who indicated that they felt uncertain about teaching Religious education dominate the statistical profile. In some cases respondents expressed uncertainty, because they felt there was uncertainty in schools regarding the future of the subject. Others felt incompetent, because their knowledge of religions is inadequate, and others voiced a certain amount of skepticism towards the acceptance of multi-religious education by parents, the learners themselves and teachers.

In spite of negativity or uncertainty expressed in Questions 3, 4, 5 and 6, 50 of the 54 respondents indicated that they were in favour of learning about religions other than their own. Respondents were not opposed to the idea of religion being taught at schools or at college, but they were opposed to the idea of one religion being taught to the exclusion of others.

3.5.3 Action/course design based on the analysis of the 1996 pilot study and 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire results

The results of the 1996 pilot study and the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire would inform the course design or intervention phase for the 1997 research project. The participating student group would focus on the same religions studied in 1996, with one exception. African traditional religions would be added to the religions studied, since student participants in the 1996 pilot study had indicated that this area had been neglected.

The co-operative learning strategies which had been used for teaching religions had generally been well received by the 1996 student group. The approach adopted for the 1996 intervention phase would therefore be repeated for the purposes of the 1997 research project. Reflection upon some of the shortcomings of the 1996 intervention phase led to minor adjustments to the format of the 1997 intervention phase.

Firstly, station or workshop questions would be changed, since those in the 1996 model had been too superficial and had not provided students with sufficient background. Attention would be given to restructuring the station questions for Hinduism and Islam based on comments made by respondents that they would find it difficult to teach these religions.

Secondly, it became evident that effective teaching and learning about religions is largely dependent on the application of certain mediational criteria such as those which have been described in relation to Feuerstein's criteria for MLE. The descriptions of the mediational criteria and co-operative learning in Chapter 2 provided the framework that would guide the approach to teaching and learning in the 1997 research project. Thus the intervention programme for the 1997 project would echo that of the 1996 pilot study, the only difference being that it would be fine-tuned in terms of the theoretical principles outlined in Chapter 2. The intervention programme for the 1997 research project was

more structured therefore, since tutors had become more aware of the significant role played by the tutor/mediator in guiding students towards an understanding of religions.

Thirdly, in the light of the restructuring described above, tutors placed more emphasis on the idea that small group learning allows students themselves to become major sources of information, assistance and support (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:102). Students were also made aware of the five basic elements for successful co-operative learning as outlined by Johnson & Johnson (1994:82; cf. 2.3.2), particularly the need for individual accountability. The basic elements for successful small group learning and therewith the benefits of sharing behaviour and self regulation (cf. 2.4.5; 2.4.6) were discussed with student participants prior to the commencement of the intervention phase. This was done in order to alleviate the problem of students, who were adherents of the religion being studied, becoming the *knowledgeable other* in the group. All team members, regardless of their religious or philosophical persuasions had to accept responsibility for seeking answers to the questions related to each of the stations or workshops (cf. APPENDIX D). In this way, criteria for MLE were aligned with the elements for successful co-operative learning.

Moreover, more opportunities were given to the participating students to present group projects on a variety of topics such as pilgrimages and festivals. Students were required to work within the parameters described above. In this way student participants would apply researched information to practical situations with the purpose of developing their own teaching skills.

3.5.4 The post-intervention questionnaire: 1997

A sample of 44 of the original 54 student participants who responded to the pre-intervention questionnaire participated in the post-intervention questionnaire. The post-intervention questionnaire was completed at the end of the intervention phase in October 1997.

The format of the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire (cf. APPENDIX B(iii)) was exactly the same as the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire, except that respondents would rate their responses on a Likert-type scale. Respondents were also given space to qualify their responses to certain questions and to respond to open-ended questions. These changes were made in order to encourage respondents to be specific in their responses.

3.5.4.1 The results of the post-intervention questionnaire: 1997

The results of the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire are presented below. The numbering in brackets corresponds to the numbering of questions on the questionnaire.

(1) What is your religious affiliation?

The religious affiliation of the 1997 respondents is reflected in the table below.

Table 19

<i>Religious affiliation of respondents</i>	<i>Frequency (of 44)</i>
Christian	28
Muslim	8
Hindu	3
Jewish	2
African Traditionalist	1
No religion	1

(3) How did you feel about a compulsory Religious education course when you started out in February 1997?

Respondents were provided with various options to guide their responses. The results have been set out in Table 20 to follow.

Table 20

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/ % (of 44)</i>
1 very negative	5 (11,3%)
2 suspicious	6 (13,6%)
3 did not mind	18 (41%)
4 very enthusiastic	14 (32%)

The information reflected in Table 20 confirms the attitudes of respondents towards Religious education at college as indicated in the pre-intervention questionnaire (cf. Table 15). Respondents tended to be more positive than negative.

Eleven of the 44 respondents (15%) indicated that they had initially been negative towards Religious education. These respondents indicated either, that they had been uncertain about what to expect from the course, or were concerned that only one religion, Christianity would be covered. One or two of the respondents who responded in this way indicated that they would not have chosen the course had it not been compulsory.

(3) What did you think the Religious education course would include?

This was an open-ended question. Responses have been clustered according to the most frequent types of responses and set out in Table 21.

Table 21

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
Religions practised in South Africa	20 (45%)
A study of one religion only (Christianity only)	8 (18%)
Moral issues	1 (2,27%)
Didactics	3 (6,8%)
Unsure/did not respond	6 (14%)

The remaining six respondents did not answer the question adequately. Responses were given from a post-intervention perspective and were therefore discarded.

- (4) *If you were negative towards a course in Religious education could you explain why?*
- (5) *If you were positive could you explain why?*
- (6) *How did you feel about multi-religious education when it was first introduced to you, and now that you have completed the course?*

Responses to questions 4, 5 and 6 cited above, will be considered with responses to questions 7, 8, 9 and 10 since responses tended to be repetitive.

- (7) *How would you rate your attitude towards multi-religious education on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=strongly negative and 5=strongly positive*

- (7.1) *When it was first introduced to you?*

Table 22

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
1 strongly negative	6 (13,6%)
2	6 (13,6%)
3	10 (22,7%)
4	7 (15,9%)
5 strongly positive	13 (29,5%)

Two questionnaires were discarded since the responses were obscure.

- (7.2) *Now that you have completed the course?*

Responses to questions 7.2, 8, 9 and 10 have been clustered and set out in Table 23 below.

Table 23

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
Negative or uncertain when first introduced to multi-religious education, but had become more positive once the course was completed.	18 respondents (41%)
Respondents who started out as positive towards multi-religious education, and who remained positive.	21 (48%)
Uncertain about multi-religious education and were still uncertain on completion of the course.	4 (9%)
Negative and remained negative towards multi-religious education.	1 (2%)

Respondents provided reasons for their change in attitude from negative to positive towards multi-religious education by responding to Question 9 on the questionnaire.

(9) If your attitude changed from negative to positive could you explain why?

Reasons could be clustered into three general types of responses:

- Respondents indicated that Religion education had improved their knowledge and understanding of the religions to which they had been exposed. Therefore respondents felt more confident about teaching in this area themselves.
- Respondents enjoyed group participation and the involvement of peers in their learning. Students from different religious backgrounds could get to know one another.
- Respondents were shown a different perspective of Religious education, whereby the focus did not need to be on one religion only. All college students and learners in the school environment could benefit from the experience of learning about one another's religions.

In some cases, reasons given by respondents had bridged more than one category.

Respondents who indicated that they had started out as positive towards multi-religious education, and remained positive or became more positive as the course unfolded, answered Question 10, as did those respondents who remained uncertain about multi-religious education.

(10) If your attitude did not change in any way, could you explain why.

The following are examples of the reasons given by respondents for their positive stance towards multi-religious education. Responses to Question 10 were similar to those responses recorded for Question 9 above:

- Respondents said that the study of religions had been an enlightening experience.
- The knowledge gained from the course increased the competence of students for classroom practise.

Respondents who indicated that they were uncertain about multi-religious education had all responded positively to Question 6, i.e that they were for multi-religious education. Thus the general feelings amongst these respondents were more positive than uncertain, as can be determined from the following motivations provided by respondents:

- Respondent indicated that learning about religions had enabled her/him to become more tolerant. He/she had experienced personal growth as a result of the learning.
- Respondent had learned a great deal about religions and felt that the same should be taught at schools.

The reservations expressed by two respondents in this group however, are significant and are set out as follows:

- Respondent explained that while he/she had gained from the course, he/she did not as yet feel competent enough to cope with religious diversity in the school environment.

- Time allowed for the course was too short and felt that more time was needed to elaborate on strategies for classroom practice.

The only respondent who had been negative at the outset and had remained negative towards Religion education explained that he/she was resentful learning about religions other than his/her own. In this case, the respondent was Muslim.

(11) If you are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, African Traditionalist or affiliated to any other religion than Christianity, how did you feel that your tutors were not affiliated to your particular religion?

Twelve of the 44 respondents responded to the above question. The respondents included the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu students.

Table 24

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (of 44)</i>
strongly negative	1
suspicious	3
did not mind	5
impressed	4

Respondents who said they were initially suspicious of their tutors provided the following reasons:

- Tutors may not have had much knowledge and insight into the respondent's particular religion.
- Tutors might only focus on Christianity and on no other religions.

Respondents who said they did not mind that their tutors were not of the same religious background provided the following reasons:

- It was a new experience having a tutor who taught students about their own religions.
- Respondents were impressed that their tutors demonstrated insight and extensive knowledge into religions other than their own.
- Respondents did not mind that tutors were Christian, because tutors were able to set the tone for respect and tolerance in the classroom environment.

The one negative respondent felt resentful about being taught by a *Christian lecturer*.

(12) Have these feelings changed now that you have completed the course?

The three respondents (cf. Table 24) who said they had been suspicious, indicated a change of heart once the course had been completed. They indicated that a relaxed, positive classroom atmosphere, in which tutors had invested equal time to all the religions studied, contributed to these positive feelings. The one respondent who reflected negative feelings was unsure about his/her feelings on completion of the course, but provided no reasons.

(13) Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?

The above question was open-ended and respondents' comments have been clustered and set out in Table 25 to follow.

Table 25

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
Respondents who indicated clearly that multi-religious education has a place in the school curriculum, mainly emphasised that religion education can teach children to accept, appreciate and respect people of different religions and cultural backgrounds. The idea of learning to know and understand others was stressed strongly by most of the students in this category.	27 respondents (61%)
Respondents who said that religion education has a place in the primary school, but included the following reservations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Senior Primary/Intermediate phase only. Two of the respondents specified only from Grade 6. • It would depend on how teachers would approach the subject. • Only if parents and teachers are willing. • Only if learners are also instructed in their own faith. 	8 (18%)
Students who were not convinced that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are not qualified. • Learners who are not affiliated to any religion would be left out. • Might be confusing for learners. • The focus area could be accommodated in a subject like history. • Learners should be instructed in their own religion only. 	6 (13,6%)

Three questionnaires were discarded on the grounds that comments were not applicable to the question.

(14) How would you rate your own confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching about religions other than your own? Rate your response on a scale of 1-5, where 1=strongly negative, 3=uncertain and 5=strongly positive.

Responses to the above question have been summarised and presented in Table 26.

Table 26

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
1 strongly negative	3 respondents (6,8%)
2	2 (4,5%)
3 uncertain	17 (38,6%)
4	11 (25%)
5 strongly positive	9 (20%)
No response	2

(15) Could you please elaborate on your answer to Question 14 above.

Reasons for being negative or uncertain about teaching about religions other than respondents' own are presented below:

- Respondents do not feel confident enough as yet to handle multi-religious content.
- Respondents feel insecure, or afraid of being biased because of their own faith backgrounds.
- Respondents fear being wrong in the presentation of information about religions other than their own.
- Respondents believed themselves to be capable, but think that schools are reticent about introducing multi-religious education.

Respondents who felt positive about teaching religion education pointed out that they had acquired a great deal of information about religions that would enable them to teach about religions other than their own. Some of the respondents in this category

acknowledged that they would need to continue to improve their knowledge about religions, but they did not see this as a deterrent to sound teaching.

Eight of the respondents had opted for (3) on the scale, but explained that they would be confident, provided they equipped themselves adequately with additional reading and research.

(16) Do you think that group work strategies instead of lectures made a difference to your understanding of the religions studied this year?

The above question was asked more directly in the 1997 questionnaire, than in the 1996 questionnaire. Respondents were provided with options in order to obtain more specific responses from respondents. Details have been set out in Table 27 below.

Table 27

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 44)</i>
Yes	33 respondents (75%)
No	5 (11,3%)
Unsure	4 (9%)
Discarded questionnaires	2 (4,5%) (unclear reasoning)

The responses to Question 16, indicate that at least 75% of respondents agreed that group work strategies made a difference to their understanding of religions. The reasons provided by those respondents who responded positively have been set out below:

- Respondents found individual research valuable.
- Sharing with team members was both enriching and interesting.
- Respondents' understanding of religions was improved when team members shared from their own particular religious perspectives; or, different view points from different team members improved respondents' understanding of the religions studied.

- Each member of a team was able to provide input into the discussions.
- Respondents found group learning more stimulating than lectures.
- Group learning encouraged research and helped improve skills required for teaching.
- Group learning allowed students to discuss issues beyond the topics which had been set for group discussions.
- Group learning was more interesting, but cannot be effective without the help of the tutor.

Reasons provided by respondents for indicating that they were uncertain or negative about group work strategies are as follows:

- Certain team members would often not prepare adequately for group discussions. Those who did would do most of the sharing.
- Respondents did not always feel confident about the accuracy of what their members had to share.
- The quality of group interaction and therefore learning, depended entirely on one's group.
- Respondents simply did not like working in groups. They preferred working on their own.

The reasons provided by respondents for being negative towards small group learning were justified if they worked in dysfunctional groups. One or two respondents indicated that they had benefitted from both group learning and *lectures* (sic) and were therefore uncertain as to which of the two was more beneficial.

(17) Do you think that discussions with fellow students from different religious backgrounds have made a difference to your understanding of religions other than your own?

Thirty eight of the 44 respondents (86%) agreed that discussions with fellow students from different religious backgrounds had contributed towards their understanding of what

had been discovered in resource materials. The four respondents, who responded negatively to this question, provided relevant justification for their responses. According to these respondents, there will not always be adherents of every belief system or philosophical viewpoint represented in a class or group. Sharing from personal experience would then be lacking.

3.5.4.2 Analysis of the results of the post-intervention questionnaire: 1997

The following analysis will focus upon the results of the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire, but also compare the 1997 post-intervention results with corresponding results from the 1996 pilot study.

The results of the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire reveal that attitudes of respondents towards religion education in the college curriculum were overwhelmingly more positive than negative in the post-intervention phase. Of the 44 respondents who completed the post-intervention questionnaire, 37 (82%) indicated that they were positive about a study of religions practised in South Africa, or had become more positive as the course unfolded (cf. Table 23; 3.5.4). The 1997 post-intervention questionnaire results mirror the positive comments registered by respondents to the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire. Both student groups indicated that religion education in the college curriculum had been a worthwhile experience and had taught them the meaning of tolerance.

In response to Question 3 on the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire (cf. Table 19), three of the respondents who were positive towards religion education indicated that they had expected to learn about religions, because they had heard about the contents of the course from the previous year's student group. At least twenty of the 44 respondents (45%) (cf. Table 20, Table 23) indicated that they had *expected* to learn about religions and the life styles of others, and also strategies to enable them to teach without offending learners from different religious backgrounds. Thus, from a post-intervention perspective,

religion education had fulfilled the expectations of approximately half of the respondents. Respondents to both the 1996 and 1997 post-intervention questionnaires had indicated that they would have been opposed to a course that reflected bias or prejudice in favour of one religion only.

In response to Question 7.2 on the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire (cf. Table 23), 39 of the 44 respondents (86%) indicated that they had either been positive towards religion education at the outset, or that they had become more positive once they realized the significance of learning about different beliefs and perspectives. Two of the respondents who indicated (3) on the scale in response to Question 7.2, had in fact provided positive comments about the value of religion education in the school environment. The 1997 results compliment the results of the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire in which 43 of 47 (91%) respondents indicated a positive stance towards religion education in the post-intervention phase (cf. Table 8).

It is interesting to note that in both the 1996 and 1997 post-intervention questionnaire results, less than 10% of respondents had been opposed to the idea of learning about belief systems other than their own.

The role adopted by tutors in mediating positive perspectives relating to religions was commented on by respondents. The Jewish, Muslim and Hindu respondents (cf. Table 24) indicated that the religious or philosophical persuasion of tutors did not matter, since the tutors had set the tone for respect and tolerance amongst the participants.

Responding to Question 13, on the place of religion education in the Intermediate Phase, 35 of the 44 respondents (80%) believed that religion education has a place in primary education (Intermediate phase) (cf. Table 25). However, in terms of their own confidence towards teaching religions other than their own, 20 of the 44 respondents (45%) only indicated that they felt competent enough to teach religions other than their own, 17 (39%) were uncertain and 5 (11%) were opposed (cf. Table 26). However, 8 of the 17

respondents who had opted for (3) on the scale, explained that they would be confident, provided they equipped themselves adequately with additional reading and research. This type of response displays a positive stance by respondents towards teaching religion education in the Intermediate Phase. On these grounds, taking respondents' reservations into account, 28 or 64% of respondents indicated that they would be prepared to teach religion education.

In comparison, the 1996 post-intervention results to the same question reveal that of the 47 respondents, 31 or 66% felt competent towards teaching religion education. The same conclusions therefore may be drawn for both the pilot study and 1997 post-intervention results. The change in attitudes towards teaching religion at school, appears to be related to the interest generated by multi-religious education.

An interesting observation with regard to both the 1996 and 1997 results is that very few respondents expressed negative perceptions towards any of the belief systems studied. Where respondents were uncertain regarding their own confidence towards teaching religion education (23% in 1996; 36% in 1997), most indicated that they were afraid of misrepresenting religions, rather than because they would not be able to teach aspects of religions. Others indicated that they needed to equip themselves better in terms of knowledge of beliefs and practices related to the principal religions practised in South Africa. No more than two or three of the respondents felt that they could not teach about religions for fear of bias towards their own.

The influence of co-operative learning strategies on the respondents' understanding of the five belief systems studied could be established from responses to Questions 16 and 17. Thirty three of the 44 respondents (75%) indicated that small group learning had aided their understanding of religions. Respondents explained that sharing from a particular religious perspective, as well as reading and research had contributed towards their understanding. Only one respondent observed that successful group learning was reliant upon the assistance provided by a tutor. The five respondents who did not agree that

small group learning had contributed towards their understanding of religions in any way, said so on the grounds that their team members had often not read in preparation for group discussions. These respondents expressed their disillusionment with the contributions made by their team members and not with learning about belief systems other than their own.

The general consensus amongst respondents in both 1996 and 1997, that religion education in a co-operative small group environment was worthwhile, would guide the 1998 research project.

3.6 THE RESEARCH PROJECT: 1998

3.6.1 Aims of the research project: 1998

The 1998 research project was conducted amongst a new group of second year Higher Diploma Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers. The aim of this project was to determine whether similar results as those obtained from the 1996 pilot study and the 1997 research project would emerge from the student respondents in 1998. The research design was the same as that used in the 1996 and 1997 projects. A pre-intervention questionnaire preceded the intervention phase in February 1998 (cf. APPENDIX C(i)), and a post-intervention questionnaire was again administered once the intervention phase had been completed in October 1998.

The focus in 1998 however would be predominantly on the effects of the implementation of MLE on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own. The comments and suggestions made by student respondents to the questionnaires of the previous two years would be taken into account in the design of the intervention phase for the 1998 research project.

3.6.2 The pre-intervention questionnaire: 1998

Forty two students participated in the 1998 research project. The 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire was based upon the pre-intervention questionnaire completed by student participants in 1997.

Minor amendments were made to the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire in order to gain additional information and more specific responses from respondents.

The following amendments were made to the questionnaire:

- The questionnaire was extended to obtain biographic and socio-economic background information from respondents. This was to determine whether socio-economic background had an influence on the attitudes which students held towards Religious education during their own school years. Another aspect of importance was whether this variable would have an effect on the way in which the respondents perceived religions other than their own.
- Respondents were required to indicate their attitudes and feelings on a Likert-type scale and were required to qualify their choices in spaces provided.
- An additional question was added, namely Question 13, to determine the pre-intervention perceptions of respondents towards religion education in the Intermediate Phase. None of the questions in the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire had been specific enough to obtain this information.
- Question 7 in the 1997 questionnaire was discarded, since the same type of information could be obtained from Questions 11 and 14 in the 1998 questionnaire (cf. Questions 4 and 8 respectively in the 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire).

3.6.2.1 The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire: 1998

The results of the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire are set out below. The numbers in brackets again correspond to the question numbers on the questionnaire.

PART 1: Biographical details and attitudes towards religion and Religious education of student participants.

(1) What is your religious affiliation?

The religious affiliation of respondents has been set out in Table 28.

Table 28

<i>Religious affiliation.</i>	<i>Frequency (of 42)</i>
* Christian	33
Jewish	0
Muslim	1
Hindu (Tamil)	2
African traditional religions	4
No religion	1
Christian and African traditional religion	1

* Respondents who indicated that they are Christian indicated a range of different denominational backgrounds, namely, Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and a range of various African Independent Churches, such as the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC).

** One respondent indicated that he/she attends church on Sundays and believes in ancestors.

Table 28 reflects that the religious diversity evident amongst the 1996 and 1997 respondents was absent from the 1998 participating student group. However, there were more African student participants from Tswana, Northern Sotho and Zulu backgrounds than in the previous two years.

(2) *Indicate the age-group to which you belong.*

Table 29

<i>Age group of respondents</i>	<i>Frequency (of 42)</i>
18-20	10
21-25	16
over 25	14

Two of the respondents did not respond to this question. The above table indicates that more than half of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 (i.e. 26 of 42 respondents).

(3) & (4) *Residential information of respondents.*

Respondents reside in various suburbs, towns and districts:

Soweto, Johannesburg northern, southern and eastern suburbs, Hillbrow, Auckland Park, East Rand areas including Germiston and Thokoza. A number of the respondents reside in college residences during the term, since they live in other provinces such as Kwa-Zulu Natal and Northern Province.

(5) & (6) *Family background: Level of education.*

Information obtained in relation to the family background of respondents indicates that more than 50% of the respondents came from backgrounds in which at least one parent had obtained a Std. 8 certificate or less. Only five of the respondents indicated that at least one of their parents had had some form of tertiary education.

(7)& (8) Family background: Number of children in families of respondents.

Twenty five or 60% of the 42 respondents indicated coming from families of 4 or more children.

(9) What was the name of the religious period at your school? E.g. Bible Education, Religious education, Right Living etc.**Table 30**

<i>Name of religious period at school</i>	<i>Frequency/ (of 42)</i>
Bible Education	8
Religious education	22
Right Living	4
Scripture	1
Biblical Studies	3
Religious Instruction	2
No religion taught	2

The information presented in the above table indicates that the majority of respondents had experienced some form of religious teaching at school. It is likely that the 22 respondents for whom the subject was known as Religious education, had been exposed to Christian education only.

(10) Indicate the value that Religious education or equivalent held for you at school.

Respondents were guided by a Likert-type scale. The options have been set out in Table 31 to follow.

Table 31

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 42)</i>
Strongly negative	0
Negative	1 (2,3%)
Neutral	16 (38%)
Fairly positive	13 (30,9%)
Strongly positive	10 (23,8%)

The information in the above table indicates that Religious education had held little or no value at school for 17 of the 42 respondents (40%),

(11) What is your attitude towards Religious education at college?

The responses to the above question, together with the respective reasons, have been clustered and presented in Table 32 below.

Table 32

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 42)</i>
Respondents who were negative towards Religious education at college, because <i>religion</i> is taught at <i>churches</i> .	1 respondent (2,3%)
Respondents who were neutral/uncertain provided the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious education at college might help pre-service teachers to teach the subject properly at school. • To know about God and different religions. • Respondent admits <i>not being a religious person</i>. • Respondents could not comment, because they had not been that involved in the course as yet. • Little interest had been paid to Religious education at school. 	10 (24%)

The reasons that respondents provided for responding positively have been clustered as follows:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> those who felt that Religious education would focus on the <i>Word of God</i>; or because it would help them to be <i>better Sunday School teachers</i>; or because the <i>Bible</i> teaches people how to live properly; 	9 (21%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> those who believed that Religious education would provide them with the background to different religions. This background would enable them to <i>understand their pupils better</i>; 	17 (40%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning about all kinds of religions is important to develop tolerance, understanding and respect. 	(included in 17)
Respondents who responded positively, but provided no reasons.	5 (12%)

The information presented in Table 32 above, indicates that 30 of the 42 respondents (71%) were positive towards Religious education at college. Seventeen of the 42 respondents however, indicated that they were positive, because they would learn about religions in order to gain a better understanding of their learners. Respondents who responded in this way also appear to have had pre-knowledge of what Religious education would include at college. As was the situation in 1997, information regarding the intervention phase was not shared with participants until after the pre-intervention questionnaire had been completed.

(12) How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

Table 33

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 42)</i>
Strongly negative	0
Negative	1 (2,3%)
Neutral	10 (23,8%)
Fairly positive	17 (40,4%)
Strongly positive	14 (33%)

The information in Table 33 reflects that respondents were more positive towards teaching Religious education than they were negative. Those who were positive towards Religious education at college (cf. Table 32 above), also reflect positive attitudes towards teaching Religious education at school.

Reasons provided by respondents, clarifying their positive responses have been clustered according to the most frequent types of responses and have been set out as follows:

- Respondents would like to make Religious education more interesting than it was for them at school.
- Respondents recognise the value of Religious education in schools.
- The subject teaches about life and not religions only.
- Knowledge of religions helps learners to interact and get along better.
- If one's own beliefs are strong the teacher will enjoy teaching while learning about the religion's of other learners in the class.
- Respondents think that it is important to teach about the religions of others.
- The subject needs people who are Christians and have a sound knowledge of the Bible.
- Respondents would teach learners to know more about God, to show children *the way of life and to have faith*.

With reference to the above responses, it is significant to note that 13 of the 42 respondents (31%) indicated that they were positive about teaching Religious education at schools for confessional reasons. Nine of the 42 (21%) clearly indicated that they wanted to teach learners about different religions, while 5 (12%) indicated that they would teach learners about life, or how to respect others and to live decently.

Reasons provided by respondents for indicating negative or neutral have also been clustered according to the most frequent types of responses on the scale and have been set out as follows:

- Teaching religion should be the responsibility of parents.
- Respondents do not have much knowledge of Religious education/no background in religion.
- Respondents would teach religious education, but will not be fully dedicated to it.
- Respondents do not feel competent to cope with the different beliefs of learners.

(13) Statements about teaching religions to Intermediate Phase learners in schools.

In this question, respondents were asked to respond to a number of statements relating to the teaching of religions to learners in the Intermediate phase (Grades 4-7) (cf. APPENDIX C). A Likert-scale was used for this question to guide responses, namely: strongly disagree, disagree, don't know, agree, strongly agree.

The responses have been tabulated in Table 34 below.

Table 34

Responses	Frequency/% (of 42)
Direct correlation, where respondents agreed with statement I and disagreed with statements IV and IX (own religion only).	2 respondents (4,8%)
Direct correlation, where respondents agreed with statements V and IX and disagreed with statements I and IV (respondents were for the study of religions).	24 (57%)
Respondents who were not sure about religion education in the primary phase.	2 (4,8%)
Respondents who appeared to have no correlation between responses at all, may have been strongly in favour of instruction in one religion only (their own), but were not against learners sharing their personal experiences of belief and practice with their peers.	6 (14,2%)
Discarded questionnaires (no correlation, and made no sense)	8 (19%)

If respondents had understood the statements, responses should have indicated a correlation between statements I, IV, V, VII and VIII. This means that if respondents agreed with statements I, IV and VII, that learners should receive instruction in their own religion only, then respondents should have disagreed with statements III and V. Alternatively, if respondents agreed with statements II, V and IX, that learners should learn about the religions of others, respondents should have disagreed with I, IV and VIII. A respondent may have disagreed with statement III, but could still have agreed with statement V.

Eight questionnaires were discarded on this question on the grounds that respondents were unable to make the correlations between the statements as described above. It appears that these eight respondents did not understand the implications of the statements. Respondents should have identified that logically, learners cannot receive instruction in their particular religion only and learn about the religions of their peers at the same time. It appears that these respondents did not understand this part of the questionnaire. Language competence of the target group was one variable that could not be anticipated before the distribution of the pre-intervention questionnaire. Due to the focus of the study, language incompetence nor the denominational composition of the participating group, would influence the results of the pre-intervention questionnaire.

(14) How do you feel about learning about religions other than your own?

Table 35

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 42)</i>
Strongly negative	1 (2,35%)
Negative	3 (7%)
Neutral	10 (24%)
Fairly Positive	12 (28,5%)
Strongly positive	15 (36%)
Discarded	1 (2,38%)

Responses to the above question indicate that 27 of 42 respondents (65%) were in favour of learning about religions other than their own. The motivations provided by the respondents were as follows:

- Eighteen of the 27 respondents who responded positively indicated that they would like to learn about religions, because they do not know enough about the religious beliefs of others. These respondents were enthusiastic and had no reservations about learning about religions.
- One of the 27 who responded positively felt that if the subject was taught properly, it would build the morals of the children.
- Six of the 27 who responded positively did not provide any reasons for their responses, however, in their responses to Question 12, each had indicated that they were in favour of teaching Religious education for confessional reasons (i.e. *to show the children the Word of God*).
- Three of the 10 respondents who provided a neutral response, also indicated that they would be interested to learn about the religions of others. The other seven, provided no reasons for their responses, or indicated that they would prefer to learn their own religions only.

The same question was asked of the 1997 respondents where 93% of 54 respondents had been in favour of learning about religions other than their own. However, the above question had been asked as an open-ended question. Respondents indicated therefore that they were either in favour or not in favour. The 1998 questionnaire included a Likert-scale which introduced an indifferent or neutral category. The introduction of the neutral category may have varied the distribution of the responses in comparison to 1997. An alternative reason, however, may lie with the greater number of Christian respondents in the target group. There is a strong possibility that the conservative Christian stance demonstrated by some of the respondents influenced student attitudes towards learning about religions.

Ten of 42 respondents (24%) indicated that they were neutral/indifferent towards learning about religions other than their own, but 3 respondents interpreted (3) on the scale in more positive than negative terms as can be seen from the respondents' reasons set out below:

- Learning about religions would help one understand the lifestyles of different people.
- Respondents felt that individuals have the right to choose *what to believe*.

The following reasons were provided for responding positively to the above question:

- To help appreciate the religions of other people.
- To know how people around the world think and believe.
- To learn about different cultures.
- If taught correctly, the subject could help build morals.
- We do not know enough about religions; we do not live alone in this world.
- Learning about religions will help to understand peers and respect the beliefs of others.

The following reasons were provided by respondents to explain their negative responses:

- Learning about religions would compromise respondents' own religious beliefs.
- Learning about religions may confuse the respondent.

PART II: Results of a general knowledge test on religions practised in South Africa.

The purpose of the general knowledge test (cf APPENDIX C(ii)) was to determine the extent of the knowledge of religions practised in South Africa by respondents. The scores obtained on the test have been set out on Table 36 below and indicate, as did the

1997 test, that students tend to have a very limited knowledge of the religions practised in South Africa.

Table 36

<i>Score (maximum 12)</i>	<i>Frequency (of 42)</i>
None correct	20
1-6 correct	21
7+ correct	1

3.6.2.2 Analysis of the results of the pre-intervention questionnaire: 1998

The results of the general knowledge test in the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire, indicate that there was no apparent correlation between the background of the respondents and the level of their knowledge of religions practised in South Africa. Respondents tended to have a poor knowledge of religions regardless of their religious affiliation or socio-economic background. A possible reason for this lack of knowledge demonstrated by respondents may reside with the lack of exposure to religions in schools. Responses to the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire indicate that 36 of the 42 respondents had experienced some form of Christian education only (cf. Table 28, 3.6.2). Historically, all schools in South Africa, except the former House of Delegates schools, would have included Bible Education or Christian religious education in the curriculum (Tait, 1997: 14).

In response to question 10 on the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire, only one of 42 respondents indicated that Religious education had held no value ((1) or (2) on the scale) for him/her at school. Twenty three of 42 respondents (53%) indicated that they had been positive towards Religious education at school and 16 of the 42 (38%) indicated that they had been neutral or indifferent (cf. Table 31).

The attitudes reflected by the 1998 student respondents towards Religious education at college, were more positive than negative (Table 31). A comparison between the 1996 and 1997 pre-intervention questionnaire results with those of the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire results indicates that 31 of the 42 respondents (74%) in 1998 were positive towards Religious education at college, while 29% (of 55) were positive in 1996, and 40% (of 54) in 1997. The research data reflects that in 1998, more of the respondents were enthusiastic towards Religious education at college, than they had been towards Religious education at school, as was the case in 1996 and 1997. The overall picture of the respondents' attitudes towards Religious education in 1998 however, i.e. towards how they remembered Religious education at school, and willingness to attend Religious education at college, was generally more positive than the 1996 and 1997 respondents had been.

The reasons provided by the 1998 respondents for being in favour of Religious education at college appear to have been for at least one of two reasons: some respondents were under the impression that Religious education would be taught from a confessional perspective, thus the response that the course would focus on the *Word of God*; others believed that the course would focus on religions practised in South Africa. It is difficult to establish why respondents responded in terms of the latter since the contents of the course were only revealed to the participants after they had completed the pre-intervention questionnaire. Respondents who responded in terms of the former were in all likelihood influenced by the approach that had been adopted at the schools which they had attended.

The only respondent who responded negatively towards Religious education at college, as well as some of those who indicated (3) or neutral on the scale, felt that religion should be taught at *churches*, because many people are not *Christians*. Respondents who reacted in this way seemed to equate 'religion' with Christianity. A small group of the respondents said, that based on their own experience of Religious education at school,

many schools did not *favour* Religious education. These respondents indicated that on these grounds they were not enthusiastic about Religious education at college.

One of the variables that could not be anticipated before the onset of the research project in 1998 was the religious and cultural composition of the target group. The 1998 target group comprised fewer students from minority religious groups than in either 1996 or 1997. It is possible that the increase in the numbers of Christian students in 1998 would account for the increase in the positive attitudes towards Religious education at school and college. This particular group reflected a more conservative Christian stance than had been evident amongst the respondents in previous years.

Student responses to Question 12 on the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire indicate that respondents who were negative or indifferent towards Religious education at college in the pre-intervention phase, were also negative or indifferent towards teaching Religious education themselves. Those respondents who were positive towards Religious education at college, also reflect positive attitudes towards teaching Religious education at school (Table 32). The numbers of respondents in 1998 who indicated that they would be enthusiastic about teaching Religious education were also higher than in 1996 (Table 5) and 1997 (Table 16). Thirty one of 42 respondents (73%) indicated that they were willing to teach Religious education.

Responses to Question 14 indicate that 27 of 42 respondents (64%) were in favour of learning about religions other than their own. The same question was asked of the 1997 respondents where 50 of 54 respondents (93%) had been in favour of learning about religions other than their own. However, the above question had been asked as an open-ended question in 1997. As noted previously, the 1998 questionnaire included a Likert-scale. An indifferent or neutral category was introduced which may have varied the spread of the responses. Ten of the 42 respondents (24%) had indicated that they were neutral or indifferent towards learning about religions other than their own. Another reason for fewer respondents being in favour of religion education in 1998 may be

Table 39

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (of 38)</i>
Learning about the Bible only <i>as it was done at school.</i>	8 respondents
About one religion only (possibly meant Christianity)	2
Learning about different religions	10
How to teach religion in primary schools	5
No response	5
No idea	1
Responses were difficult to interpret or student respondents seemed to misunderstand the question.	7

Analysis

Seven of the 38 responses to the above question were difficult to interpret. These particular respondents were not English first-language speakers and therefore misunderstood some of the questions, including this one. Language as a variable, as with the ethnic and religious composition of the participating student group, could not be anticipated before the onset of the research project. However, language incompetence did not influence the overall results of the research, but strengthens the case for effective mediated learning.

Results of Questions 4, 5 and 6 have been omitted since the responses were repetitions of those responses recorded for Question 2 and for Questions 7, 8, 9 and 10. Sufficient information was obtained from responses to Questions 7, 8, 9 and 10 relating to student attitudes towards multi-religious education, before and after intervention.

(7) How would you rate your attitudes towards learning about religions other than your own?

(9) *If your feelings towards learning about religions changed from negative to positive, could you explain why?*

This was an open-ended question in which respondents provided reasons why their feelings towards learning about religions changed from negative or neutral to positive. Eight of the 38 respondents provided the following reasons for responding as they did to Question 7:

- Respondents enjoyed learning about religions and felt that they had gained valuable information for classroom practice.
- Respondents enjoyed the course once they realized that they were not going to be indoctrinated.
- Respondents who had not been sure of what they were going to learn became more positive as the course gained momentum.
- Respondents were negative at first simply because they had not been interested in learning about religions.

(10) *If your feelings towards learning about religions did not change in any way, could you explain why?*

Eighteen of the 38 respondents who were positive towards religion education (cf. Tables 38 and 39) when it was first introduced to them, and remained positive, responded to this question. Respondents provided the following reasons:

- Respondents said they *had learned a lot about religions* other than their own and felt that their attitudes towards others had improved.
- While their knowledge of others had increased, respondents also felt that they had grown stronger in their own religious beliefs.
- The course had been interesting and respondents felt more confident about teaching religion education in schools.

- Respondents had enjoyed the content as well as the co-operative ethic encouraged in the approach.
- Learning about religions shows that religion plays a role in shaping one's identity.

Ten of the 38 respondents also provided their reasons for their change from neutral to positive in Question 10. This group indicated that they had learned more than they had anticipated and felt that they were in a better position to appreciate the beliefs and practices of others.

Analysis

The information as set out in Table 41 reflects that not one of the respondents was negative towards religion education in the post-intervention phase. The two respondents who were indifferent towards religion education in the post-intervention phase provided reasons that were more positive than neutral or indifferent. Thirty six of the 38 respondents (95%) indicated being positive towards religion education in the post-intervention phase. It is interesting to note that this figure includes those respondents who had expected a confessional type of Religious education in the pre-intervention phase (cf. Table 32).

The 1998 post-intervention results for Questions 7-10 compare favourably with the 1996 and 1997 post-intervention results (Question 6 in 1996; Questions 7-10 in 1997). Forty three of 47 respondents (91%) in the 1996 pilot study, and 39 of 44 respondents (89%) in 1997 indicated that they had become more positive towards religion education once they realized what such a course would entail (cf. Table 8, Table 23 respectively).

- (11) How did you feel that your lecturers were not necessarily of the same religious or philosophical background as yourself?*
- (12) Have these feelings about who taught you changed now that you have completed the course?*

The responses to Questions 11 and 12 have been combined since these tend to overlap. These questions were asked of all respondents, since so few were from religious backgrounds other than Christianity.

Table 42

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Strongly negative/negative	1 (2,6%)
Neutral	22 (58%)
Positive	8 (21%)
Strongly positive	6 (15,7%)

Analysis

The information in Table 42 above indicates that 22 of the 38 (58%) respondents were indifferent or unaffected by the perspective on religions demonstrated by their tutors. It appears that respondents interpreted *neutral* as 'I did not mind', as becomes evident from the following responses:

- Tutors had not undermined anyone's religion, or tried to change anyone's beliefs, but had clearly indicated what students could expect from the religious education course.
- Respondents did not mind as long as tutors indicated a broad knowledge of religions or were well informed.
- Respondents realised that teachers are able to teach about religions other than their own.
- Respondents learned a great deal, even though at first they felt that the particular tutor may not have known about his/her religion, in this case African traditional religions.

Reasons provided by respondents who selected the positive options on the scale are set out below:

- Respondents would have preferred a confessional approach to Religious education, but they realised the importance of having knowledge about other people's religions.
- Tutors had adopted an approach that accommodated all students.
- Respondents realized that *being strong in one's own beliefs*, means that one need not feel uncomfortable teaching about the religions of others.
- Students had been allowed to 'facilitate', they became the *sources of information*.
- The tutor had *taught him/her* (the respondent) *a valuable lesson for life*. The respondent realized that when religions are taught in an impartial way, students could be encouraged to respect the religions of others.

(13) Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?

Table 43

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
strongly agree	14 (37%)
agree	13 (34%)
don't know	6 (16%)
disagree	5 (13%)
strongly disagree	0

The information in Table 43 reflects that 27 of the 38 respondents (71%) agreed that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school. Respondents provided the following reasons:

- Multi-religious education would address the needs of learners from different backgrounds.
- Learners would learn to respect and accept one another's beliefs.
- Multi-religious education addresses some of the needs of multicultural education.

- Multi-religious education contributes towards inculcating positive values and moral behaviour in learners.
- Multi-religious education is an effective way of displaying equality and respect between learners of different religions.

Five of the 38 respondents (13%) responded negatively to the above question and 6 (16%) were uncertain (*I don't know*). These respondents either did not motivate their responses, or indicated that in their experience, most primary schools do not present a multi-religious approach, but focus on Christianity only.

Analysis

The results to the above question on the 1997 post-intervention questionnaire show that 27 of 44 respondents (61%) agreed without reservation that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school. Six of the 44 respondents in 1997 were opposed to multi-religious education in the primary school. In spite of the larger number of conservative Christian respondents present amongst the 1998 student participants, not one, in the post-intervention phase, indicated that learners should be instructed in their own religion only.

(14) How would you rate your own confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching about religions other than your own.

Table 44

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
strongly negative	1 (2,6%)
negative	1 (2,6%)
not sure	10 (26%)
positive	16 (42%)
strongly positive	8 (21%)

The information set out in Table 44 reflects that 24 of the 38 respondents (63%) felt confident about teaching religions other than their own. These respondents provided the following reasons:

- They had gained the necessary knowledge as a result of religion education at college.
- They felt that they would be able to teach in an unbiased way themselves.
- They would need to engage in additional research themselves, but nonetheless felt confident.

Respondents who indicated that they were uncertain about teaching religions other than their own, provided the same reasons as did respondents who had indicated positive on the scale (cf. Table 44). These respondents also explained that they would need to do a lot more research before they would feel confident enough to teach religions other than their own.

Only two of the 38 respondents indicated that they were not in favour of teaching religions other than their own and provided the following reasons:

- He/she would be incapable of showing respect *for aspects of belief that may be important in religions other than his/her own*.
- There was not enough information available.

Analysis

An analysis of the results of Questions 7, 13 and 14 on the 1998 post-intervention questionnaire reveals that 36 of 38 (95%) respondents were positive towards multi-religious education in the college curriculum and 27 of 38 (71%) agreed that religion education has a place in the primary phase. However, in terms of the respondents' perceptions of their own competence, only 24 of 38 respondents (63%) felt competent about teaching religion education. Another 10 (26%) indicated that they were uncertain

about their own competence. This latter group felt that they did not have adequate knowledge of religions to cope in a religiously diverse classroom context.

In comparison to the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire results, 43 of 47 respondents (91%) had been positive towards multi-religious education in the college curriculum, 36 of 47 (76%) agreed that religion education has a place in the primary school, but 31 of 47 (65%) only felt confident enough to teach religion education.

In 1997, 39 of 44 respondents (84%) were positive towards multi-religious education in the college curriculum, 35 of 44 (79%) agreed that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school, while 20 of 44 (45%) were positive about their own competence. An additional 8 respondents who indicated that they were indifferent or neutral had indicated that they would feel more confident in the classroom if they engaged in more research.

A similar tendency was therefore evident in the 1996 pilot study, and both the 1997 and 1998 research projects. The data shows that respondents were in favour of learning about religions for the purposes of their own professional growth, were generally positive about the place of religion education in primary schools, but were somewhat doubtful regarding their own competence towards teaching about religions.

A further significant observation is related to those respondents who indicated in the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire, that they were positive towards teaching religious education (cf. Table 32; 3.6.2.1). The numbers of respondents decreased from 73% (of 42) in the pre-intervention phase, to 63% (of 38) in the post-intervention phase. The decrease in the numbers of respondents who felt confident about teaching religion education appears to be related to the introduction of student participants to multi-religious education.

(15) Do you think that co-operative group strategies instead of lectures made a difference to your understanding of religions other than your own studied this year?

Table 45

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Strongly agree	16 (42%)
Agree	16 (42%)
disagree	6 (16%)
strongly disagree	0
unsure	0

In response to the above question, 32 of 38 respondents (84%) were able to identify positive attributes of co-operative learning and applied these to the way in which they learned about religions.

Reasons provided by respondents that co-operative group strategies had contributed towards their understanding of religions are set out below:

- Working in a group allowed team members to share their different opinions.
- Team members were able to help one another and share information.
- Respondents developed research skills.
- Team members were able to benefit from discussions around issues with a group rather than working on their own.
- Working in a group allowed team members equal opportunities to interact.
- Concepts become clearer when talking about them in a group.
- Team members were allowed to look at issues critically. Students did not simply have to accept information without thinking about it.

Respondents who reacted negatively to co-operative group learning provided the following reasons for their negativity:

- Working as a group was time consuming, and there was not always enough time to reach conclusions.
- Not every one in the group worked at the same level, others never worked.
- Respondents felt that team members did not always want to share ideas and suggested that *they all worked individually*.

Of the six respondents who felt that co-operative learning did not contribute towards their understanding of religions, three were positive that discussions with fellow students had made a difference to their understanding of religions (Question 16), and three felt that discussions with fellow students had not made a difference.

(16) Do you think that discussions with fellow students made a difference to your understanding of religions other than your own?

Responses to this question have been set out in Table 46 below.

Table 46

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Yes	31 (81,5%)
No	6 (15,7%)
Unsure	1

Analysis

Six of the 38 respondents (15,7%) indicated that co-operative group strategies had not made a difference to their understanding of religions. This group took the question to mean, *discussions with fellow students who were adherents of the particular religion*

under discussion. Two of the six respondents indicated that since their group members were mostly Christians, the information came from books anyway. The other four explained that group discussions were ineffective, because team members had not prepared adequately. According to these respondents, those who had read the prescribed materials in preparation for group discussions tended to do most, if not all of the sharing.

The respondents who responded positively to the above question, agreed that group discussions had improved their understanding of religious concepts. Working in teams had contributed towards their understanding even if none of the team members had been adherents of the religions studied. Thirty one of the 38 respondents (74%) responded with more or less the same reasoning.

(17) Do you think that the approach adopted by your lecturers/tutors made a difference to your understanding of religions?

Responses to the above question have been set out in Table 47 below.

Table 47

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Yes	32 (84%)
No	2 (52%)
Unsure	4 (11%)

Respondents who agreed that the approach adopted by tutors had made a difference to their understanding provided the following reasons:

- Tutors did not make their own religious backgrounds evident. They had been fair in their treatment of all religions.
- Respondents admitted that they had read more than what they would have, had they studied on their own and therefore had enjoyed conducting their own research.

- Co-operative group work, combined with visual material such as slides and videos had contributed to respondents' understanding of religions.
- Interaction with team members had contributed towards understanding religions. This was in spite of some respondents saying that too much work was involved in the research of each station or workshop.
- Tutors provided support for students, guiding them towards understanding religious concepts.
- Decentralizing the learning into co-operative small groups had assisted students, because they were more involved in their own learning.
- Respondents had enjoyed the freedom to ask questions in an informal learning environment.

(18) What did you enjoy the most about this course?

This was an open-ended question and responses have therefore been clustered as set out in the table to follow.

Table 48

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Respondents who specified that they had enjoyed the study of religions.	17 respondents (45%)
Respondents who specified that they had enjoyed independent research and/or working in co-operative groups, sharing and discussions.	8 (21%)
Respondents who specified enjoyment of both the study of religions and working in small groups.	3 (8%)
Students who specified the role played by tutors (neutrality/well informed).	2 (5,2%)
Other (specified methodology, specific assignments, specific religions etc)	6 (15,7%)
No response	2 (5,2%)

Responses reflected in Table 48 above will be discussed with Question 20 below.

(19) What did you like the least about the course?

The responses to Question 19 have been evaluated with Question 20, since respondents provided additional comments that further qualified statements made in Question 19. Responses to Question 19 have been summarised and set out in Table 49 below.

Table 49

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency/% (of 38)</i>
Respondents who did not respond or said they had enjoyed everything about the course.	16 respondents (42%)
Did not like group work because involved doing too much on their own.	9 (24%)
Did not like small group learning (no reasons provided).	3 (8%)
Did not like small group learning, because of lack of participation from team members.	4 (10,5%)
Did not like the study of certain religions, such as African religions.	3 (8%)

Analysis

The value of both individual research and the communication of such research in small groups was recognised and explicitly expressed by 16 (42%) of the 38 respondents. These 16 had rated their confidence in the classroom highly (cf. Question 14). It should be noted, that of the nine respondents who objected to the amount of research which they were required to do on their own, three (cf. Table 46) had nonetheless rated their own confidence in the classroom highly in Question 14. These respondents had failed to realize the connection between the amount of research that they had conducted and their confidence in the classroom.

In some cases, respondents contradicted themselves in their responses to Questions 14, 18 and 19. Two of the respondents who had rated their own self confidence poorly in the classroom (Question 14) did so on the grounds that they did not know enough about the religions of others. Yet they indicated that the course had entailed too much in terms of self study. Another two respondents rated their own confidence highly in terms of teaching religions on the grounds that they had become more knowledgeable about the religions addressed in religion education. They too indicated in Questions 19 and 20, that the course was too intense and that the workload could have been reduced.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, a summary and analysis of the data obtained from six sets of questionnaires was presented. The information obtained from the questionnaires provided the guidelines for a programme of intervention in which second year pre-service teachers would be exposed to five principal religions practised in South Africa. The aim of the research was to determine whether a programme of intervention would influence the perceptions and attitudes of student participants towards belief systems other than their own.

The research was conducted within an action-enquiry research model, so that tutors were in a position to observe student participants as they embarked on a study of the beliefs and practices associated with principal religions of South Africa. The programme of intervention, which comprised the study of religions and strategies for teaching and learning, was underpinned by the philosophy of MLE operationalised within a co-operative learning context. Responses made by participants to the contents of the religion education teaching programme, as well as the teaching model, were considered in the redesign of the intervention programmes for the follow-up research projects in 1997 and again in 1998.

Responses to the pre-intervention questionnaires in 1996, 1997 and 1998 revealed that many of the respondents equated *religion* with instruction in a particular religious framework, viz. Christianity or Bible Education. Based on the responses to pre-intervention questionnaires therefore, it appears that the initial attitudes of students towards Religious education, at school and at college, had been coloured by the experiences of respondents of Religious education at school.

The data obtained from the 1996 and 1997 pre-intervention questionnaires yielded that respondents were opposed to Religious education in the college curriculum if it meant that they would be victims of prejudice, indoctrination and discrimination on religious grounds. Respondents were also opposed to the idea that the tutors' religious perspectives might be imposed upon them. These respondents emphasised however, that they would be in favour of a study of religions through which they could gain a broad understanding of the beliefs and practices of others. Although the majority of student participants in 1996 and 1997 were Christian, there was a fair representation of Muslim and Hindu students who in the light of the above, may have influenced the numbers who were initially negative towards Religious education.

In 1998, there were many more African students in the target group than there had been in 1996 or 1997. The student participants were affiliated to various Christian denominations mostly, and less to other major religious groups. These respondents were more positive towards Religious education at school, at college and towards teaching in this area than their 1996 and 1997 counterparts had been in the pre-intervention phase. The 1998 respondents were, however, more inclined to think of Religious education in confessional terms than their predecessors had been. This inclination amongst this group of respondents may have been the reason for the increase in the numbers who were initially positive towards Religious education. Nonetheless, this group also expressed a strong desire to learn about religions other than their own.

The responses to the post-intervention questionnaires in 1996, 1997 and 1998 indicated that there were those from amongst the respondents who had become more interested in Religious education once they realized that the study would not focus on Christianity only. It is interesting to note that participants had also become more positive once they realized that learning about religions would not mean a compromise of their own beliefs.

The responses to the post-intervention questionnaires indicated furthermore, that the approach adopted by tutors influenced the attitudes of participating students towards religions other than their own. Respondents reacted positively towards the impartiality of tutors, who focussed upon educating about religions, rather than upon promoting any particular belief system. The majority of respondents agreed that group strategies had contributed towards their understanding of religions. The possibilities created by group interaction had enabled participants to share and discuss individual research and, where there were adherents of a particular religion or religious tradition present, to provide input from a personal perspective. Active participation enabled participants to share various viewpoints and was an indication to participants that tutors had adopted a positive and unbiased stance towards religions in general.

Responses to the post-intervention questionnaires across the three years of the empirical research indicated that few of the respondents held negative perceptions towards belief systems other than their own in the post-intervention phase (cf. Tables 8 & 10, 3.4.5.1; Tables 23 & 25, 3.5.4.1; Tables 41 & 43, 3.6.4.1). Respondents who expressed uncertainty towards teaching religion education, were more concerned about their lack of knowledge and the possibility of inaccuracy when conveying information about belief systems other than their own in the classroom.

In weighing up the results of the empirical research in the light of the hypothesis for this study, it is possible to conclude that the attitudes and perceptions of student participants displayed in relation to religion education and belief systems other than their own had been influenced by MLE and co-operative learning. However, it is also possible that for

some participants MLE had overshadowed the co-operative learning context. Five participants in 1997 and 16 in 1998, indicated that they had not liked working in co-operative small groups. Nevertheless, the disillusionment expressed in relation to peers who had not contributed to their groups as they should have, does not appear to have negatively influenced the perceptions of participants towards the religions studied. It is possible that for these students, the mediational criteria communicated by tutors had been effective apart from co-operative learning. Hence, these students had differentiated between the overall approach adopted by tutors towards the contents of their learning and the context of their learning (viz. co-operative small group learning).

In spite of the above observations, the implementation of co-operative learning strategies in the intervention phase across all three years of the empirical research had clearly influenced the attitudes of the participants towards religion education. Reflection on the findings of the 1997 and the 1998 empirical research indicate that the improvement of the attitudes of a substantial number of the participants towards religion education and belief systems other than their own was linked to co-operative learning.

The information obtained from respondents by way of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires will be discussed in the light of the ten criteria for Mediated Learning Experience in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter an interpretation of the analysis of the research data as recorded in Chapter 3 will be undertaken. The purpose of this interpretation will be to determine whether the key factors that had underpinned the teaching model for religion education, viz. Feuerstein's criteria for MLE applied to co-operative learning strategies, had influenced the attitudes and perceptions of student participants towards religions other than their own. The literature review in Chapter 2 of this study provides the background to the interpretation of the research data.

In the light of the above, the chapter comprises the following:

- An evaluation of the action research model for religion education.
- An evaluation of MLE as a vehicle to bring about changes in perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions.
- The influence of the tutor/mediator on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own.

4.2 Action research design

The action research design which underpinned the empirical research for this study, contributed towards the development of a possible teaching programme for religion education (cf. 3.5.3; 3.6.3). Ten criteria for MLE and the principles for co-operative learning formed the basis of the teaching model for religion to pre-service teachers. The participants were divided into two groups, each with their own tutor. The researcher

doubled up as tutor/mediator with one of the groups in order to observe and monitor participants as they engaged in the study of religions and strategies for teaching religions (cf. 3.2). A problem associated with the researcher doubling up as both researcher and tutor means that there was no independent participant observer to monitor the activities of both tutors (McKernan, 1996:5,185). The researcher had to rely on the integrity of the research assistant or second tutor/mediator to provide an honest evaluation of the interaction with the second group of student participants. Neither of the tutors could be observed to determine whether both participating student groups were receiving the same quality of mediation.

However, tutors met frequently to reflect upon the progress of participating students and on shortcomings related to the design of the intervention programme. The responses to the questionnaires served as a valuable source whereby student participants expressed their opinions of the tutors' actions. Tutor observations of student participants at work were recorded and contributed towards planning. Observations also served as a valuable source of information and could be used to verify participant responses to the questionnaires.

Action research was found to be a valuable method of research in the field of religion education. Since the perceptions of participants towards religions were central to the study, the direct involvement of tutors in the activities and discussions of participants was essential to gain an understanding of the perceptions of participants. Ideally, action research within the context of religion education for pre-service teachers should go on beyond the scope of this study, because each new group of students will bring new insights and challenges to the classroom environment.

4.3 Application of MLE to religion education: an evaluation

In this section the criteria for MLE (cf. 2.4) will be discussed with reference to the analysis of the research data. The question to be addressed is whether the modelling of

MLE for the purposes of this study influenced the way in which student participants responded to new knowledge about belief systems.

4.3.1 Mediation of intent & reciprocity and meaning

The mediation of intent and reciprocity was defined in 3.4.3 and 3.5.3 in terms of the five *stations* or workshops in which each of five principal religions practised in South Africa was studied (cf. APPENDIX D). Mediation of meaning is relative to the effective communication of the value and significance of religion education in the college curriculum for pre-service teachers. Intent therefore is inextricably linked to meaning. Malone (1998:13) has also suggested that pro-active approaches to studies in religion may bring about changes in student attitudes and behaviour.

The effective mediation of intent, reciprocity and meaning was essential to combat negative perceptions of Religious education gained from the school environment and to encourage positive attitudes amongst participants towards religion education in the college curriculum. The research data indicates that the student participants had formed an opinion about the role or value of religion in their own training as educators and in the school environment before any intervention had taken place (cf. Table 6, 3.4.2.1; Table 17, 3.5.2.1; Table 32, 3.6.2.1).

Owing to the above, participants had to be reassured of the following to ensure reciprocity:

- Tutors would not discriminate against minority religious groups represented in religion education classes at the college.
- Tutors would not undermine the students' own particular belief systems by imposing any particular belief system upon them. This would include participants who were a-religious or not religiously inclined.

- Learning about religions would increase the knowledge of student participants to enable them to be more understanding and respectful towards their peers and eventually their own learners.
- Participation and reflection would underpin all teaching strategies related to teaching religions. The personal reflections of participants, where these were possible, of religious practices and variant traditions within the same religion were significant. Such reflections would show students that religions are not *ideal types*. As far as possible, students should be made aware of the diversity and therefore the complexity of belief systems (Geaves, 1998: 20).

The qualitative research data from the 1996, 1997 and 1998 pre-intervention questionnaires indicates that there was some expectation from amongst the respondents (38%, 45% and 40% respectively) that Religious education would include the study of a number of different religions. However, there were also respondents who anticipated that Religious education would be Bible-orientated. This latter point is particularly significant with reference to the 1998 pre-intervention questionnaire results. More of the respondents than in the previous two years (31%) had believed that Religious education would be taught from a confessional perspective. Effective mediation is significant therefore as tutors show all participants that learning about and from religions is a meaningful learning experience and is furthermore related to their professional development.

The approach adopted by tutors in order to invest meaning in the study of religions is significant. To facilitate learning about religions, tutors used combinations of the *Jigsaw*, *Learning Together* and *Group Investigation* models of co-operative learning (cf. 2.3). Working in small groups meant that student participants had to take responsibility for finding answers to the assigned station questions. Participants were also required to share information and points of view even if these were different views on the same belief system. The majority of respondents to the 1997 and 1998 post-intervention questionnaires confirmed that co-operative learning had enabled student participants to

develop their knowledge and understanding of the religions studied (cf. Table 23, 3.5.2; Table 39, 3.6.3).

In retrospect, tutors realize that participants who hold conservative views about religion need to be accommodated as far as possible so as not to alienate them from learning in this area (cf. Hausmann, 1993:15; 2.4.2). The numbers of participants from amongst the target groups who were opposed to learning about religions other than their own were few, but could not be ignored. They, more than the other participants who were in favour of the study of religions, had to be shown that they were allowed to 'feel at home' in their own particular religion or religious tradition by contributing personal experiences of rituals or practices to group or whole-class discussions (cf. Knauth & Weisse, 1995:246; 2.4.2).

Direct experience (cf. Malone, 1998:13) with materials on religions and face to face promotive interaction (cf. Johnson & Johnson, 1994:89) with peers from diverse religious backgrounds may have helped to alleviate the concerns that some students expressed pertaining to the exclusivity of their own particular truth claims. However, all participants appreciated the opportunities to share from their own personal experiences, particularly in classes where religious diversity was more obvious (1996 and 1997). A small group of participants indicated that their interest in religion education had increased when they realized that they were allowed to express their devotion to their own religion or religious tradition.

That students discover meaning in a study of religions other than their own could be the most significant of the potential for change related to MLE. Respondents themselves acknowledged that the value they had detected in religion education was important, since what they had gained at college would in turn be communicated in their own classrooms. The responses from student participants in more than 60% of cases in each year of the research project, confirms that learning about religions had been valuable in some way (Table 8, 3.4.5; Table 23, 3.5.4; Table 41, 3.6.4). Furthermore, the majority of

respondents in the post-intervention phase of each year of the research also expressed a positive orientation towards the place of religion education in the primary school (76% in 1996, 79% in 1997 and 71% in 1998). Respondents felt either that learners could be taught to respect and appreciate religious and cultural differences or that religion education could inculcate moral skills and values within learners.

The results of the research over the three year period clearly indicated that respondents had become willing participants in religion education once they realized the value that tutors would place upon learning about belief systems in general. Furthermore, participants were drawn by the emphasis placed on active participation in the learning process. That participants would have *voice* (Hook, 1994:40) was an indication to participants of the value that tutors had placed on open discussion and enquiry (cf. Table 8, 3.4.5.1; Table 22, 3.5.4.1).

4.3.2 Mediation of transcendence

In relation to the mediation of transcendence, tutors found their role to have been twofold (cf. Feuerstein *et al*, 1980:20):

- to assist participants to overcome personal biases towards religions other than their own;
- to assist participants to connect isolated *facts about religions* to the various dimensions of religions (2.4.3).

In terms of the above, evidence of the mediation of transcendence could be determined by means of whether student participants were able to offer explanations of beliefs, concepts, traditions and other phenomena in religions based on their own reading and self study. Furthermore, participants should also have been able to explain the connections between various aspects of religions and the meaning that these have for adherents or devotees (Moore & Habel, 1992:63). Dialogue within small groups, particularly where a

devotee or adherent of a particular religion or denomination was present, was particularly effective in this regard.

The research data confirms that dialogue with team members from different religious or denominational backgrounds had enhanced the participants' understanding of religious concepts (cf. 3.4.5, 3.5.4, 3.6.4). Interreligious discussions to this end were especially successful when there was greater evidence of religious diversity amongst the participants. However, eighty four percent of the 1998 target group also indicated that interaction with team members in general had enhanced their understanding of religions. The high frequency of positive responses to the questions related to co-operative group learning from the 1998 participants was significant. The target group consisted mainly of African students for whom English was not their first language. Many of these participants had found the resources difficult to access and to interpret. The majority of these participants had previously had little or no contact with people from religious backgrounds other than their own. These participants had therefore found group assistance and peer support invaluable to their learning.

It is not conclusive that all participants would be successful in transferring knowledge concerning religions accurately in the school environment. The research data does however indicate that almost all of the participants were able to transcend their own limitations and insecurities relating to religion education. Changes in student thinking were related to an increase in knowledge and understanding of the five religions (cf. Table 8, Table 23, Table 39).

The research data also indicates that in spite of the careful structuring of station materials and monitoring of group discussions by tutors, not all participating students had been able to transcend their biases and negative perceptions of religions other than their own. Those participants who had felt incapable of adopting an unbiased approach to teaching about religions were few in number in the J.C.E context, but these numbers may be higher in other teacher education institutions where student populations may be monoreligious

and/or monocultural. For this reason, tutor mediation of transcendence may need to be fine-tuned to address the perceptions of students who are unable to *bracket out* their own beliefs as they study the beliefs of others. Learning to *bracket out* is an essential skill to assist the growth of understanding of the beliefs of others as unique in their own right (cf. Moore & Habel, 1992:63).

One example where student participants experienced difficulty in this regard was related to the study of Hinduism. In the 1996 target group, a small group of Christian students could not come to terms with the Hindu God-concept. These students were unable to grasp that the use of images (*murtis*) and icons in Hindu worship is a means to a far greater end. Another example was related to three or four of the Christian students who were inclined to explain religious phenomena and doctrines in Christian terms in their written responses to the station questions. Religious concepts and doctrines would be explained comparatively rather than for their uniqueness within a particular belief system. For example, when participants were required to explain monotheism in Judaism, they indicated that *Jews do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity* without explaining what Jews do in fact believe.

4.3.3 Mediation of competence

The mediation of competence was associated with enabling participants to explain religious concepts and practices within the broader context of the classroom. Those participants who had indicated that they would cope with religion education in schools expressed that increased knowledge had contributed towards their confidence. Some participants indicated that they had been motivated by the whole approach to religion education by tutors. Since tutors had been fair and unbiased, participants felt that they could also exhibit the same attitudes towards religions other than their own in the classroom. Exposure to religions and positive attitudes demonstrated by tutors appear to have been key factors in mediating competence (cf. Table 27, 3.5.4; Table 44, 3.6.4).

Based on the research data however, it appears that some respondents were concerned that their competence in the classroom may be associated with knowing all the finer details of rituals and religious practices. These few respondents did not feel confident about teaching religion education themselves. Furthermore, respondents who did not feel confident about teaching religion education suggested that they had not had sufficient time to internalize or process the amount of information covered in the teaching programme. Such feelings of incompetence may be indicative of what Moore & Habel (1992:32) describe as *the elusiveness of understanding associated with the complexities of religious belief and practice*. Some respondents also suggested that insufficient time had been given to teaching strategies for classroom practise. Time allocation for religion education in the college curriculum will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Ideally, teaching religion education during school experiences would enhance the confidence of pre-service teachers. Three participants from the 1996 pilot study group and six from the 1997 research group were able to teach religion education during their school experiences in the same years as the research projects. Seven of the nine students taught in schools in Lenasia, a traditionally Indian suburb. These students were received positively by their host schools. Tutor observation of these students confirmed that they had demonstrated a satisfactory level of competence in terms of the transfer and application of religious knowledge in the school environment. Two students taught religion education at a school in northern Johannesburg. Their tutor confirmed that they too had demonstrated a satisfactory level of competence.

Since most schools in Gauteng persist either in the teaching of Bible Education only, or have elected to exclude Religious education in any form from the curriculum, it would be impossible to conclude whether all participating students would be capable of similar competence as was demonstrated by the students described above. In their responses to the post-intervention questionnaires, a few of the respondents explained that they lacked enthusiasm toward multi-religious education on the grounds that they were unable to put their learning into practice.

4.3.4 Mediation of sharing behaviour, self-regulation and control of behaviour.

These three criteria for MLE are linked and will therefore be discussed together.

For the purposes of this study, the mediation of sharing behaviour was interpreted within context of co-operative learning (cf. 2.3.3). Co-operative learning provided a constructivist paradigm for learning about and from religions. The types of comments made by respondents in the post-intervention questionnaires confirm some of the perceived benefits surrounding constructivist theory in relation to religion education. Student participants had evidently improved in relation to knowledge and skills pertaining to religion education as they worked together constructing knowledge about religions (cf. Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994:44; McCarthy & McMahon, 1992:18). Participants pointed out that concepts had become clearer when team members had explained these to one another. Working as a team therefore had been more beneficial than working on their own (cf. 3.6.4.1). Tutors observed that participants who did not have a good command of English would benefit from peer support within the small group context.

The 1997 and 1998 post-intervention data indicates that more than 75% of respondents were able to identify the value of co-operative learning in relation to religion education (Table 26, 3.5.4.1; Table 41, 3.6.4.1). Participants acknowledged that sharing in a group context had been beneficial in terms of improving research skills, for the clarification of concepts, for increasing their opportunities for discussion and for sharing different view points or experiences of a religious belief, tradition or practice.

Tutor observation of participants revealed that co-operative learning had also been effective in bringing about changes in students' thinking about religions. The patterns of exchange between team members indicated that participants had improved their skills of interaction. Participants were eventually able to communicate religious concepts and terminology, even if these had been encountered for the very first time in their

experience. Tutors observed that student interaction and sharing tended to increase the greater the religious diversity amongst participating students. Respondents to the 1996 and 1997 post-intervention questionnaires emphasized that attitudes such as tolerance and respect increased alongside the knowledge and understanding gained from team members as a result of sharing from an own religious perspective (cf. 3.5.4.1, 3.6.4.1).

The 1998 target group consisted mostly of adherents from various Christian denominations/movements and African traditional religions. Respondents from this group were apt to place more emphasis on the benefits of peer support in the absence of adherents from religions other than Christianity or African religions. Whether student groups were multicultural and multireligious, or monocultural and monoreligious, the outcomes of learning were the same. Participants had discovered the benefits of synthesising their various pieces of information into a more meaningful whole.

Ironically, in spite of the successes described above, 42,5% (16 of 38) of respondents indicated in Question 19 of the 1998 post-intervention questionnaire, that they had not liked small group learning (cf. Table 48, 3.6.4.1). Yet, 84% acknowledged that co-operative group learning had made a difference to their understanding of religions, 81,5% indicated that discussions with fellow students had made a difference to their understanding and 84% had agreed that learning together had made a difference to their understanding.

It must be noted that the successes or failures of co-operative learning will be dependent on how effectively participants are able to regulate and control their behaviour in relation to the activities and tasks assigned to groups. Participants in the 1997 and 1998 research projects provided similar reasons for their negativity towards co-operative learning. At least four respondents to Question 19 on the 1998 post-intervention questionnaire pointed out that lack of participation from their team members contributed towards their negativity towards co-operative learning. Four respondents in 1997 pointed out that they

had not felt confident about the accuracy of the information their team members had to share (cf. responses to Question 16, 3.6.4.1).

In the light of the above, participants who were unco-operative group members may have hindered the learning process required for participants to come to terms with religious concepts and terminology. It is interesting however, that the negativity surrounding co-operative small group learning did not influence the perceptions or attitudes of participants towards the religions studied. Generally, the positive stance adopted by student participants towards religion education meant that they were willing to engage in learning about religions. There appears to have been more frequent comment by student participants on the failure of their groups, than negative expressions towards beliefs, doctrines or practices with which they were unfamiliar or did not agree.

4.3.5 Mediation of Individuality

In structuring the teaching programme, the researcher wanted participants to examine their own religious “personality” in the face of the diverse social system of the classroom (cf. 2.4.7). Student participants in the 1996 pilot study provided the framework for the structure of the teaching programme. In their responses to the 1996 post-intervention questionnaire, respondents indicated that the emphasis on participation by tutors was an indication that their rights to religion were being respected. Emphasis on individuality by tutors therefore made a difference to the attitudes of students towards religion education. Observation of co-operative groups at work over the three year research period indicated that students were more inclined to participate in religion education when they realized that their religious identity would not be threatened in any way (cf. Table 8, 3.4.5.1).

The numbers of student participants who generally agreed that religion education has a place in the primary school are significant (cf. Table 24, 3.5.4.1; Table 39 3.6.4.1). Prior to the commencement of the intervention phase, conservative participants were inclined to point out that primary school learners would be confused by the study of religions

other than their own. Since participants were able to share from a personal perspective it appears that they realized that it was possible to learn about the beliefs of others in order to understand and appreciate them, while becoming more informed about their own (cf. responses to Question 10, 3.6.4.1). The tutor/mediator therefore plays a significant role in fostering the development of the individual personality (cf. Skuy *et al*, 1991:31) in a multi-religious class environment.

Mediation of individuality was strongly emphasised by tutors in that each member of a co-operative team was required to seek answers to station questions and activities in preparation for group sharing. Thus, an attempt was made by tutors to balance individuality with sharing by communicating the equitable status of each participant, regardless of their religious or philosophical background.

4.3.6 Mediation of goal planning

Based on student responses to the 1997 and 1998 post-intervention questionnaires, as well as tutor observations of co-operative teams at work, it appears that the majority of student participants felt that they were able to achieve the immediate goals associated with station activities. The various benefits which respondents ascribed to co-operative group learning have been interpreted as an indication of goal achievement. However, in cases where respondents had reacted negatively towards co-operative group learning, goals may not have been achieved for the following reasons:

- group learning was time consuming and there had not been sufficient time to reach conclusions;
- poor levels of interaction in groups due to lack of preparation;
- poor attendance by some participants, which hindered the progress of the groups to which they belonged.

Poor levels of interaction in some teams did not, as noted earlier, lead to negative perceptions towards religions. On the other hand, lack of commitment to individual research lead to poor levels of understanding and therefore failure by individual participants to achieve the anticipated goals in relation to the demands of each station. According to the 1998 research data, 29% only of respondents (cf. Table 47, 3.6.4.1) had clearly specified co-operative group learning as the aspect of the course that they had enjoyed the most. It was necessary for tutors to reflect on the importance of goal planning in reportback sessions at the end of each station. The necessity of goal interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1994:83) was repeatedly reviewed in these reportback sessions with participants in order to encourage more effective group interaction in subsequent activities.

Potential hindrances to the effective mediation of goal planning as described in 2.4.8, such as objections to the idea that all religions have equal claims to the truth or to particular doctrines or practices, were not experienced amongst these particular participants. Participants in each year of the research acknowledged that their tutors had been fair in their treatment of each of the religions studied. Participants from minority religious groups had indicated that they had not been treated any differently from those participants who were adherents of the majority religious group (cf. 1996 and 1997 post-intervention questionnaires).

Attempts to encourage student participants to embrace the broader goals associated with *Life Orientation* as a learning area within Curriculum 2005, as well as the demands of outcomes-based education may be hindered by a lack of transformation in schools with regard to the place of religion in the curriculum. It is possible for tutors to overcome the problems associated with time allocation and a poor work ethic in the college environment. It is, however, far more difficult to encourage pre-service teachers to embrace a new paradigm for religion education, when the school system proves to be reticent to embrace such a paradigm.

4.3.7 Mediation of Challenge

The mediation of challenge, when related to religion education, becomes particularly relevant when the tutor attempts to motivate pre-service teachers to contend with the complexities of religious and cultural diversity in the school environment. The challenges meted out to participants by tutors in this regard were numerous and will be discussed by reflecting on participant responses to questionnaires and tutor observations of participants at work.

Within the context of the religion education intervention programme, the mediation of challenge goes hand in hand with goal planning. Tutors stressed the importance of setting and achieving immediate goals related to the five stations. The challenge of achieving these goals would be realized through sheer persistence in coming to terms with what was a new field of enquiry for the majority of participants (cf. General knowledge tests, 1997 and 1998). Tutors were able to conclude that participants gained at least a basic understanding of the beliefs and practices highlighted in the station questions for each of the five religions studied.

Thus, the 1997 post-intervention responses indicate that more than 70% of respondents had approved of learning about religions other than their own, more than 60% had indicated that religion education has a place in Intermediate Phase education, and that they were competent enough to teach in this area at schools. The 1998 post-intervention responses indicate that more than 80% of respondents had approved of learning about religions other than their own, more than 70% agreed that religion education has a place in Intermediate Phase education, and more than 60% indicated that they were competent enough to teach in this area.

A further challenge lay with participants learning to address issues of belief and practice with which they disapproved or disagreed. Based on the results of the 1996 pilot study, station questions were redesigned in 1997 and 1998 to encourage participants to address certain doctrinal issues, beliefs or religious practices which some students had found

disturbing or offensive. New questions were therefore included for research with specific religious groups in mind. Examples of such beliefs or practices were:

- the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity (with Jewish and Muslim participants in mind);
- the Hindu God-concept, with the multiplicity of images and icons (with monotheistic religions in mind);
- the place of the ancestors and the role of the *isangoma* in African traditional religions (with Christian participants in mind);
- dietary laws and dress codes with all participants in mind.

Participants were required to investigate these kinds of beliefs and practices in order to understand them within a total system of belief and practice. Participants were required to investigate the historical origins or the textual context of those beliefs and practices that accentuate the differences between religions or provide answers for conflict between religions (cf. 2.4.9; Ryan, 1994:27). Beliefs and practices that were potentially areas of conflict were downplayed by tutors as areas of potential conflict and presented as phenomena of religions that participants would discuss in an atmosphere of dialogue. By setting up the structures whereby participants would engage in dialogue, tutors would encourage participants to adopt a different perspective on Religious education. The challenge to participants therefore, was to learn to accept differences and to accept the responsibility for learning the origins and contexts of differences. The development of these kinds of attitudes is significant, since pre-service teachers will in turn face the responsibility of dealing sensitively with differences between religions in the classroom context (cf. 2.4.8; Ryan, 1994:27; Orteza y Miranda, 1994:32).

The approach described above did not always alleviate the problem of negativity towards particular beliefs and practices. In the 1998 responses, one respondent indicated that he/she had not liked the study of African traditional religions, and two had not liked the study of Islam. Furthermore, a small group of students who had participated in the 1996

pilot study had not been able to reconcile studies of religions with their own personal theologies or those of the religious institutions to which they were affiliated. Participants had indicated in group discussions and in the post-intervention questionnaires that they could not teach religions other than their own in an unbiased way. The responses of participants who evidently could not study religions in an objective way will be discussed in 4.3.9 below.

4.3.9 Mediation of awareness of change

Mediation of awareness of change should not be viewed as the culmination of a process of learning and knowledge acquisition. Change, as a desired outcome of teaching and learning about religions, essentially had to be communicated continuously to participants and had to underpin all the other criteria for MLE. It can be concluded that awareness of change would be evident in the attitudes displayed by student participants towards belief systems other than their own.

The ways in which student participants acquire and process knowledge about religions has been a major focus of this study. Yet, the history of Religious education in South Africa indicates that people who were adherents of minority religions, or who maintained ties with African traditional religions, were excluded and continue to be excluded from the curricula of many public schools (cf. Summers, 1996:2,3). It is on these grounds that some of the respondents to the post-intervention questionnaires who are adherents of minority religions indicated that they had been fearful of bias and exclusion when they were first introduced to religion education at the college. Change for these students was equivalent to inclusion in the teaching programme of the college curriculum. Change also meant being recognised for the contributions that they could make to interreligious and intercultural learning.

A further element of change was connected to those participants who had been exposed to Bible or Christian education only in the school curriculum. Almost all of these

participants in 1997, like their peers from minority religions, had indicated that they wished to learn about religions practised in South Africa. These participants had explained that learning about religions had broadened their understanding of others.

The process of change amongst the 1998 predominantly African target group is particularly significant. Thirty three of the 42 respondents in the pre-intervention phase indicated affiliation to one or other of a variety of Christian denominations or movements. Thirty one percent of these respondents had believed that Religious education at the college would be confessional. Of the 42 respondents, 27 had clearly indicated that they were in favour of learning about religions other than their own in the pre-intervention phase. In the post-intervention phase, 36 of 38 respondents indicated that they had gained from the experience of learning about the religions of others. Forty seven percent of these respondents indicated in addition, that their attitudes towards others had improved, *because* they had learned a lot about the religions of others. This latter group voiced greater resistance to the demands made upon them by co-operative small group learning, than about learning about religions.

In spite of the greater numbers of participants who had demonstrated changes in their thinking about religious diversity and religion education, the few in each year who indicated that learning about the beliefs of others compromised their own beliefs, can not be ignored. For some of these participants, change was incomprehensible, for others, perhaps not quite out of reach. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conclude whether exposure to religions had increased the negative perceptions held by some participants towards religions, or whether they simply remained opposed to the concept of religion education, convinced that their own beliefs are superior.

In the next section, the potential influence of the tutor/mediator on the perceptions of student participants towards religions will be examined in the light of the above comments.

4.4 The potential influence of the tutor/mediator on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* document (1998:66) describes the teacher as a *Mediator of learning* in the following way:

The teacher will mediate learning in a manner which is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners; construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational; communicate effectively showing recognition and respect for the differences of others ”.

The inferences made in the above quotation regarding the teacher as a mediator of learning have far reaching implications for religion education and the pre-service teacher.

Tutor/mediators in the field of religion education play a significant role in assisting pre-service teachers to explore their own religious identity in a pluralist society. The assistance given to pre-service teachers to re-evaluate their religious identity and to give positive expression to that religious identity in the school environment may be one of the most important contributions to pre-service teacher development. For a teacher to exercise sensitivity to the *diverse needs of learners* and to show *respect for the differences of others*, might mean that pre-service teachers have to challenge some of the patterns of meaning that they have inherited from religious institutions, schools and parents (cf. Sharron, 1987:41).

The research data indicates that respondents had largely been appreciative of the approach to religion education adopted by tutors. That tutors had provided support and guidance on the way to understanding religions, were well informed and had promoted an atmosphere of open enquiry amongst participants, were specifically remarked upon in responses to the questionnaires. A few of the respondents indicated that they had

appreciated that tutors had not revealed their own religious backgrounds to student participants.

This neutral stance adopted by tutors in terms of their own religious affiliation was not intentional. However, tutors did not remain neutral towards the idea of developing a sympathetic understanding of religions (Rankin, 1993:2). Tutors clearly articulated their stance in this regard as well as the idea that religion education allows one the opportunity to develop one's understanding of one's own belief system, while exploring the belief systems of others. In fact, Feuerstein (Sharron, 1987:41) insisted that effective mediators should not remain neutral toward the material that they confer upon students. Tutors or teachers are mediators too of values and morality and therefore cannot *act merely as objective perpetrators of information* (Sharron, 1987:41). In spite of the comments made by participants in the context of this study, it is not necessary for teachers to refrain from declaring their religious or philosophical adherence in order to remain neutral. It may be that tutors are able to strengthen the case for religion education when students or learners know exactly what the teacher believes (Roux & Steenkamp, 1997:34).

Read *et al* (1988:6) suggests that teachers are valuable sources of information of their own religious traditions. Provided tutors do not seek to indoctrinate students into their own particular outlook, tutors should make their views available to students to explore in an educational context. The role of the tutor/mediator in the context of religion education therefore, becomes one in which as Wilson (1992:11) states, initiates people

into various forms of thought and activity in such a way that they are helped to become more well-informed, understanding and reasonable.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the results of the research data have been examined in the light of the ten criteria for MLE. The main aim of the application of the ten mediational criteria to a

teaching model for religion education was to transform the ways in which pre-service teachers think about religions. The research data revealed that the application of the universal criteria for MLE, viz. intent and reciprocity, meaning and transcendence gave rise to positive results regarding student attitudes and perceptions towards religion in the college curriculum and towards religions other than their own.

Mediation of reciprocity ensured that participants would contribute to the learning process. Transcendence would enable participants to overcome their lack of knowledge and/or bias towards religions other than their own and to offer basic explanations of beliefs, concepts and traditions.

Pro-active approaches towards studies in religions whereby participants would directly experience materials on religions were employed. Co-operative learning models such as *Learning Together* and *Group Investigation* would ensure active participation from student participants. Working together in a constructivist paradigm in an atmosphere of open inquiry therefore enabled students to rediscover their own beliefs and practices as well as to find meaning in the study of religions other than their own. Tutors attempted to create a balance between group interaction and individuality. Interreligious dialogue also contributed towards the expression of the particular religious identity of individuals.

Mediation of goal planning was associated with successful completion of all station activities. Participants would also develop research and synthesis skills consistent with the on going demands of education.

Mediation of challenge was associated with developing within participants the capacity to deal with religious and cultural diversity. For some participants challenge was linked to working through conflicting truth claims. For others, challenge entails overcoming their lack of knowledge and increasing their competence as practitioners in the field of religion education. Awareness of change was the criterion that underpinned all the other criteria

for MLE and participants were consistently motivated to contemplate the need for tolerance and respect towards others, particularly for classroom practise.

The research data indicates that student participants were influenced by the knowledge of religions and positive attitudes displayed by tutors. Direct interaction with materials and with one another, facilitated by tutors, encouraged students to accept one another's inherited worldview (Bolton, 1993:16). That more participants exhibited positive attitudes and perceptions towards religions in the post-intervention phase than negative is significant. It is possible to conclude that the tutor/mediator, as the agent for initiating positive attitudes and changes in student perceptions was an essential component of the intervention programme.

CHAPTER 5

GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study has attempted to address the potential influence of strategies for teaching religion on the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own. Furthermore, the methods by means of which pre-service teachers acquire knowledge about religions are considered crucial to the way in which teachers play out their knowledge in the social context of the classroom. The *Norms and Standards document for educators* (1998) includes knowledge of the principles and practices of religions of South Africa amongst the competences of prospective educators. For this reason active learning approaches are essential to encourage learning about religions with the purposes of widening and deepening cognitive skills, critical thinking and creative attitudes towards religious diversity in the classroom (Grimmitt, 1978:9; cf. Osman, 1992: 129).

This chapter comprises the following:

- an overview of the thesis;
- limitations of the study;
- guidelines for further implementation of religion education in colleges of education;
- recommendations for further empirical research in the field of religion education;
- concluding remarks.

5.2 Overview of the study

The first chapter of this thesis provided the background, the aims and the hypothesis of the study. The research design and methodology were explained as well as clarification provided of the terminology and concepts used.

The primary motivation for this study was to examine appropriate teaching strategies to enhance the knowledge and understanding of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own. The hypothesis for this study therefore is that the application of Feuerstein's criteria for MLE to religion education would positively influence the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own.

In chapter two an overview of relevant literature on MLE and co-operative learning was presented. The significance and benefits of learning about religions in a constructivist paradigm were discussed. Thereafter, the criteria for MLE operationalized in the context of co-operative small group learning were examined as an appropriate means for teaching and learning about religions.

In Chapter 3, a detailed account of the research methodology was presented. Details pertaining to the target group and the selection of the target group were provided. The action research model that guided the strategies for teaching religions was outlined and adapted according to the responses provided by student participants in pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. Action research allowed tutors to evaluate their own performances in the classroom, as well as to adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of student participants. A summary and analysis of the results of the research data obtained from pre- and post-intervention questionnaires was also presented.

In Chapter 4, qualitative responses to the questionnaires were discussed in the light of the ten criteria for MLE presented in Chapter 2. An attempt was made to determine the

extent of the influence of the application of the various criteria for MLE on the perceptions and attitudes of participants by examining the qualitative data provided in the questionnaires. The potential influence of the tutor/mediator on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards religions was also discussed.

In the following section, the limitations of the study will be reviewed.

5.3 Limitations of the study

5.3.1 The scope of the study

This particular study was conducted amongst second year Higher Diploma in Education Intermediate Phase students at J.C.E. The research however, enabled the researcher to draw conclusions about the students at one educational institution only. Although the research data rendered some positive and encouraging results from the target group, these results may not be reflective of pre-service teachers at other teacher training institutions, nor of the attitudes of student groups involved in other courses at J.C.E. The study was thus a case study focussing on a particular group of students at JCE only.

Furthermore, all student participants in the target groups of each year of the research project were treated as an experiment group. As there were no control groups, the potential influences of the following variables on the perceptions of religions other than the students' own could not be determined:

- levels of maturity of students (age of participants, year of study, type of course viz. degree or Higher Diploma);
- homogeneity vs. heterogeneity of classes of participants;
- the potential influence of other teaching models by means of which religions could have been presented to students.

All participants were exposed to MLE operationalized in a co-operative learning context. One of the primary aims of the research was to improve on teaching methods in the area of religion. Tutors believed therefore that it would have been unethical to withhold the teaching model used in the intervention phase of the study from one group of students for the purposes of comparison. All the results were therefore related to one teaching model viz. co-operative learning, underpinned by one educational philosophy only, MLE.

5.3.2 Structures to determine the lasting effects of MLE

Structures to determine the lasting effects of MLE on student participants were not built into the research design for this study. Therefore, it was not possible to draw any definite conclusions relating to the lasting effects of certain of the mediational criteria, particularly those related to student performance in the classroom. As noted in 4.3.3, the reticence in many public schools to implement multi-religious education meant that not all students could put their learning into practise.

The majority of respondents to the post-intervention questionnaires indicated that they felt competent enough to teach religion education. However, whether or not this competence would in fact be carried through into the school environment could not be determined for the participating student group as a whole.

5.3.3 The questionnaires as a method of obtaining data

The pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires were designed to preserve the anonymity of the student respondents. As a result, there was no way to determine the extent of modifiability in relation to the individual student's capacity to understand religious concepts and issues. The quantitative data provided information relating to

change for the participating group as a whole. Personal interviews with a sample group of participants may have provided further insight into the extent of the modifiability.

5.3.4 Allocation of time to religion education

The allocation of time to religion education on the college timetable presented various problems. An overview of religions as well as strategies for teaching religions had to be addressed in two forty-minute periods per week for approximately 24 weeks. Moreover, learning about religions is a process and time is needed for student participants to internalise relevant information and to learn to articulate this new information. Direct contact with student participants revealed that certain factors could either impede or speed up this process for individual students.

The lack of knowledge demonstrated by student participants in general was one of the factors that impeded the pace at which students could proceed through the demands of each workshop or station. The requirements of co-operative learning meant that participants had to access new information in resources, process this information and thereafter articulate the information in co-operative groups. Although participants were exposed to basic information about religions only, the expected goals were usually attained, but discussions took longer than anticipated.

However, for some students, language competence was a problem. In the 1998 research project, the majority of the student participants were not English first language speakers. These students grappled with accessing relevant information, understanding certain religious concepts, and thereafter with the articulation of such concepts. Tutor intervention around such issues took more time than was available, leaving many other areas, such as relevant teaching strategies unexplored.

5.4 Guidelines for religious educators

In spite of the limitations associated with this study, as well as some of the restraining factors described above, it is possible to draw conclusions from the results of the empirical research with respect to the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers towards belief systems other than their own. These conclusions may serve as valuable guidelines to inform and guide religious educators in other teacher training institutions and schools.

The following have been identified as relevant guidelines with support from the empirical research.

5.4.1 Tutor attitudes towards religion education

The qualitative data obtained from student participants in the research projects indicated that the attitudes towards religion education displayed by tutors was one of the major influences on the attitudes towards religion education displayed by participants. This outcome of the research confirms a point made by Kniker (1990:214) that *the teacher's attitude about religion is as important as the factual knowledge*. Educators in religion therefore need to become aware of their own biases and stereotypes in order to become sensitive towards their students' religious perspectives (Kniker, 1990:215). Student participants confirmed that they were opposed to any teaching that reflected the personal biases and prejudices of the tutor.

In colleges of education, tutors procure the task of preparing pre-service teachers to deal with their religious identity and self-understanding in a pluralist society. Not all pre-service teachers will have considered their own religious or philosophical positions in relation to others. Since they will be required to do the same for learners in the school environment, it is important that pre-service teachers are given the freedom to obtain

clarity about their own questions and self-identity in the college environment (Hausmann, 1993:16; Hook, 1994:13).

5.4.2 Religion education and the value of participation

The research data indicates that participation is essential to secure the interests of pre-service teachers towards religion education. When tutors decentralize learning strategies for teaching religions, students are motivated to explore the variety in religious beliefs and traditions and to consider the personal commitments of individuals and communities (cf. Melchert, 1995:347). This study has shown that co-operative small group learning is effective to ensure participation from students and that authoritarian approaches to learning about religions have no place in multi-religious classes (cf. 1.3; 3.7). Furthermore, co-operative learning strategies promote unbiased attitudes and encourage students to think independently.

However, participation in co-operative groups should be structured in various different ways to maintain the interest of students (cf. Bolton, 1993:16). The efficacy of co-operative learning becomes all the more evident when strategies are designed around various audio-visual stimuli, such as slides and video material, or when students present information based on their own research. Homogeneous co-operative groups may also be effective when students from similar religious backgrounds prepare presentations based on their own religious practices and traditions.

5.4.3 Religion education and educational theory

The outcomes of religion education as a successful educational enterprise will be dependent on the philosophy and the underlying educational theory adopted by educators. According to Murray (1994:5), the performance of educators in general is improved when teaching strategies are driven by educational theory. This study was underpinned

by constructivist theory concretized in a co-operative learning framework (cf. 2.4.3). Hence, the implementation of MLE in a co-operative learning framework was shown to have been successful in enhancing student thinking about religions from an educational rather than a confessional perspective.

In the context of religion education therefore, tutors should aim to develop within pre-service teachers those cognitive and practical skills required for the professional development of pre-service teachers. The qualitative data confirms that positive attitudes and perceptions towards religions were promoted by means of the teaching model (cf. 1.4). Students were encouraged to construct their own meaning by entering into dialogue with their peers and to develop independent thought about religions and religious issues (cf. Osman, 1992:53).

Learning about religions in a constructivist paradigm has numerous other benefits for pre-service teacher education than those noted above. Hayden (1993:18) points out, for example, that when students are engaged in the learning process, they practise ways of dealing with differences in opinions, beliefs and lifestyles. Students also encounter the richness of different religious traditions as well as the *people who live the religion and give it life* (Weisse, 1995:246; cf. Moore & Habel, 1992:36).

5.4.4 Religion education requires an atmosphere of dialogue

One of the criteria for MLE referred to in this study is the mediation of sharing behaviour (cf. 2.4.5). This facet of MLE should go beyond participation merely as providing answers to activities. Participatory teaching strategies in religion education should incorporate dialogue between students around the issues and concepts under investigation. Dialogue between students does not imply *interreligious* dialogue only, that is, dialogue between affiliates from different religions or denominations. Dialogue

may also occur as a by-product of individual research as students articulate information on beliefs and practices obtained from relevant resources.

Interreligious dialogue however cannot occur when students have no knowledge of their own religious beliefs and traditions. Interreligious dialogue is also limited when particular religions or denominations are not represented in a class. However, both these potential situations may be alleviated when, as Knauth & Weisse (1995:245) have suggested, students first exchange *their views* on religious and ideological *positions*. Thereafter, learning may be structured so that students seek answers to particular areas of belief and practice whether they are affiliated to the religions that espouse these beliefs or not. In this way, students who are unfamiliar with those religious traditions or denominations closest to their world of experience may rediscover their own traditions while investigating the belief systems of others.

5.4.5 Religion education and the development of critical thinking and awareness

As noted earlier in this study (2.4.3), approaches to religion education should not simply affirm religious pluralism, but aim to develop the skills of ideological criticism (Grimmitt, 1994:138). While the tutor/mediator may create a spirit of freedom in the college classroom as students engage in intercultural and interreligious communication, it is essential not to abandon the development of critical awareness in the face of developing empathetic understanding (Rankin, 1993:3).

Religion education ought not to approach religion simply from a descriptive, non-evaluative perspective. A simplistic approach to religion education has implications for the performance of pre-service teachers. Rankin (1993:3) points out that humane standards should not be overruled by the need to be tolerant or sympathetic towards other people. This means that inhumane practices or unethical behaviour should not be overlooked in religious beliefs and practices for the sake of being tolerant. The

development of a *critical consciousness* within students therefore (cf. 2.4.3; Grimmitt, 1994:141) is associated with the evaluation of ethical practises in the name of religion.

It is also essential that students become conscious of the dangers of stereotyping religious attitudes or practises based on a limited knowledge of religions. On the other hand, increased critical consciousness of one's own cultural/religious perspectives and those of others is essential to the development of independent thought around religious issues. An approach to religion that requires students to evaluate their own positions on belief, practice or lifestyle may be a new experience for many students. However, if teacher education is to be worthwhile in the arena of religion education, it is essential that the influences of ideologies on attitudes, values and beliefs are examined, debated and challenged.

Religion education may also become the means by which core values are identified in religions and explored as the means to a common identity in which all communities may share (Grimmitt, 1994:141).

5.5 Recommendations for further empirical research

This study focussed primarily upon the influence of an intervention programme on the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers towards religions other than their own. The way for further study is open in that the influences of other variables on the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers towards religions could be examined. The influence of the maturity of students, for example, on the effects of programmes of intervention may be a valuable area to investigate. Furthermore, the same research methods used in this study may be implemented in other contexts in which a particular cultural or religious ethos is represented in the target group. Follow up studies to determine the extent of the influence of MLE on students, once they are positioned in schools may also be of value.

5.6 Concluding remarks

This study has attempted to address the problem of preparing pre-service teachers for religious diversity in South African classrooms. The significance of appropriate strategies for teaching religions to pre-service teachers has been explored empirically. The results indicate that knowledge of religions and cultures practised in South Africa cannot be taken for granted in pre-service teacher education. The mediational role of educators becomes significant in the realm of religion education to counteract negative attitudes towards religion and to confront the lack of interreligious and intercultural learning experienced by South Africa's youth.

What is imperative however, is that religion education with all of its diversity and richness emerges as an area of wide spread enquiry in South Africa. The place of religion in Curriculum 2005 is evident in the Specific Outcomes in Life Orientation, Arts and Culture and the Human and Social Sciences. Since religion education, as opposed to Religious education continues to be unexplored territory for many practising educators, the development of a new ideology for religion in the curriculum hangs in the balance.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRES - THE PILOT STUDY 1996

APPENDIX A(i): Pre-intervention questionnaire February 1996.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education – second year Intermediate Phase students

- The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out how you feel about religious education at college.
- Please answer this questionnaire honestly. You do not need to write your name on it.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

1. What is your religious affiliation? _____

If Christian, state your denomination, e.g. Methodist, Catholic

2. What was the name of the religious period at your school?

e.g. Bible Education, Right Living etc. _____

3. Rate the value that Religious education (or equivalent) held for you at school?

Circle one of the following:

None				A lot
1	2	3	4	5

4. What is your attitude towards Religious education at college?

Completely negative				Very enthusiastic
1	2	3	4	5

5. How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

Strongly negative				Strongly positive
1	2	3	4	5

6. Briefly note what you consider the role of religion to be today:

(6.1) At schools _____

(6.2) In society _____

7. You are invited to provide additional comments related to 6.1 and 6.2 above ?

Thank you for your participation.

February 1996.

APPENDIX A(ii): Post-intervention Questionnaire: October 1996.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education - second year Intermediate Phase students.

- The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine how you felt about the Religious education course presented to you this year.
- Please answer this questionnaire honestly.
- This is a confidential questionnaire. You do not need to write your name on it.

1. State your religious affiliation.

2. How did you feel about a compulsory Religious education course at J.C.E. when you started out in February 1996?

3. What did you think the Religious education course would include?

4. If you were negative towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?

5. If you were positive towards a course in religious education, could you explain why?

6. How did you feel about multi-religious education:

(6.1) When it was first introduced to you?

(6.2) Now that you have completed the course?

As a result of your answer to no. 6, answer either question 7 or question 8.

7. If your attitudes towards multi-religious education changed from positive to negative, could you explain why?

8. If your attitudes towards multi-religious education changed from negative to positive, could you explain why?

9. If you are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or affiliated to any other religion than Christianity, how did you feel that your lecturers were not affiliated to your particular religion?

10. Have these feelings changed now that you have completed the course?

11. Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?

12. How would you rate your confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching multi-religious education? Rate on a scale of 1-10, where 1-4 =negative, 5=unsure and 6-10=positive? Write your response in the box below.

Please motivate your response.

13. If there is anything you would change or add to a Religious education course such as this one, what would those changes be? Please answer briefly.

14. Do you think that methods applied by lecturers would make a difference to the attitudes of college students towards multi-religious education?

Thank You for participating.

October 1996.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES - RESEARCH PROJECT 1997.

APPENDIX B(i): Pre-intervention Questionnaire February 1997.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education - second year Intermediate Phase students.

- The purpose of this questionnaire is to establish how you feel about Religious education at college.
- Please answer this questionnaire honestly. You do not need to write your name on it.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

PART I: Personal details and attitudes towards Religious education.

1. What is your religious affiliation? _____

If Christian, state your denomination, e.g. Methodist, Catholic

2. What was the name of the religious period at your school?

e.g. Bible Education, Right Living etc. _____

3. Rate the value that Religious education (or equivalent) held for you at school?

Circle one of the following:

None				A lot
1	2	3	4	5

4. What is your attitude towards Religious education at college?

Completely negative				Very enthusiastic
1	2	3	4	5

5. How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

Strongly negative				Strongly positive
1	2	3	4	5

6. Please give reasons for your answer to question 5 above.

7. Do you think that religion has any value in schools in a democratic society?

8. How do you feel about learning about religions other than your own?

PART II: General Knowledge Questionnaire – religions in South Africa.

Please answer these questions on the religions practised in South Africa.

(Answer as best you can)

1. For which religion is Ramadan a holy month? _____
2. What is Holi? _____
3. When does the Jewish Sabbath start? _____
4. Where in South Africa is there a Buddhist community? _____
5. Which group of Christians do not celebrate birthdays or Christmas?

6. For whom is *Mass* important? _____
7. What do Jewish people celebrate during the festival of Passover?

8. Who celebrates *Diwali*? _____
9. Which group of people celebrate Easter at Moriah near Pietersburg?

10. Who was the founder of Islam? _____
11. What do Christians mean when they speak about God as a *Trinity*?

12. What is the importance of circumcision in African traditional religions?

13. What is the name of the building in which Muslims worship? _____
14. What is the name of the building in which Jewish people worship?

15. Do people from African traditionalist backgrounds pray to God?
Yes/No (tick the option which you prefer) because _____

Thank You for participating. February 1997

APPENDIX B(ii): Post-intervention Questionnaire October 1997.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education - second year Intermediate Phase students.

- The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine how you felt about the religious education course presented to you this year.
- Please answer this questionnaire honestly.
- This is a confidential questionnaire. You do not need to write your name on it.

1. State your religious affiliation.

2. How did you feel about a compulsory Religious education course when you started out in February 1997? Place a cross in the block alongside the appropriate answer.

Very negative		Suspicious of the course	
Did not mind		Very enthusiastic	

COMMENTS:

3. What did you think the Religious education course would include?

4. If you were negative towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?

5. If you were positive towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?

6. How did you feel about multi-religious education:

(6.1) When it was first introduced to you?

(6.2) Now that you have completed the course?

7. How would you rate your attitude towards multi-religious education on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=strongly negative, and 5=strongly positive:

- 7.1 When it was first introduced to you?

Write the appropriate number in the box.

- 7.2 Now that you have completed the course?

Write the appropriate number in the box.

As a result of your answer to question 7, answer either question 8 or question 9 or question 10.

8. If your attitude towards multi-religious education changed from positive to negative, could you explain why?

9. If your attitude towards multi-religious education changed from negative to positive, could you explain why?

10. If your attitudes did not change in any way, could you explain why?

11. If you are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, African traditionalist or affiliated to any other religion than Christianity, how did you feel that your lecturers were not affiliated to your particular religion?

Strongly negative		Suspicious	
Did not mind		Impressed	

COMMENTS:

12. Have these feelings changed now that you have completed the course?

13. Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?

14. How would you rate your confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching multi-religious education? Rate your response on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=strongly negative, 3=uncertain and 5=strongly positive.

Write the number in the box.

15. Could you please elaborate on your answer to question 14 above.

16. Do you think that group work strategies instead of lectures made a difference to your understanding of the religions studied this year? Place a cross in the appropriate box.

Yes		No	
Unsure			

COMMENTS:

17. Do you think that discussions with fellow students from different religious backgrounds have made a difference to your understanding of religions other than your own?

Thank You for participating

October 1997.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRES - RESEARCH PROJECT 1998.

APPENDIX C(i): Pre-intervention Questionnaire February 1998.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education - second year Intermediate Phase students.

- The purpose of this questionnaire is to establish how you feel about Religious education at college.
- Please answer this questionnaire honestly. You do not need to write your name on it.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

PART I: Personal details and attitudes towards Religious education.

1. What is your religious affiliation? Place a cross in the appropriate block.

Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	African traditional
-----------	--------	--------	-------	----------	------------------------

If Christian, state your denomination, e.g. Methodist, Catholic

If Hindu, elaborate on your background, e.g. Tamil, Hindi.

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2. Indicate the age group to which you belong by crossing the appropriate block.

18-21	22-25	over 25
-------	-------	---------

3. Indicate the area in which you live at the moment.

College residence (Girton etc.)	Southern Suburbs of Johannesburg	Northern Suburbs of Johannesburg	Eastern Suburbs of Johannesburg
West Rand (Florida, Roodepoort etc.)	Soweto	Vosloorus/Katlehong/ Thokoza	Lenasia
Eldorado Park	East Rand (Alberton, Boksburg, Benoni etc.)	Vereeniging/ Vanderbijlpark	Other

If you have selected *Other*, use the space below to specify where you live.

4. Where do your parents live?

5. What was the highest grade/standard at school passed by your parents?
Place a cross in the appropriate box.

5.1. Mother

Less than Std. 5	Std. 6	Std. 7	Std. 8	Std. 9	Std. 10
---------------------	--------	--------	--------	--------	---------

5.2. Father

Less than Std. 5	Std. 6	Std. 7	Std. 8	Std. 9	Std. 10
---------------------	--------	--------	--------	--------	---------

6. Do either of your parents have a tertiary qualification? (degree or diploma)
Place a cross in the appropriate block.

YES	NO
-----	----

7. How many children are there in your family?

Write the number in the box.

8. What is your position in your family? (e.g. 1=eldest, 2=second child and so on).

Write the number in the box.

9. What was the name of the religious period at your school? Place a cross in the appropriate box.

Bible Education	Jewish Studies	Islamic Studies	Religious Education
Right Living	Cultural studies	Scripture	No religion taught

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If none of the above apply, state the name of the subject at your school in the space provided.

10. Indicate the value that Religious education (or equivalent) held for you at school.

Place a cross in the box alongside the option that you agree with the most.

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

11. What is your attitude towards a course in Religious education at college?

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

Give a reason for your response

12. How do you feel about teaching Religious education at school?

(See options on the next page)

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Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

Give a reason for your response

13. Rate each of the statements below on a scale of 1-5, where 1=strongly disagree, 3=uncertain and 5=strongly agree. Write the appropriate number in the boxes alongside the statements.

I. Primary school learners should receive instruction in their own particular religion only.	
II. It is possible for teachers to teach about religions other than their own without being biased.	
III. Primary school children should learn to appreciate all aspects of world religions.	
IV. Primary school learners would become confused by learning about religions other than their own.	
V. Primary school learners should be given the opportunity to learn about the religious practices and lifestyles of their peers.	
VI. Primary school learners should not be taught to favour one religious view over another.	
VII. Religious education should focus on descriptions of religions only, rather than on the personal experiences of the child.	
VIII. Religious education should be taught by teachers who are of the same faith background as the learners.	
IX. Primary school learners should be allowed to share their personal experiences of religious life with their peers.	

COMMENTS:

14. How do you feel about learning about religions other than your own?

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

Give a reason for your response:

Thank you for participating

February 1998.

PART II: General Knowledge Questionnaire – religions in South Africa.

Please answer these questions on the religions practised in South Africa.

(Answer as best you can)

1. For which religion is Ramadan a holy month? _____
 2. For which group of people is Diwali an important festival? _____
 3. When does the Jewish Sabbath start? _____
 4. Where in South Africa is there a Buddhist community? _____
 5. Which group of Christians do not celebrate birthdays or Christmas? _____
 6. For whom is *Mass* important? _____
 7. What do Jewish people celebrate during the festival of Passover?

 8. Which group of people celebrate Easter at Moriah near Pietersburg? _____
 9. Who was the founder of Islam? _____
 10. What is the importance of circumcision in African Traditional religions?

 11. What is the name of the building in which Muslims worship? _____
 12. What is the name of the building in which Jewish people worship? _____
-

APPENDIX C(ii): Post-intervention questionnaire October 1998.

JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Religious education - second year Intermediate Phase students.

- Please answer these questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers.
- We want to know how you feel about multi-religious education (learning about the various religions of the world, and those practised in South Africa).
- This questionnaire is confidential – you do not need to write your name on it.
- Please read the questions carefully.

1. What is your religious affiliation?

Place an X in the appropriate.

Judaism	Christianity (Catholic)	Christianity (Protestant)	Islam	Hindu	African Traditional Religions	No religion
---------	----------------------------	------------------------------	-------	-------	-------------------------------------	----------------

If you are Hindu, please specify (eg. Tamil, Hindi etc) _____

If your religious or philosophical orientation is not mentioned above please specify _____.

2. Should there be a compulsory Religious education course at colleges of education?

Place a cross in the appropriate box.

Yes	No
-----	----

Please give reasons for your answer to Question 2.

3. What did you think the Religious education course at JCE would include when you started out in February 1998?

4. How did you feel about learning about religions practised in South Africa?
Place an X next to the appropriate response.

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

COMMENTS:

5. If you were negative towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?

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6. If you were positive towards a course in Religious education, could you explain why?

7. How would you rate your attitudes towards learning about religions other than your own? Place an X next to the response that corresponds to your view.

- 7.1. When it was first introduced to you?

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

- 7.2. Now that you have completed the course?

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

As a result of your answer to question 7, answer either question 8, or question 9, or question 10.

8. If your feelings towards learning about religions changed from positive to negative, could you explain why?

9. If your feelings towards learning about religions changed from negative to positive, could you explain why?

10. If your feelings towards learning about religions did not change in any way, could you explain why?

11. How did you feel, when you started the course, that your lecturers were not necessarily of the same religious or philosophical background as yourself?

Place an X next to the response that corresponds to your view.

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Positive	
Strongly positive	

COMMENTS:

12. Have these feelings about who taught you changed now that you have completed the course?

YES	NO	UNSURE
-----	----	--------

COMMENTS:

13. Do you think that multi-religious education has a place in the primary school?
Place an X next to the response that corresponds to your view.

Strongly disagree	
Disagree	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Agree	
Strongly agree	

COMMENTS:

14. How would you rate your own confidence in the classroom with regard to teaching about religions other than your own? Place an X next to the response that corresponds to your view.

(Please turn over for scale)

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Strongly disagree	
Disagree	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Agree	
Strongly agree	

Please give reasons for your response.

15. Do you think that co-operative group strategies instead of lectures made a difference to your understanding of the religions other than your own studied this year?

Strongly negative	
Negative	
Neutral/Uncertain	
Agree	
Strongly agree	

Please give reasons for your response.

16. Do you think that discussions with fellow students made a difference to your understanding of religions other than your own?

YES	NO	UNSURE
-----	----	--------

Please give reasons for your response.

17. Do you think that the approach adopted by your lecturers/tutors made a difference to your understanding of religions?

YES	NO	UNSURE
-----	----	--------

Please give reasons for your response.

18. What did you enjoy the most about this course?

19. What did you like the least about this course?

20. What changes would you make, if any?

Thank you for participating.

October 1998.

APPENDIX D STATIONS

The following workshops or *stations* were compiled for the religion education intervention phase of the empirical research. The final form of the stations as presented in the 1998 research project only have been included, since these expanded on the 1996 and 1997 stations. Approximately 6-8 forty minute sessions were assigned to each station.

Instructions to students

1. You are required to work in groups of four.
2. You will be required to investigate answers to the questions set out for each station.
3. It is important that you come to classes prepared to share and to discuss information with your team members.
4. Assist one another by explaining concepts and terminology, particularly if you are studying the beliefs and practices from your own religious background.
5. Your own research will contribute towards group projects and presentations.

STATION 1

JUDAISM

1. What makes a person Jewish?
2. The beginnings of the Jews as a people are usually traced back to a person called Moses and an event known as the *Exodus*. Summarise the events that led to the Exodus and explain why these events are still remembered by Jews today. Write up the summary in the form of an interesting article for Intermediate Phase learners (Grade 4 – 7).
3. The idea that God is One is a basic tenet of Judaism. How is this monotheistic idea interpreted in Judaism?
3. Many religions have bodies of sacred scripture. What are the Jewish sacred scriptures? What role do these scriptures play in the religious life of a Jew?

4. Jewish people worship in a building known as a *synagogue*. Draw a floor plan of a synagogue and locate the following features of a synagogue on your floor plan:

- (i) The Holy Ark
- (ii) bema
- (iii) seats for men
- (iv) seats for women
- (v) Ner Tamid

Construct a key for your floor plan, and briefly explain the significance of each of these features.

Examine a picture of the inside of a synagogue. What do you observe concerning the décor of the inside of a synagogue?

- 5. What is the most important day of the week for Jewish people? How would this day be spent by an Orthodox Jewish family?
- 6. The life of a Jewish person is marked by important milestones. Find out what these milestones or stages in life are and describe the most important practices associated with each one.

7. The Jewish Calendar

Refer to a 1998 calendar. Find the dates of each of the Jewish festivals listed below.

Passover (see your notes on Moses and the Exodus), Purim, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkoth, Hannukah.

Now, investigate the essence of these festivals using the guidelines provided below:

- (i) Historical reasons for the festival
- (ii) Special practices, rituals or symbols associated with the celebration/commemoration of the festival
- (iii) Religious significance for Jewish people today.

Please note: the self study relating to Questions 7 and 8 should be equally divided amongst the members of your team (Jigsaw). Each team member will have the responsibility of teaching a particular rite of passage and a particular festival to the other members of the team.



STATION 2

CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity is said to be a universal religion. What do you think this means?
2. How would you explain to somebody who has never come into contact with Christianity, who or what a Christian is?
3. Jesus of Nazareth is revered by Christians as the founder of Christianity. Write a short **article** (one page) on the life of Jesus. Present your information for a multi-religious audience.

Do not write from memory if you are a Christian. Give careful consideration as to **how** you should present information in this type of article.

4. Christians believe that God is a Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Explain the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity.
5. All Christians direct their lives by the teaching and example of Jesus, yet there are more than 10 000 Christian denominations in the world today!!

You are going to spend some time exploring this sometimes controversial, yet fascinating aspect of Christianity.

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- (i) Begin by explaining in your own words what “denomination” means in relation to Christianity.
- (ii) Why do you think there are so many different denominations in contemporary Christianity?
- (iii) Three major groups within the Christian Church are:
 - Roman Catholic
 - Orthodox
 - Protestants.

Provide three defining characteristics of each of these broad groupings within Christianity in order to highlight the differences between them (origins, organisation, rituals).

6. There are many different African Independent Churches in South Africa today, the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) being the largest. Identify and explain two features of the ZCC.
7. Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist (Holy Communion) are amongst the significant rituals in Christianity.
 - (i) Write short descriptions of these rituals in Christian practise.
 - (ii) What significance do these rituals have in the lives of those who practise them?
 - (iii) Different denominations have different ways of practising these rituals, particularly baptism and Confirmation. Identify specific examples where such differences exist between denominations. Find out the reasons for such differences (e.g. Infant baptism and adult baptism by total immersion.

8. The Christian Calendar.

Refer to a 1998 calendar. Find the dates for Easter and Christmas, two significant Christian festivals.

- (i) What were the origins of these festivals and what religious significance do these have for Christians today?
- (ii) How do members of the ZCC celebrate Easter?
- (iii) Give reasons why Jehovah's Witnesses do not recognise Easter, Christmas or birthdays as days of commemoration.

9. The following are symbols in a number of Christian denominations:

- water
- light (especially the lighting of candles)
- the cross
- a white dove.

Find out what these symbols mean for Christians (2 –3 lines).



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STATION 3

ISLAM

1. What do the terms *Islam* and *Muslim* mean?
2. The origins of Islam are associated with a key figure known as *Muhammed*. Refer to the resources available on Islam and write an article on the life of Muhammed for use by Intermediate Phase educators. Be selective, and include the most relevant information only.

Consider the following:

- the way in which material on the life and activities of Muhammed would be presented if one is Muslim, and then if one is not Muslim. Compare the presentation of such an article with the one written on the life of Jesus or Moses;
- the type of information you would include so that both Muslim learners and learners who are not Muslim can learn **from** stories about Muhammed.

Length of article: 2-2 ½ pages

3. Islam teaches that there are five ways in which a Muslim is expected to serve and worship God. These are called the Five Pillars.

Research each of the Five Pillars and present your material in the form of an information booklet for Intermediate Phase educators. The Group Investigation method must be used for this study of the Five Pillars.

Include the following in your presentations of the information:

- 3.1. Why do you think the idea of *pillars* is used?

- 3.2. There are various important beliefs and practices or rituals associated with each of the Five Pillars. Highlight some of the main beliefs and practices and provide brief explanations for these.
 - 3.3. In relation to the First Pillar, examine a photograph or picture of Muslim art and/or architecture. What do you notice about Muslim art and architecture? What does Muslim art reflect concerning Muslim belief about God?
 - 3.4. Include simple sketches, maps etc. where appropriate to aid your explanations, particularly in relation to the Second and Fifth Pillars.
-
4. The sacred text of Islam is known as the Qur'an. Explain the origins of the Qur'an according to Muslim belief.
 5. How do Muslims view the Qur'an in relation to the Torah in Judaism and the New Testament writings of Christianity?
 6. The Muslim Calendar
Consult a 1998 diary. Find the dates for the following holy days in Islam:
 - Ramadan & Eid ul Fitr
 - Eid ul Adha - note the main activities and spiritual significance associated with this festival.
 7. Examine pictures, photos or diagrams of the inside of a mosque. What do you observe? Now describe the typical features of a mosque, both inside and outside.
 8. Devout Muslim men and women dress in a distinctive way. Provide a brief description of how Muslim men and women dress, and explain why.
 9. In Muslim countries social and political life is organised around upholding Muslim laws.
 - What problems do you think Muslims living in South Africa would experience with upholding religious laws?
 - How do you think this impacts on the school environment?

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Discuss these issues with the members of your group and consider the following, amongst others:

- Should *halaal* foods be sold in tuckshops?
- Should Muslim dress codes be allowed to impact on the wearing of school uniforms?
- Prayers from 12 noon to about 2.30 pm on Fridays?
- Types of food served at school functions.



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STATION 4
HINDUISM

The two passages below reflect Hindu concepts of God. Read these carefully.

**I am immortality and death
What is and what is not Arjuna.**

**I am the source of all.
All things come forth from me.**

**I am the beginning and the end
And the middle of all creations.
I am the knowledge of the soul.
I am the discourse of all who speak.
I am the gambling of the cheat
The sharp edge of the brilliant.**

**I am victory. I am effort.
I am courage to the stout-hearted.**

**Understanding, knowledge, non-delusion
Patience, restraint, truth, serenity.
Courage and fear, joy and sorrow.
Rising up and passing away.**

**Harmlessness, equanimity, content,
Austerity, open-handedness
Fame, ill-fame, however various,
These states of being arise from me alone.**

**And whatever is the seed of all beings
That I am, Arjuna.
No creature that moves or does not move
Could exist without me.**

(From: The Baghavad Gita)

'Then Vidadga Sakalya asked him: "How many gods are there, O Yagnavalkya?"

He replied with this very Nivid (formula)"

'As many as are mentioned in the Nivid of the hymn of praise addressed to the Visvedevas. that is three and three hundred, three and three thousand.'

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'Thirty three', he said.

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'Six', he said.

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'Three', he said.

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'Two', he said.

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'One and a half', he said.

'Yes,' he said, and asked again: 'How many gods are there really, O Yagnavalkya?'

'One', he said.

'Yes', he said and asked: : Who are these three and three hundred, three and three thousand?'

Yadnavalkya replied, 'They are only the various powers.....'?

(From: The Upanishads)

1. Refer to the extracts above. What ideas do these extracts provide concerning the Hindu view of the Divine? Share your ideas with your group members.
2. Examine the sketches of Hindu deities (gods) on Sheet 4.1. Describe the Hindu beliefs associated with the worship of Shiva, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Ganesha and Krishna. Give examples of when these deities would be worshipped.

Note: You should share the workload involved in answering this question. Each team member researches one of the deities and reports back to the team.

3. An interesting characteristic of Hinduism is the use of images or idols in worship. Examine the sketches of the Hindu deities (gods) on Sheet 4/1 and 4/2.
- (i) What do you notice about the deities? Discuss your observations with your group.
 - (ii) Hinduism is a religion which is rich in imagery and symbolism. Identify as many symbols as you can in the sketches of the deities on Sheet A and attempt to find out the meanings of these symbols (e.g. the lotus flower). Meanings of these symbols will be discussed with your class as a whole.
 - (iii) What is the purpose of the images or *murtis* in Hindu worship.
4. Examine a slide or poster of a Hindu shrine.
- (i) Where is one most likely to find such a shrine?
 - (ii) The term used by Hindus to refer to acts of devotion and worship at a shrine is *puja*. *Puja* can be conducted in one's home and in a temple. Provide brief descriptions of *puja* at home, and *puja* in the temple.
5. Examine the diagram on Sheet 4/3 and the cartoon. Use these to explain the Hindu concept of time and destiny. Begin by finding the meanings of the following terms (see Diagram 1):
- (i) atman
 - (ii) samsara
 - (iii) karma
 - (iv) moksha

Now explain the connections between these terms in relation to the diagram.

- (v) In what way do the teachings on *karma* and *samsara* contribute to an understanding of evil and suffering in Hindu belief?

6. Hindus have developed at least three main paths which they believe will lead to salvation. Find out what these three main paths to salvation entail.
(3-4 lines on each)
7. The life of individual Hindus is regulated by life cycle rituals or *samskaras*: birth sacred thread ceremony, marriage and death. Describe the rituals associated with each of these *samskaras* and explain the religious significance of these. Present your information for use by Grade 6 learners.
8. Explain why many Hindus are vegetarians and why all (or most) Hindus do not eat beef.
9. The most well known of all Hindu festivals is Diwali.
 - (i) Consult a 1998 diary and find the dates for Diwali (North India and South India).
 - (ii) Describe the festival of Diwali, the reasons behind it and the main symbols and rituals associated with this festival. You must make reference to the following important figures: Rama and Sita or Lakshmi.



Sheet 4/1

Hindu deities



Brahma the creator, facing four directions.



Lord Vishnu and his attributes



Shiva



Lakshmi



Muruga

Sheet 4/2

Ganesha



Sarasvati



Kali



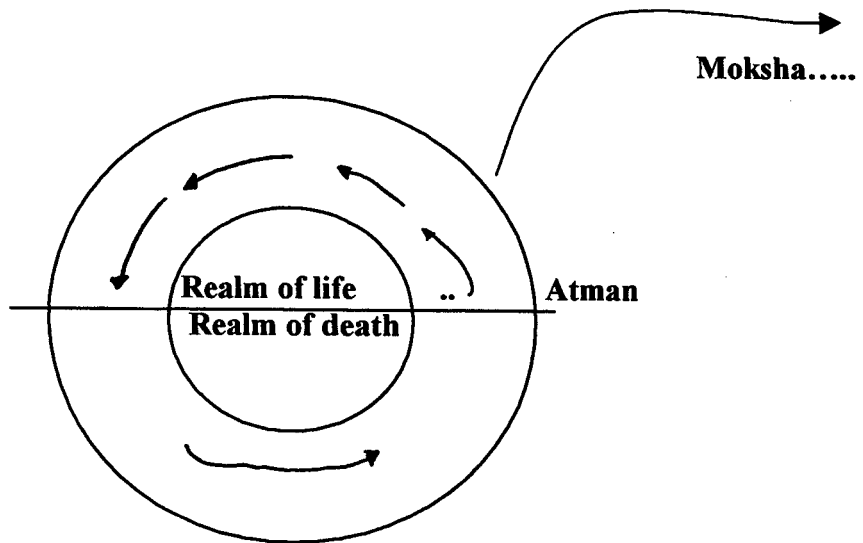
Krishna

The illustrations of Hindu deities extracted from:

1. Demariaux JC. 1995. *How to understand Hinduism*. London: SCM Press.
2. Diesel A, Maxwell P. 1993. *Hinduism in Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

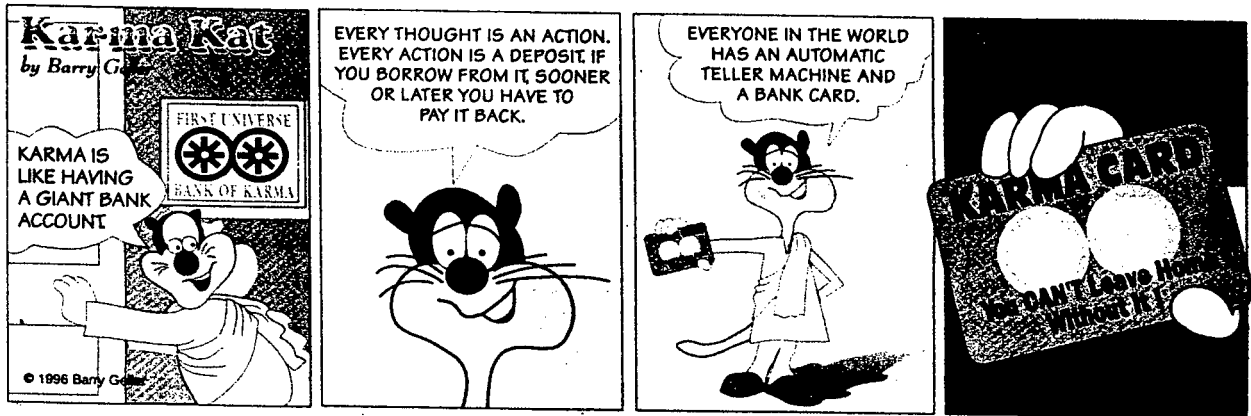
Sheet 4/3

1.



Hindu concept of time and destiny

2.



From: Lovelace A & White J. 1997. *Beliefs, values and traditions. Hinduism.* Oxford: Heinemann.

STATION 5
AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

1. What is meant by the term *African traditional religions*? Share your answers with your group.
2. Read the reconstructions of the Tswana and Zulu creation myths (included on Sheet 5/1 below).
 - 2.1 What functions do you think myths such as these have in traditional African life?
 - 2.2 Discuss with the members of your group the possible similarities between these stories.
 - 2.3 What role does God appear to play in these myths?
 - 2.4 Now refer to any of the prescribed readings on African traditional religions. Provide an explanation of the African traditionalist understanding of God. Share your answers with the members of your group. Decide, as a group, how this perception of God is evident in the two examples of creation myth.
3. The *ancestors* play an important role in the worldview of African traditionalists. Find out the following and share your answers with your group:
 - 3.1 the function of the ancestors;
 - 3.2 how the ancestors communicate with people;
 - 3.3 why the living make sacrifices to the ancestors.
4. Why would an African traditionalist consult:
 - 5.1 an *isangoma* (a diviner)
 - 5.2 an *inyanga* (a herbalist)?

6. Read the newspaper report below on witches and witchcraft in Northern Province (included as Sheet 5/2). Share your responses to the following questions with the members of your group.

6.1 How, according to this report, is the problem of evil dealt with in traditional African society in Northern Province?

6.2 What picture emerges of the so called activities of the witches or sorcerers?

6.3 The writer of this article comments as follows:

The picture that emerges from the report is of mass hysteria fuelled by envy and greed.

What do you think the writer meant in this statement? Do you agree?

Summarise your group's response.

7. African traditional life is regulated by life cycle rituals or rites of passage. Provide brief explanations about the birth rituals, initiations into adulthood, marriage and death. Divide the tasks between the members of your group and write a group summary in the form of an informative article for teachers who want to improve their understanding of African traditional religions.

Note: There may be variations between groups, such as the Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa etc.

Refer to such variations should these be significant.

Sheet 5/1

A Tswana creation myth.

In the beginning, Modimo had its abode in a hole underground the earth. Mosima was a place of green fields covered with mist. It was characterised by people living in harmony and at ease. Animals such as cattle and goats grazed in the fields. Loowe, a one legged agent of divinity was the escort to those who came out of the hole, either by agreement or to fulfill the will and purposes of Modimo. They came out together; men with their wives, children and animals – cattle, sheep, goats and dogs. Loowe returned into the hole, leaving the people and the animals on the surface to inhabit it and to make a home in it.

Based on: Setiloane GM. 1986. *African theology. An introduction.* (Adapted)

A Zulu creation myth

A mischievous young man was once punished by iNkosi by being sent to earth through a hole in the sky. After the hole had been opened in the floor of the sky, iNkosi tied an umbilical cord around the young man's waist and lowered him to earth. The young man then cut himself loose from the cord connecting him to the sky by means of a reed.

Later, when iNkosi checked on the boy through the same sky opening, he found him wasting away from loneliness. Since iNkosi himself was the father of the boy, he decided to send the most beautiful young sky maiden to comfort him and to be his wife. She too was lowered to earth by means of a cord and she found the youth near a banana plant. When the young man saw the girl, he realised that she had come from the lord of the sky. He cut her cord as he had cut his own, whereupon iNosi drew it back into heaven and closed the hole in the floor of the sky. Henceforth, people could multiply on earth and were no longer lonely, seeking to return to heaven.

Extracted from: Kruger JS, Lubbe GJA, Steyn HC. 1996. *The human search for meaning.*

A multireligious introduction to the religions of humankind. Pretoria: Via Afrika

Darkness is alive and well in the Northern Province, fuelled by mass hysteria and envy, writes IVOR POWELL

THE trouble started for Abram Maharala when two of his sons came home to his tiny village in the Bochum district of the Northern Province after a stint of migrant labour in Johannesburg, bringing with them a deluxe new ghetto-blastar.

Days later, Mr Maharala's life had been turned upside down. His house had been reduced to ashes, his property seized or destroyed.

He, the mother, and their five children had been forced to flee for their lives.

What had happened was

Mr Maharala's other wife had accused him of practising as a *molofo*, or wizard. As proof, she offered the image of the two sons dancing late into the night with their new sound system.

Only, in her version, the boys had been turned into zombies and their late-night gyrations interpreted as ritual communion with the forces of darkness.

Down the dusty road lives sangoma Maggie Mokhojwana, whose family was driven out from the village of Siekuruw after lightning struck one of the houses in the village.

She wasn't even there at the time, but her husband's brother insisted she did it, and that was good enough.

These are only two of the more than 150 people found guilty of witchcraft by traditionalist kangaroo courts, who live as refugees at the Helena Trust Farm outside Pietersburg.

The Helena Trust is only one of 10 such places of refuge in the Northern Province.

They are the human face that lies behind the Summit on Witchcraft called this week in Pietersburg by the Northern Province Council of Churches.

The conference follows a report published last month by the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft, Violence and Ritual Killings instituted last year, under chairman Professor Victor Ralushai, by the Northern Province's ministry of safety and security.

It showed that more than 300



OUTCAST . . . sangoma Maggie Mokhojwana and her family were forced to flee their village

Picture: NICKY DE BLOIS

report is of mass hysteria fuelled by envy and greed.

One case study cited by the commissioners tells the story of a man by the name of Johannes Mpai in the village of Dibeng. When a certain woman in the village was struck by lightning, no fewer than eight diviners were consulted.

Of the eight, three said they divined nothing, four identified an unspecified woman from another village and one identified Mr Mpai as the culprit.

But, despite the disagreement of the experts, the crowd that had gathered brutally stoned and burnt the unfortunate Mr Mpai.

Another case, cited by a tradition-

al healer at Friday's conference, had members of a village community tampering with the tape recording of a sangoma's pronouncements to insert the names of the culprits they wanted to find.

Despite the dubiousness of the motives behind the killing of suspected witches, the commission unambiguously stated that "the overwhelming majority of people interviewed in both urban and rural areas still believe in witchcraft", and that, although only one killing is on record in the past year, the belief in witches continues to constitute a danger in traditional societies.

The commissioners went a step further, suggesting that the Suppres-

ban the use of body parts as muti.

sion of Witchcraft Act of 1957 be repeated, because it fails "to draw a clear line between the so-called witch, the sorcerer and the witchfinder".

Part of the problem is that any kind of "witchdoctoring" or supernatural activity is effectively banned, including most forms of African traditional healing.

Legislation proposed by the commission wants to drive a wedge between traditional healing and the darker practices of witchcraft. It proposes a register and a formal association of traditional healers bound by a rigorous code of conduct — which would, among other things, ban the use of body parts as muti.

The role of education (on matters like the natural causes of lightning) is equally stressed, as is the role that traditional leaders could play in controlling outbreaks of hysteria.

At the same time, harsh penalties are envisaged for those who sniff out witches, especially in cases which lead to violence.

The Northern Province's minister of safety and security, Advocate Seth Nthwal, summed up the government's attitude at the conference when he said he had no intention of interfering with people's beliefs.

It was just that witchcraft should not be countered with witchcraft. When it spilt over into violence, it became a matter for the law.

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