Young people’s dis/engagement with religion in contemporary society
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Young People’s Dis/engagement with Religion in Contemporary Society: Implications for Religious Education in Botswana

The paper examines how young people in Botswana dis/engage with religion in contemporary society, and the implications of this dynamic on Religious Education (RE) as a school subject. It interrogates how young people dis/engage with religion in contemporary society, and the implications of this dynamic on school RE in Botswana. It demonstrates how the beliefs and experiences of contemporary young people in Botswana are influenced superficially by religions in their community since they lack knowledge about narratives of religions. The paper argues that the age of young people also determined their level of religious belief, with the younger appearing ‘secure’ in religion while the older being apathetic towards religion and increasingly reflecting a secular outlook. The findings reported in this paper challenge current practice in the design and delivery of RE based on what society thinks is needed rather than drawing on the concerns and contemporary needs of young people. The latter is nonetheless necessary if RE is to remain relevant for learners in an increasingly complex socio-cultural world impacted by competing forces in contemporary society such as modernity, religious belief, and secular influences. This paper is guided by the following research questions:

• What are the sources of values and meaning making that inform young people’s lifeworld in contemporary Botswana?
• How do young people dis/engage with religion in contemporary Botswana?
• In what ways can a lifeworld approach address the issue of how young people dis/engage with religion in Botswana?

Perspectives that address these questions are drawn from a large unpublished study that investigated the religious beliefs and secular values of young people, and the implications of this on the teaching of RE in Botswana. Although the study was completed in 2003, to date there has not been any similar study in Botswana on this subject, and thus the original findings remain relevant on this important but ignored area towards a re-conceptualisation of RE in Botswana, and the need to pay serious attention to the concerns of young people in the design and delivery of RE in public education. Given the slow pace of educational reform in Botswana, the findings of that study offer a post-dated critique of the failure of syllabi changes introduced in 2012 and 2014 for senior and junior secondary, respectively, to effect meaningful changes that respond appropriately to the vivid experiences of young people in a Botswana postmodern milieu. The discussion also reflects a socio-cultural context in which young people have dis/engaged with religious and secular worldviews in socio-cultural life. We also examine the implications of this dynamic on school RE.