

Montessori and Religious Education in Western Cape Preschools

Shamiemah Jassiem
Supervisor: Prof. Abdulkader I. Tayob
2016

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Social Science in Religious Studies
University of Cape Town

This work is based on research supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are that of the author, and the NRF accepts no liability whatsoever in this regard.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

Acknowledgements

As I was warned before embarking on this journey, this research project became a part of my family. So many people invested time, energy, support and assistance and while THANK YOU is hardly adequate to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude, it is a good place to start.

My first vote of thanks goes to the Almighty for giving me the health and strength to get through this task.

To my supervisor, Prof. Abdulkader I. Tayob – THANK YOU for your endless support, encouragement, motivation, advice and meticulous attention to detail. THANK YOU for all the learning and growth opportunities you provided and for accepting my research into your broader project. The additional workshops and reading groups were invaluable. I am deeply honoured to have had the privilege to learn with and from a scholar of your stature.

This project would not have been possible without the much appreciated funding provided through the National Research Foundation. THANK YOU.

To my husband, my pillar of support - Zahir Baker – THANK YOU for the many sacrifices you made and for the tireless support you gave me during this journey. THANK YOU mostly for creating a learning environment by entertaining the kids while I worked and for doing all the tasks at home so I could have more time to write...I know it was not easy, which makes me appreciate it so much more.

To my children (Shereen, Ali & Aasiya Baker) – THANK YOU for the sacrifices you made, for the many times you had to make do without me. Thank you for accepting this research project into our family and for graciously sharing precious family time. I know it wasn't easy but it was sincerely appreciated.

To my dad, my siblings and the rest of the family – Your contribution has been discreet, but invaluable. THANK YOU for your insurmountable support, encouragement and inspiration. THANK YOU for the numerous accommodations you all made and for the patience you had.

To the *children, staff and families of the schools in this study*, THANK YOU for your willingness to participate. Your contributions made this research project possible but also taught me so much.

Last but certainly not least, to my colleagues, (especially Hawa) for being so accommodating, for sharing my load and for making this all possible. The silent sacrifices you made has not gone unnoticed - THANK YOU. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

Abstract

The debate about whether or not religious education should be included in early childhood education is a longstanding one. Even those who believe that Religious Education should be included in early childhood programs cannot agree about the content or method for including it. The phenomenon of religious education in Montessori pre-primary schools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa is explored in this study, using a qualitative research approach. More specifically, the study explored the goals of their religious education; the level of awareness of Montessori's approach to religious education and finally looked at how they were implementing religion in their schools.

A sample of 4 pre-schools were selected from the 90 Montessori pre-schools in the Western Cape. These included a Non-Denominational, Muslim, Christian and a Jewish School. The Muslim and Non-Denominational schools are full Montessori schools, while the Christian and Jewish schools have incorporated Montessori alongside other curriculums, namely the Jubilee Excellence School Curriculum and Reggio-Emilia approach, respectively. A collective case study approach was adopted and data was collected through observations and interviews. While the findings cannot easily be generalized, it is significant in providing a starting point to understanding the phenomenon of religious education in Montessori pre-schools in the Western Cape.

The study highlighted Dr Montessori's personal and professional struggle with religion and found that the struggles Dr Montessori faced in terms of Religion have still not been resolved today. The schools in the Western Cape still grappled with the essence of Montessori's struggle, i.e. where to place religion and how to integrate it in the Montessori method and philosophy. Dr Montessori's beliefs about the importance of spirituality in the early years were found to be consistent with the contemporary views of scholars around the world. The religious schools followed guidelines of their own religions when deciding on which values to focus on. At the Jewish school, the focus was on the community, while at the Muslim school the focus was on the individual and self-etiquette. The focus of the Christian school was on discipline and obedience. The schools had various commitments to spiritual and ethical development of the children.

Finally, the study found that the Montessori method was ideal for teaching the practices of religion, but when schools delved into issues of faith or love of God, they switched to other modes of teaching (e.g. preaching). This disjuncture between teaching faith and

practices was ultimately Dr Montessori's reason for abolishing religious education from her method.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract.....	4
Chapter One: Introduction.....	10
1.1. Growth of the Montessori Movement.....	11
1.2. Religion and Spirituality	12
1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Study	12
1.4. Research Design.....	12
1.5. Data Collection.....	13
1.6. Analysis Of Data	13
1.7. Research Ethics	14
1.8. Map of this study	14
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework	16
2.1. Religious Education.....	17
2.1.1 Religious Instruction	18
2.1.2 Spirituality.....	19
2.1.3 Religion Education	20
2.2. Maria Montessori & the Montessori Method of Education	20
2.2.1. Montessori and Religion	22
2.3. Case Studies on Religion in Preschools	29
2.4. Conclusion.....	34
Chapter Three: Methodology	36
3.1. Research Design.....	36
3.1.1 Framework.....	36
3.2. Research Questions	37
3.3. Data Collection.....	37
3.3.1 Observations	38
3.3.2 Interviews	38
3.4. Selection of Participants	38
3.4.1 Non-denominational School	39
3.4.2 Islamic School.....	39
3.4.3 Christian School	40

3.4.4 Jewish School	40
3.5. Generalizability	40
3.6. Data Analysis.....	40
3.7. Limitations of the study	41
3.8. Ethical Considerations.....	41
3.9. Confidentiality.....	42
3.10. Conclusion.....	42
Chapter Four: School Profiles	43
4.1 The Western Cape.....	43
4.2 The Non-Denominational Montessori School [Non-Denominational].....	43
4.3 The Islamic Montessori School	45
4.4 The Christian Montessori School	47
4.5 The Jewish Montessori School	49
4.6 Conclusion.....	52
Chapter Five: Justification and Rationale.....	53
5.1 Religion & Montessori: Why or Why not?	53
5.1.1 The Non-Denominational school	54
5.1.2 The Islamic School.....	55
5.1.3 The Christian School.....	57
5.1.4 The Jewish school	58
5.2 Goals of the schools	60
5.2.1 The Non-Denominational school	60
5.2.2 The Islamic School.....	61
5.2.3 The Christian School.....	63
5.2.4 The Jewish School	64
5.3 Montessori’s Approach to religious education	65
5.3.1 Non-Denominational School	65
5.3.2 The Islamic School.....	66
5.3.3 The Christian school.....	66
5.3.4 The Jewish School	66
5.4 Conclusion.....	67
Chapter Six: Implementation of Religion	69
6.1 Principles of the Montessori Method	69

Islamic School.....	110
Jewish School	110
Christian School	111
Non-Denominational School	111
Interviews	111
Interviews at Islamic School.....	111
Interviews at Jewish School	111
Interviews at Christian School.....	111
Interviews at Non-Denominational School	111
School Documents	111
Appendices	112
Appendix 1: Letter to Schools	112
Appendix 2: Consent Form.....	114
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule	115
Appendix 4: Interview Transcript Sample	116
Appendix 5: Fieldwork Notes Sample	118
Appendix 6: SAMA’s Fundamental Principles	120

6.2. Daily Programmes of the schools.....	70
6.2.1. The Non-Denominational School	71
6.2.2. The Islamic School.....	71
6.2.3. The Christian school.....	72
6.2.4. The Jewish School	72
6.3. Circle Time	73
6.3.1. The Non-Denominational School	74
6.3.2. The Islamic School.....	75
6.3.3. The Christian school.....	76
6.3.4. The Jewish School	78
6.4. Meal Times.....	80
6.4.1. The Non-Denominational School	81
6.4.2. The Islamic School.....	82
6.4.3. The Christian School.....	83
6.4.4. The Jewish School	84
6.5. Recitals And Scripture Lessons.....	86
6.5.1. The Christian School.....	87
6.5.2. The Islamic School.....	87
6.5.3. The Jewish School	89
6.6. Everyday Interactions	90
6.6.1. The Non-Denominational School	90
6.6.2. The Islamic School.....	91
6.6.3. The Christian School.....	93
6.6.4. The Jewish School	93
6.7. Special Resources For Teaching Religion	94
6.7.1. The Islamic School.....	94
6.7.2. The Christian School.....	95
6.7.3. The Jewish School	96
6.8. Analysis of Religious Education.....	97
Conclusion.....	100
References	102
Fieldwork Reference List.....	110
Observations.....	110

Chapter One: Introduction

Early childhood educators and scholars debate about the place of religion in the education and nurturing of young children (Wolf, 1996; Hay and Nye, 1998; Tregenza, 2008; Hyde, 2011 & Reck, 2012). Those who believe that Religious Education should be included in early childhood programs cannot agree about the content or method for including it, and offer a variety of models for teaching Religion to young children.

Moreover, research on Religion and Early Childhood Development (ECD) within a South African context is quite limited and no research can be found specifically in the area of Religious Education and Montessori Early Childhood Development (ECD). This study explores the phenomenon of religion in Montessori pre-primary schools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. It looks at what religious education is in Montessori schools. More specifically, it explores the goals of their religious education; the level of awareness of Montessori's approach to religious education and finally looks at how they are implementing religion in their schools.

Dr Montessori believed that Religious Education had a place in her schools, but she struggled to find its exact place and method. The foundations of her philosophy on Religious Education started with an experiment early in her career, where she set up a child-sized chapel and a model Christian school in Barcelona to demonstrate how Religion could be brought practically into the life of a child as a source of joy and inspiration (Montessori, 1972). This experiment was soon abolished, as she felt that this model did not fit in with her Method of education. In her own words:

The experiment in religious education was eventually abolished in our Children's houses because it was aimed exclusively at instruction in Catholicism, which lends itself to exercises in moving about and preparing various objects, whereas there is no place for such activities in religions that are almost entirely abstract (Montessori, 1972, p.300).

Montessori basically felt that the religious education model she introduced in Barcelona was more suitable for teaching rituals and practices in religion, but not an appropriate model for teaching the abstract parts of religion. In general, she faced many challenges when trying to accommodate Religion in her method and returned to the topic of Religious Education at various points in her career. In her writings and lectures she moved between including and excluding religion, placing emphasis on it or pushing it

into the background. She died in 1952 without having established the place of religious education in her system. This particular experience and experiment of Maria Montessori will be used to further interrogate the place of religion in Montessori schools.

1.1. Growth of the Montessori Movement

After her death, the Montessori movement continued to spread, mostly on the continents she visited during her lifetime. The method only came to South Africa in 1976, when Mrs Strilli Oppenheimer established the first Montessori school. Four years later, in 1980, the first Montessori school was opened in the Western Cape. It is estimated that today there are currently over 400 Montessori preschools in South Africa, 90 of which are located in the Western Cape (Unofficial communication from the South African Montessori Association, 2014).

It appears that the struggles Montessori faced in terms of Religion have still not been resolved today. Some of her followers believe that she was a staunch Catholic and a deeply religious person who wanted to establish Christian schools. They recognize that she abolished the religious experiment, but claim that she sent them a letter on the eve of her death encouraging the establishment of religious schools. Others believe that Montessori aimed to create an educational environment that was open to all (regardless of their religious beliefs) in which children learned about numerous religions. There is also a group who believe that Religion should not be taught in Montessori early childhood classrooms. Children should be exposed to “the great moral and spiritual themes of love, kindness, joy and confidence in the fundamental goodness of life” (Seldin & Epstein, 2003, p.235).

Despite these various viewpoints and opinions, the number of Religious Montessori schools in Cape Town has seen a recent increase – approximately 25% of the schools in the Western Cape are either faith based or have a religious ethos. There has been a specific surge in Muslim Montessori schools and many Christian schools are opting for promoting a Religious ethos. This increase in Religious Montessori schools sparked my curiosity to investigate what is happening, and how religion is being taught in Montessori schools in the Western Cape.

1.2. Religion and Spirituality

This study takes a closer look at the recent development in religious education, which should be useful for a closer examination of Montessori schools in the Western Cape. The debate about whether or not religion should be a part of early childhood education is a longstanding one, not limited to the Montessori field. The approach to religious education of children has seen some significant changes over the last half of the 20th century, with a focus on spirituality gaining increasing interest. Currently, most scholars working on early childhood education agree that young children are capable of having spiritual experiences and suggest that spiritual development should be a part of early childhood education programmes. They differ about the manner in which it should be included (Ratcliff & Nye, 2005; Hay & Nye, 1998; Mardell & Abo-Zena, 2010).

1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to establish what religion education in Montessori schools in the Western Cape is. It is not my aim to promote or discourage the teaching of religion. The study asks why schools are choosing to be *Religious* Montessori schools; what the goals of these schools are in terms of Religious Education and whether or not they are achieving these goals. It looks at the level of awareness they have of Montessori's approach to religion education and how her method has impacted their programmes. It also looks at how Montessori schools today are implementing religion into their classrooms, including those schools who do not choose to be religious in any form, but teach religion as part of the fabric of the environment in which children live and grow.

1.4. Research Design

This study was conducted within a qualitative framework, using the collective case study research strategy. The case study approach involves looking at a particular group of people, and in this case, where multiple cases are involved, it is referred to as a collective case study approach (Fouché, 2005). This approach is useful in furthering the understanding about Religion in Early Childhood Development Centres, and allows for easy comparisons to be drawn between the different schools. It is therefore an appropriate design to achieve the aims of the study; namely to gain an understanding of the importance and meaning Montessori schools have placed on Religion as well as to understand how schools are interpreting and adapting Montessori's views of Religion

Education and implementing it in their classrooms. It seems, therefore, appropriate to look at Montessori schools and in this case, I am looking at Montessori schools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.

The Western Cape is a culturally diverse province, home to people from multiple religions and cultures. There are over 400 Montessori schools in South Africa, of which approximately 90 are located in the Western Cape. Only about 15 of these schools are religious. A sample of 4 Montessori Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres within the Western Cape region participated in the study. The schools identified, based on their diverse demographics and their religious programmes, are:

The Non-Denominational* Montessori School

The Islamic* Montessori School

The Christian* Montessori School

The Jewish* Montessori School

*All names are pseudonyms.

1.5. Data Collection

Data for each case study was collected through 4 observations and 2 semi-structured interviews at each of the four schools (i.e. a total of 16 observations and 8 interviews). Data collection at the faith-based schools took place between November 2014 and February 2015, while data collection at the Non-Denominational school took place in August 2015.

To minimize the effect of my presence, I spent 4 days in each school for periods ranging between 2 and 3 hours per observation. This allowed me to observe adults and children in their 'natural setting,' and to desensitize them to my presence. I also conducted two semi-structured interviews – with the principal and directress (lead teacher) in each school. This enabled me to determine a layer of understanding not possible through observations alone. The interviews varied in length between 30 and 60 minutes, and were all audio-recorded and manually transcribed.

1.6. Analysis Of Data

I applied the Qualitative Thematic Analysis to the data, which was useful for describing and organising the data according to ideas, themes and categories that emerged. The

themes identified in sentences and paragraphs were linked to the research questions, which enabled me to analyse the data in the framework provided by the research questions. I manually coded the data, which ultimately helped me to get really close to the materials and made the identifying of themes and ideas much easier.

1.7. Research Ethics

Because this research involved human subjects, ethical clearance was requested and granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town.

1.8. Map of this study

Chapter Two provides a framework for the study. It looks at the recent developments in scholarship on religion, spirituality and young children and then looks at the different ways in which religion and spirituality could be nurtured in early childhood settings. It takes a closer look at Maria Montessori's vacillation with religion. It explores her personal religious journey, her theory on religious education, as well as her contribution to religious education.

Chapter Three outlines my research strategy in detail. The data collection and data analysis process are described, including the rationale for using these approaches and the ethical considerations taken into account. It also outlines the limitations of the research.

Chapter Four provides the reader with profiles of each school involved in the study. It describes the demographics of the Western Cape and then looks at each school in more detail. Each profile discusses approximately where the school is located; who started it and when it was started and any associations of the school. It describes the school, the staff and their training and discusses the vision of each school.

Chapter Five and Six form the core analysis of the study and are closely linked. Chapter Five explores the importance the schools have placed on religion and Montessori; the goals of their religious education and their level of awareness of Montessori's approach to religious education. It looks at possible conflicts about religious education, and

whether or not they are facing the same dilemma Montessori faced in teaching religion to young children.

Chapter Six looks at how the schools are teaching religion. It describes their daily programmes and then explains how religion is taught in large group activities (at circle and mealtimes), the materials and resources used and also how religion is brought into everyday interactions.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter in which the arguments are articulated, based on the literature and the research. Finally the potential for future research in the field is highlighted.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Literature on the topic of religion in early childhood settings is quite limited, particularly for Montessori pre-primary settings. The idea that children are capable of understanding God or of having spiritual experiences only emerged at the end of the 20th century (Ratcliff & Nye, 2005; Reck, 2012). The research reviewed for this study is mostly conducted within Western settings, while studies in Africa and specifically South Africa all focus on primary school children – i.e. children over the age of 6. Being a fairly new area of research it is therefore important to establish exactly what religious education in pre-schools is all about. This study looks specifically at religious education in Montessori preschools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.

Whether religious education should be a part of ‘secular’ education or not is a longstanding debate. Recent scholarship on early childhood education has offered insights on religious education in the early childhood period. This chapter provides a framework for this study by looking more closely at these suggestions for religious education in early childhood education, and also looks at what actually happens in early childhood classrooms with regards to religious education.

It starts with a look at the different ways of including religious education in schools before exploring the changing views of spirituality in Early Childhood Development scholarship over the last half of the 20th century. This chapter then provides a brief introduction to Maria Montessori before exploring Montessori and religion. It shows how Maria Montessori was challenged by religion in her personal life, as she vacillated between being a devout Catholic to experimenting with Theosophy before she gradually returned to her birth religion. It also finds that Maria Montessori’s ideas were consistent with those who focused on spirituality, but despite this, she left a mixed legacy for teaching religion in schools.

This chapter ends with a discussion on studies that focus on what transpires in early childhood classrooms with regard to religious education, religion and spirituality. The case studies reviewed show how Montessori followers and practitioners across the world differ on the place of religion in Montessori classrooms. Some Montessorians have followed her early experiments with religion, where she set up a child-sized chapel in Barcelona. They have expanded on this, and developed faith-formation programmes based on teaching Christianity to children. Most of her other followers have looked at her practices in her whole career and do not limit Montessori classrooms to the teaching

of one religion. They are divided between those who teach about many different religions and those who teach no religion, but instead focus on universally applicable moral and spiritual values (Seldin & Epstein, 2003). This review also refers to studies that argue between the Montessori method and Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

2.1. Religious Education

There has been a rising interest in the topic of spirituality during the latter half of the 20th century, with scholars' views about spirituality and religious education changing significantly. Scholarship has always debated about including or excluding religion from early childhood education. Today, most scholars agree that young children are capable of having spiritual experiences (Hay & Nye, 1998; Ratcliff, 2007; EAUDE, 2003 and Wolf, 1996). While they promote spiritual development as a necessary part of early childhood education programmes, they differ about the manner in which it should be included. Some propose that a religious instruction model should be used, while others propose religion education or even spirituality models. A closer look at these models as well as the changing viewpoints on spirituality for religious education is useful for a closer inspection of religion in Montessori schools in the Western Cape.

From 1892 to 1930, research reflected a holistic approach in which religious concepts were integrated into studies regardless of whether or not the study was religious in nature (Ratcliff, 2007). Then, religion was integrated into the daily programmes in ECD centres across the world. From 1930 to 1960, there was a decrease in emphasis on religious experience, and research focused on religious education for younger children. The questions posed included, how religious consciousness is developed and how religion develops in babies (Ratcliff, 2007). Studies also considered children's religious development and beliefs and critiqued the lack of religious content in children's literature. According to Ratcliff, spiritual experience was not given direct attention in these studies.

From 1960 to 1990, academic scholarship took a cognitive approach to religious education. Most scholars and religious educators believed that because abstract thought was only expected to develop with adolescence, young children were incapable of understanding God or faith (Reck, 2012). This theoretical perspective was based largely on the combined contributions of Erik Erikson (psychosocial development), James Fowler (Faith development), Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development) and Jean Piaget (cognitive

development). Religion was generally not included in preschool programmes, as it was believed that religious thought during this age focused on literal beliefs and concrete imagery and children only later began to understand concepts of religion and God (Bridges & Moore, 2002). By the late 1980s, the direction of research changed from looking at religious development of children to looking at their spiritual experiences. Spirituality gained increasing scholarly interest as researchers started to interrogate the idea that children's spiritual development unfolded in stages. The work of Robert Coles, Sofia Cavalletti and Ana-Maria Rizutto demonstrated the presence of spiritual experiences in childhood (Ratcliff & Nye, 2005; Reck, 2012). They laid the foundations for this paradigm shift in the way children's spirituality is viewed today. Religious development of children gave way to an interest in children's spiritual experiences; a development based on the premise that all children are innately spiritual but not necessarily religious. By the end of the 20th century, we see a steady incline in religious schools with greater attention given to the spiritual experiences of children. Research began to focus on definitions of spirituality (Ratcliff & Nye, 2005; Giesenberg, 2000; Hay & Nye, 1998; Byrne, 2010; Watson, 2000), spiritual development (Eaude, 2005; Benson, Roehlkepartain & Rude, 2010) and how spiritual development in young children may be encouraged or supported (Graham, 2007; Bone, 2008; Giesenberg, 2000; Tregenza, 2008).

2.1.1 Religious Instruction

Teaching exclusively about one religion is commonly referred to as religious instruction. Byrne (2010) sees religious instruction as a focus on a set of specific religious beliefs about self, God and humanity. Halstead (2005) refers to religious instruction as a type of religious education. He defines it as the development of faith through the teaching of a particular religion or denomination with the aim of preserving faith across generations. Teaching about a religion can be approached from a variety of ways, including a faith perspective and a ritual or practice perspective. While religious instruction can provide a child with emotional stability and encourage him/her to engage with and be transformed by the truths of the faith, it is criticized for the lack of attention given to critical openness and personal autonomy (Halstead, 2005). It is also criticized for not defining knowledge in terms of rationally justifiable beliefs, thereby failing to prepare children for life in

multi-cultural and multi-faith societies. Some specific cases of religious instruction in ECD Montessori schools will be discussed later.

2.1.2 Spirituality

Hay and Nye (1998) argue that children are born with spirituality, which is independent of any religious association. They propose that this innate spirituality should be the starting point for religious education programmes of young children (Ratcliff, 2007). Scholars and educators agree that the nurturing of spirituality should be included in early childhood programmes, but they differ about whether it should be confined to the teaching of one religion (religious instruction) or to not teaching religion at all (spirituality).

Hay and Nye (1998) advocate that religion and spirituality are two separate things, but may overlap. That is, a religious experience may have aspects of spirituality, but will also include creeds and theology. Likewise spirituality could include an experience of God, but it can also be rooted in an exquisite sunset. Hay and Nye (1998) identify characteristics of spirituality as self-knowledge, sense of wonder & awe, feeling of transcendence, hope, love, courage and a search for meaning and purpose.

Grajczonek (2010) believes that secular spirituality should exclude all religious aspects like belief in God or an ultimate existence. Holly Catterton Allen (2008) sees spirituality as “related to the relationship with oneself, others, the world and perhaps with the transcendent” (p.7). Similarly, Byrne (2010) sees spiritual development as incorporating values, meaning, beliefs and self-worth of an individual, which may include their religious beliefs.

A large following of Montessorians believe that religion should not be a part of the early childhood classrooms, but that spirituality should still be nurtured within the environment (Wolf, 1996; Seldin & Epstein, 2003). The importance of nurturing spiritual development in young children is emphasized by other researchers, who claim that it can fade and disappear if not nurtured intentionally (Eaude, 2003; Wolf, 1996). Hay and Nye (1998) recommend that early childhood programmes should seek to develop spirituality before children receive formal religious instruction.

2.1.3 Religion Education

Scholars have surprisingly not looked at the debate in the broader study of religion education, which proposes a different dimension – that is, to teach different religions (religion education). Religion Education may involve the nurturing of spirituality while learning about different religions and belief systems. Halstead (2005) advocates that teaching about the similarities and diversity of religions enable children to make informed decisions about their own paths in life. Halstead argues that religion education is able to break down religious prejudices, which can contribute to the development of a tolerant, multicultural society. He admits that it may be criticized for prioritizing the individual over the community, encouraging relativism for reducing ‘revealed truth’ to ‘cultural practice’ and for treating all faiths as equally worthy of respect (Halstead, 2005). Mardell & Abo-Zena (2010) advocate that because the early childhood years are ideal for developing tolerance, children should be taught about other religions during this time.

While scholars are more in agreement now about nurturing spirituality in the early years, the debate about whether or not to teach religion to young children and if it is included, how to include it, continues. Few scholars have advocated that children should be taught about different religions, as this is an ideal time to develop tolerance. Others have advocated that they should first be taught one religion. This could include learning about the faith, nurturing a love of God and belief in God and the relevant Holy Book, and abiding by the laws of the faith. It could also be approached from the perspective of learning about the rituals and practices relevant to the religion before developing faith. Whether included in a religious setting, or a secular setting, scholars appear to be in agreement that spirituality should be nurtured. This is consistent with Montessori’s views about spirituality, which I look at more closely in the next section. First, however, I introduce the woman behind the Montessori Method, Maria Montessori.

2.2. Maria Montessori & the Montessori Method of Education

Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952), the founder of the Montessori method of education may be called a feminist who fought for women’s rights in a patriarchal society. She was the first female to attend a boys’ technical school at the tender age of 13 and became the first female in Italy to graduate as a medical doctor (May, ND). Montessori was the only child of Alessandro Montessori and Renilde Stoppani. She was born a Catholic and had a son, Mario, out of wedlock. Mario was raised by a wet nurse and went to boarding

school. While she visited him there from time to time, she never revealed her identity to him. The two were reunited during Mario's teenage years (Kramer, 1976) and became collaborators as Mario worked as his mother's assistant and advocate (May, ND).

Maria Montessori used her scientific training and experience to develop didactic materials and a method of educational practice aligned to her philosophy of education and child development (Tregenza, 2008). Her method developed from her observations during her work as the director of the Orthophrenic School for developmentally disabled children in 1900. As a specialist in paediatrics and psychiatry, she began to extensively research early childhood development and education and came across the work of Jean Itard and Édouard Séguin. Montessori conceptualized her method by applying their educational theories, which she tested through hands-on observation of students at the Orthophrenic School. She found the resulting improvement in students' development remarkable (Standing, 1962). After applying these techniques exclusively to special needs students, Montessori opened her first school in the inner-city slums of San Lorenzo in Rome in 1907. This school, named *Casa dei Bambini* (Children's Home), was a tremendous success.

She advocated that the child goes through four planes of development from birth to maturity and that each plane lasted approximately six years. She also indicated that these planes could be further sub-divided into three-year periods. Children should be placed in mixed-aged and non-graded classes, which corresponds to these three-year groupings. Each plane of development is guided by a set of sensitive periods, that is, periods during which an overwhelming inner drive directs the child to a particular area of development (Haines, 2016). The first plane of development (from birth – 6 years) is believed to be the most important years of one's life, and is characterized by the absorbent mind, that is, the ability to take in everything from the environment effortlessly. The programme is designed to facilitate the holistic development of children without using rewards or punishments. In the pre-primary class (3-6 year olds), concrete activities are prepared in an environment in which children have the freedom to work at their own pace. The method is based on a belief of the child's need for independence, as independence leads to self-confidence, which is regarded as the fundamental building block for learning.

Dr. Montessori spread her research findings in books, speeches and lectures in Italy and then throughout Europe. The method became respected and recognized around the

world as it spread to Argentina, Australia, China, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States of America. She also offered teacher-training courses around the world. During WWII, she was forced into exile. She and Mario moved to India where they lived from 1939 – 1946. During her time in India, she worked on her book “Education for Peace”, and her work on peace education likely led to her being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. Montessori spent her final years in Amsterdam with her son and his family. She continued to travel, lecture and train during this time. She died in 1952 at the age of 81.

2.2.1. Montessori and Religion

Berryman (1980) claims that many religious educators and Montessorians have overlooked Montessori’s contribution to religious education, which he saw at the core of her life and work. In his paper, *Montessori and Religious Education*, Berryman (1980) reviews Montessori’s life and work in terms of Religion. He believed that Maria Montessori’s experiment in Barcelona was of great value to her practice of religious education, despite the fact that it did not contribute much to her theory of religious reality. According to Berryman, Montessori’s practice of religious education is based on a spiral curriculum, which attaches the Christian symbol system to the creative process and does not limit the way in which God is known. Montessori distinguishes between imagination and fantasy to explain religion, which she saw as another kind of reality – one not based on sense impressions or on illusions. For her, religion is a reality, whereas fantasy is a chaotic projection. Berryman concludes that Montessori’s theory may be dated, but that her practice of religious education is not (1980).

Given the different ways in which scholars of education have classified the teaching of religion in school, this study situates Maria Montessori’s exploration in these terms. We find that spirituality; religious instruction and perhaps also religion education appear in her practice throughout her lifetime. By looking at Dr Montessori’s personal struggle with religion, I show how she expressed several views on religion in education and explored several options on how to include religion in her classrooms.

As a feminist who fought for women’s rights in a patriarchal society and having a child out of wedlock, Montessori was challenged by the teachings of Catholicism. While living in India, she was exposed to many different religions and her own religious journey involved a move from being a devout Catholic, to an exploration of Theosophy before

gradually returning to her birth religion. According to her son Mario Montessori, Dr. Montessori went on annual spiritual retreats, which resulted in significant changes in her personal faith (May, ND). Miller (2002) believed that her spirituality resonated with the teachings of Theosophy and described her faith as a “transcendental, mystical spirituality,” which encompassed the essence of nearly all world traditions (p.3). Miller goes as far as saying that Montessori “pursued her educational work with a spiritual consciousness verging on mysticism” (p.1). At one point in her life, she even considered forming a religious order dedicated to serving children (Kramer, 1976).

Berryman (1980) attributes her poor articulation of a theory on religion as a sign of a lack of systematic treatment. He believed that this contributed to her struggle between being both a scientist and a religious person. She was challenged by the way children were viewed, and advocated that they were deserving of respect. Berryman proposes that by looking back and forth at what Montessori said (or wrote) about religious education and what she did, one could begin to understand how she developed a theory from what she learned from the children (Berryman, 1980).

Dr Montessori advocated a philosophy of education and child development. She had very strong views about what should be included, what should be excluded and even prescribed the manner in which the teacher should conduct herself within the classroom. Montessori, however, did not have the same conviction with regards to religion. In fact, Montessori predicted in a footnote in one of her earliest books, “I cannot foresee whether I and my colleagues will be able to bring such a heavy task (the moral and religious education of children) to a successful conclusion” (Montessori, 1917, p.355). According to Schmid, Montessori simply did not have the understanding to expand her insights about Religion and religious education “in the same thorough manner as she did the mathematical and sensorial training of the young child” (Schmid, 1969, p.21).

The foundations of her philosophy on religious education emerged from the experiment school she set up in Barcelona. This experiment was abolished as she felt the model was designed for teaching rituals and practices of religions, but unsuitable for teaching abstract concepts (like faith) in religions (Montessori, 1995). Montessori and her son Mario Montessori spent several years in India where she was exposed to Hinduism and Buddhism. It is believed that she specifically did not think it was possible to represent

the abstract concepts of these religions and therefore removed any explicit writings on religious education from her books (May, ND, p.6).

Despite abolishing the experiment, Montessori believed that the study of religion was important but quite different from other subjects in her philosophy. She believed that religious education should be consistent with her whole system. She advocated that it too requires a prepared environment with distinct divisions in which children could have sensorial explorations of concepts. She believed that with religion, the prepared environment allowed for the development of life skills and the development of the mind, while at the same time indirectly educating the spirit and developing an appreciation and understanding of religion (Montessori, 1972[a]).

Montessori repeatedly emphasized the importance of the environment and the role it plays in shaping the child. She saw the prepared environment as a space in which the child could develop holistically. Montessori advocated that the classroom was the starting point for establishing peace in the world as the Directress (as Montessori teachers are known) cultivates and enhances the moral energies of children, their intelligence and creative spirits (Montessori, 1972[b]). Montessori proposed that the educational environment must promote not only the freedom of the individual, but also the formation of a society. In a Montessori classroom, children have freedom of movement and freedom of choice, within limits. They are in multi-age classrooms and learn how to socialize, communicate and accommodate children younger and older than themselves. Children and directresses also remain together for a period of at least three years creating a sense of community within the classroom. Negotiating these dynamics in an environment where a delicate balance is maintained between freedom and discipline, leads to the steady inner growth of the child, which Montessori saw as self-discipline. A space is created in which children can choose to work freely and repetitively with a variety of activities of appropriate interest and level of challenge, ultimately leading them to intense concentration. Montessori advocated that the habits children learn in her schools are important for their moral development, as it is through concentration, silence and ordered movements that the “spiritual sense” is developed (Montessori, 1972(a), p332).

Montessori referred to church-based environments as “atriums”. The prepared environment was already present in the church, enabling the 3 – 6 year old to work independently with self-chosen activities that would indirectly prepare the child to

reason about faith (May, ND). The importance of a prepared environment for Religious education is reinforced in Montessori's lecture in 1946, where she says that we do not 'give' religion, but rather we see it "develop through the influence of the environment" (Montessori, 1946, p. 198). Montessori argues here that the prepared environment is as important in religion education as it is in the rest of her method; that the environment influences the child's religious development.

Two years later Montessori not only discards this idea, but says that there is no need for religion to be taught (Montessori, 1948). In a book she published in 1948, she emphasizes that there is inherent goodness in humans. One sees her changing her argument from teaching religion in a perfectly prepared environment, to not teaching religion at all. But the focus also shifts to spirituality and spiritual development of the child. She says that within a natural freedom a deep respect for inner and outer truth will develop and a better mutual understanding of human purposes will prevail (Montessori, 1991). She does not emphasize the importance of the environment here as she did just two years previously, but it is not clear what exactly led her to this change of heart.

In 1952, in a letter to the English Catholic Montessori Association the day before her death, she once again advocates the importance of the environment for a child's religious development, but also emphasizes the role of the adult

Do not consider the child a weakling; for it is he who builds the human personality, and whether this personality is going to be Christian or not depends on his environment and on us who are the guides of his religious formation (Montessori, 2008, p.29)

In this latest view, religious concepts should be incorporated into the child's daily life. Adults, babies and children should worship together and not be separated into different rooms. She says,

It is among the simple people whose women take their children to church while they are still breastfed that the staunchest faith is to be found (Montessori, 2008 p.30).

Schmid (1969) believed that Montessori's greatest understanding of religious education was to see it located in the practical experience of worship.

Montessori believed that religion was vital, but was opposed to it being taught in the same way as other subjects (Montessori, 1946, 197). She believed that religion should be

given as a revelation, for “if you give it as you give the rest of education, you may crush something from the beginning of life” (Montessori, 1946, p.201). Her son Mario Montessori believed that the more his mother worked with children, the more she saw God within them (May, ND).

For Montessori, the most crucial element in teaching religion to children is knowing when and how to teach. All teaching should be based on the psychology of the child’s developmental stage, and religion should follow this process. (Montessori, 1946). She identified three stages of development,

One on top of the other. They do not destroy each other – they build on each other to expand the soul. We must study these three different stages of spiritual development if we are to know how to help humanity (Montessori, 1946, p. 206).

Montessori compared the birth of every child to the incarnation (a profound mystery in Christianity), “when a spirit enclosed in flesh comes to live in the world” (Montessori, 1966, p.29). She saw each human being having his or her own destiny to fulfill and referred to the baby after birth as a spiritual embryo, contrasting it with the physical embryo. The physical embryo is a pre-natal period focused on the formation of the body and requires a positive physical environment. Damage that occurs during the prenatal period may have permanent effects on the child’s physical body. Given a healthy prenatal environment, a baby is physically complete at birth. The spiritual embryo belongs to a post-natal period where the formation of the personality, intellect and psychological attributes take place. At birth, the baby is psychologically and spiritually in the embryonic state and requires a positive environment. As s/he is in the process of forming him/herself, it is the personality and spirit of the baby that is vulnerable to negative influences. Even the experience of childbirth was considered by Montessori to be important for the child’s spirit. An unhealthy environment or incorrect handling of the infant during the spiritual embryo period could cause permanent psychological damage. Montessori placed great significance on the first six years of life, believing that it was in this spiritual embryo period with which the child constructs him or herself through his very act of living (Montessori, 1995).

Like the theorists Erikson and Fowler, Montessori concurred that the quality of care provided by the caregiver impacted on the child’s ability to develop trust or mistrust. Montessori urged caregivers to take special care of the new born child’s spiritual life, for

if his/her environment is neglected the spirit of the child is in constant danger (Montessori, 1966, Erikson, 1959 & Fowler, 1981). The child needs the protection of an environment rich in nourishment and love and a concentrated relationship with his parents to ensure nothing comes to harm it. Montessori never wrote or said anything contradicting the importance of the spirit or spiritual development of a child.

The first stage occurs during the first 6 years of life, the second starts after 6 and the third stage is during adolescence. Montessori believed that the child should find nourishment for spiritual development from birth to six years and that religious education is most important from birth (Montessori, 1946). During the first stage, the child is in need of security and therefore they should come to know God as the Father and Protector. During the second stage (between 6 and 7 years) the child goes through a sensitive period for moral development. Here, teaching should focus on developing a sense of 'right and wrong', an understanding of the moral law. At around the age of puberty (between 12 and 13), the final stage occurs. During this stage, the child develops social consciousness and should be taught about God as the God of the universe, of all people and all things.

This study focuses on children in the first stage, and therefore I will look only at the first stage. The first religious period starts in infancy. She advocated that in this stage of life, the child absorbs information from her environment – children will take in religion as they take in language (through unconscious absorption) if they are immersed in a spiritual atmosphere. When children are exposed to religion on a daily basis from birth, these impressions are absorbed deeply into the unconscious. She understood that the learning capacity of a young child is fundamentally different from that of an adult. Unlike the adult, learning happens unconsciously for the young child. She referred to this ability as the absorbent mind, saying that a child is unable to distinguish between positive and negative or useful and useless information. Like a sponge, the child absorbs knowledge, skills and information from her environment with very little effort.

Montessori saw the period from ages 2 to 4 as a sensory period and recommends that at this time, children should be taught through active participation and the use of specific sensory materials. Teachers should bear in mind that verbal instruction alone is insufficient and that movement and imagination is vital. Montessori believed that “the senses, being explorers of the world, open the way of knowledge” (Montessori, 1995, p.165). She advocated that children learn concepts best when they are introduced in a

concrete form, which can be explored using the senses (Montessori, 1966). She set out to cultivate an acute sense of observation in children by educating their senses, which has the advantage of enlarging the field of perception and of offering a foundation for intellectual growth. It is through their own activity and explorations of the environment that the child develops an understanding of various concepts. In addition to the emphasis placed on sensorial learning, Montessori advocated that religious sentiment should express love and protection. Children should be taught that God loves them, as it is in these early years that they need love and protection most (Montessori, 1946). She believed that by the time a child is 5, the main part of religious development was complete.

While Montessori does not take a consistent stance on religion, spirituality and the spiritual aspect of a child's development are very prominent. She believed that children were spiritual beings and consistently placed great emphasis on the spiritual development of the child. The principles of spirituality can be found in all Montessori's writings, not only her religious education writings (Trogenza, 2008). Her view was that the child was a spiritual being and that the environment had a vital role to play in the child's spiritual life. She suggested many ways to protect the spirit and prepare the environment optimal to its development. Montessori advocated that the directress should have the knowledge of child development necessary to prepare an environment, which catered for the physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the child. She believed it was the role of the teacher to serve the child's spirit.

The child's development follows a path of successive stages of independence, and our knowledge of this must guide us in our behaviour towards him or her. We have to help the child to act, will and think for him or herself. This is the art of serving the spirit, an art, which can be practiced to perfection only when working among children (Montessori, 1995, p.257).

Montessori tried to develop a method to teach religion in a manner that would be universally applicable. After abandoning the experiment in Barcelona, she never experimented with or suggested an alternative method or approach to the teaching of a religion. The reason she abolished the experiment and religious education from her method, was due to the disjuncture she had between teaching faith and practices. For most of her career, she did not limit Montessori classrooms to the teaching of one

religion. Today Montessorians are divided between those who teach about many different religions and those who teach no religion but instead focus on the universal moral and spiritual themes of love, kindness, joy, the fundamental goodness of life and tolerance for all (Seldin & Epstein, 2003).

As seen in her personal life, Montessori's vacillation with religion is echoed in her writings. When Montessori returns to her birth religion later in her career, we also see the return of religion in her lectures and writings. In the third edition of *The Montessori Method*, a chapter on religious education is included with changes to vocabulary and explanations, but not to the essence of her approach and its methods. In addition to this chapter, Montessori also published books on Christian Education and lectured about spirituality in children (May, ND).

I have shown that while religion was not explicitly included in the Montessori classroom, Dr Montessori indeed had a theory of religious education. Her views about religion in the classroom appear to be closely linked to her personal journey. Her indecisiveness about including or excluding religion mirrors her own personal indecisiveness about her birth religion. Despite the changing views about religion and its place in her schools, Montessori was consistent about the importance of spiritual development of young children.

2.3. Case Studies on Religion in Preschools

As can be seen in the previous section, the debate about whether or not religion should be a part of early childhood education exists in Montessori's life and reflections. Like recent scholars, Montessori too saw the importance of nurturing spirituality in the early years of a child's life. During her lifetime, Montessori experimented with religious instruction, preached about the importance of religion education and practiced secular spirituality within the pre-primary classroom. In this section, I turn to some studies done on specific schools. Some of them focus on spirituality, others on religious instruction and others on religion education. None of the studies look specifically at Religion and Montessori within a South African context, nor do any of them attempt to explore the phenomenon of Religion and Montessori or the challenges that Dr. Montessori faced a century ago.

Montessori's personal vacillation about her religion has not prevented others from extending her work. Christian Montessori educators, in particular, have adopted and adapted her method for religious instruction. Some followers have expanded on her

early experiments with religion in the child-sized chapel in Barcelona and further developed religious education under the Montessori banner. Two major faith formation programmes based on teaching Christianity to children have emerged from this – namely the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* and *Godly Play*.

Sofia Cavalletti and her colleague Gianna Gobbi developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) based on the principles and methodology of Montessori's earlier religious teachings. The foundation of this programme is to provide a carefully prepared environment in which children are free to encounter and explore the mystery of God. The development of the spiritual relationship is encouraged and supported through the manipulation of sensorial materials (Tregenza, 2008; Hyde, 2011). Cavalletti and Gobbi build on Montessori's idea that by working with materials that educate the senses, the child harnesses the sense to recognize fine details and characteristics of the world around him or her.

Jerome Berryman, building on the work of Gobbi & Cavalletti, proposes *Godly Play* as an alternative approach to religious education, which aims to develop spirituality in children and describes it as his interpretation of Montessori's Religious Education (Graham, 2007). *Godly Play* involves the telling of sacred stories and parables, using props and objects, to engage children in the Christian language system, and creates a space for children to ask questions and safely confront their existential limits. He uses the environment to create a space in which spirituality is nurtured and one's relationship to God can be discovered (Reck, 2012). According to Hyde (2011), despite the fact that Berryman's approach reflects Cavalletti's process, his focus on the significance of play and creativity indicates a departure from the Montessori principles as interpreted by Cavalletti. *Godly Play* focuses mostly on the importance of children learning about religion through sensory explorations, movement and imagination. The adult plays a big role in the child's experience, guiding it according to a set script (for the story) as well as the questions posed after each story. *Godly Play* prescribes the content and manner in which stories are told to the children and does not give the narrator the freedom to adapt to the children's needs or questions. Both Cavalletti and Berryman agree that young children can indeed learn about spirituality through the manipulation of sensorial materials.

Coates (2011) and Schein (2013) both advocate the compatibility of Montessori and Judaism. Coates (2011) argues that Montessori is not only compatible with the Jewish

faith, but that its devotion to spiritual quests and its focus on universal values make it appealing to all religions. She believes that the Montessori principles of caring for the environment, self-sufficiency, independence and justice integrate well with principles of the Jewish faith and culture, and is useful in building communities. Coates also cites Harris (2005) who argues that the increase in the numbers of Jewish families opting for Montessori education is a result of the level of academic excellence the Montessori method has proven to produce, in addition to it having elements of a traditional Jewish education. Montessori provides children with “spiritual knowledge and a cultural framework to function within society,” demonstrating an understanding that there is a place for religion within education (Coates, 2011). Coates focuses on the shared values of Jewish and Montessori communities in developing children who are capable, confident and spiritually awakened, and advocates that all Jewish schools adopt the Montessori method.

Schein (2013) too advocates the relevance of Montessori for 21st century Jewish children living in America. Her study was born out of her criticism that non-religious Montessori schools lack spirituality. She defines spiritual development as the integration of deep connections and dispositions reinforced by spiritual moments. Looking at the reflections of parent and early childhood educators, Schein constructs a theory of spiritual development of young children. The theory looks at ways one can nurture spiritual growth and development of children living in 21st century America, beginning at birth. In order to support young children’s spiritual development, Schein’s theory advocates two phases – the first looks at the process in which children begin their spiritual journeys, and the second includes participants’ descriptions of the kinds of moments they believe could support spiritual development in young children without using a religious lens (Schein, 2013). She concludes with a description of how her theory can be adapted for the spiritual development of young Jewish children. Jewish religious and cultural life enable children to establish trust and deep connections. These connections lead to children developing and strengthening their understanding of themselves and others so that they may begin to develop a belief system. This belief system ultimately leads to “actions reflective in complex dispositions” which works together in nurturing the spiritual development of young children. Both Coates and Schein advocate the compatibility of the philosophies of Judaism and Montessori. Neither discusses specific methods of how Jewish religion should be brought into the classroom.

Ahmad (2014) highlights the importance of having a strong foundation in education from an early age, in order to produce lifelong learners. She advocates that the Montessori method is suitable for this goal, as it encourages the use of the senses to explore and understand the world. She emphasizes how compatible this is with Islam, as the Quran emphasizes the greatness of the senses “And God who brought you from your mother’s womb knowing nothing but He has endowed you with hearing, sight and mind so that you might have cause to be grateful” (16:78; as cited in Ahmad, 2014). Ahmad goes on to highlight that both Montessori and Islam teaches peace and love towards the environment and all living things. According to Ahmad, Montessori and Islam also teach that newborns have an inherent sense of good and bad, and should therefore have good role models and be given lessons in grace and courtesy. She encourages that more Muslims should take the initiative to start Montessori pre-schools but cautions that they should do it with a sincere intention to “provide quality, affordable education and to earn the reward from God” (Ahmad, 2014, p.19). Like Coates and Schein, Ahmad focuses on the compatibility of religious tradition and Montessori, but does not discuss a method of implementation. Other studies on Montessori ECD do not focus on specific traditions. Bone, Cullen & Loveridge (2007) looked at everyday experiences of children in three different early childhood settings in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Each setting (a Montessori classroom, a private pre-school and a Rudolf Steiner [Waldorf] kindergarten) represented the opinions of teachers, parents and children. The study focuses on the practices surrounding food and eating, and uses sharing of food as a starting point for analyzing spiritual experiences. This research presents the concept of everyday spirituality, by recognizing the mystery, wonder and extraordinary in ordinary mundane events (Bone, Cullen & Loveridge, 2007). In all three settings, Bone found that everyday spirituality was part of daily pedagogical practice and reflected the holistic aspects of the early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa. She found that different spiritual experiences were supported in each of the settings, and that the spirit of the child was celebrated in each setting. In particular, she found spiritual aspects in many parts of the everyday life of the Montessori setting, and believed that the philosophy of Montessori had embedded in it a space for the development and exploration of the spiritual (Bone, 2008). Bone has demonstrated what many Montessorians believe – that spirituality may be separated from religion, but it cannot be separated from Montessori!

Tregenza (2008) also looks at Montessori's ideas and principles about spirituality. In her study based in South Australia, she looks at the place of spirituality in education. The Government of South Australia included spiritual wellbeing as one of the five dimensions in its "Learner Wellbeing Framework." She finds that Montessori's ideas and principles are useful for contemporary educators in informing, understanding and responding to the challenges they face with regards to the spiritual needs of young children. She advocates that Montessori's ideas about the spiritual wellbeing of children are still relevant and valid for 21st century children.

Cossentino (2005) examines the practice of Montessori education as ritualized activity, echoing practices in religions. She studies a lesson in a Montessori primary classroom using the lens of ritual to examine the practice of Montessori education. She regards ritual in this context as "the action of teaching and learning, and the messages that are embedded in that action" (Cossentino, 2005, p.226). Cossentino argues that ritual functions as a symbolic connection between the "Montessori method (as articulated by Dr Montessori) and its practice as enacted by Montessorians" (Cossentino, 2005, p. 214). According to Cossentino, ritualized activity defines the framework of Montessori practice and draws attention to the intricacy and unity of the method. The Montessori 'cosmological' worldview is centred on independence, concentration, coordination, respect and order. Montessorians construct their practice within the cultural and technical borders of this worldview. One finds Montessorians across the world showing children in a very specific manner how to roll and unroll a mat, how to pour dry and wet ingredients, how to place cubes one on top of the other to build a tower and so forth. Like many religions, Montessori is established on practice. Cossentino advocates that Montessori practice is cosmological and ritualized and believes that ritualized activity is amongst the most distinctive features of the Montessori method. She suggests that Montessori Education is a religion!

In a study conducted in Massachusetts, at Tufts University's lab school, Mardell & Abo-Zena (2010) spent the final two months of the school year focusing on the topic of beliefs with 18 kindergartners at the inclusive model early childhood centre. The project aimed to create a space in which children could explore their own and others' understanding, questions and perspectives of the divine, creation and heaven. The project was born after children demonstrated an interest in spiritual matters and requested "directly to study God" (p.13). Mardell & Abo-Zena argue that although

children generally study world religions in middle and high schools, they should develop the disposition of tolerance during early childhood years, as this is the ideal time for children to develop positive attitudes towards themselves and others. It is during the early childhood period that children first gain knowledge and develop opinions about differences, and if the exploration of different beliefs is guided and encouraged during this time children will be more tolerant. Mardell & Abo-Zena found that participation in this project promoted tolerance amongst the children, and improved their problem-solving and critical-thinking abilities. The project concludes that young children are perfectly capable of engaging in respectful discussions about beliefs, and advocates that issues of religious diversity and differences in beliefs should be made an intentional part of the early childhood curriculum, even as part of classroom conversations. Mardell & Abo-Zena have taken the approach that nurturing spirituality intentionally in early childhood programmes should be done in the context of religion education, i.e. teaching about many different religions.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the different views of spirituality in Early Childhood Development scholarship. It shows that the debate of including or excluding religion from early childhood settings is not unique to Montessori. This chapter also highlights the struggle that Dr. Montessori faced in terms of religion – both in her personal and professional capacity. While Montessori's belief that spirituality is of vital importance in the early years is consistent with the views of scholars around the world, she left a mixed legacy for teaching religion in schools.

The case studies reviewed show how early childhood practitioners across the world differ on the place of religion in pre-primary classrooms. Both Montessori and early childhood settings in general include the nurturing of spirituality in early childhood settings in one of three ways, that is through religious instruction, spirituality and through religion education.

This study seeks to get greater insight into religious education in Montessori schools in the Western Cape. It will pay attention to the contemporary practices of Montessori teachers to see how they are teaching religion, how has Montessori's sometimes ambivalent approach influenced their approach and also what the goals of their religious education are. Moreover, it seeks to find if Montessorians today face the same struggles

that she faced in terms of religion and whether their approach to religious education may be regarded as religious instruction, secular spirituality or religion education.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and outlines the rationale for the methodological choices made. It looks at the limitations of the research design before concluding.

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1 Framework

In order to generate the type of data necessary to answer my research questions I needed to carefully consider the research approach I would use. As I sought depth in the data I found the qualitative approach most fitting. The qualitative approach also held a greater possibility than the quantitative approach to get closer to the contemporary practice of teachers; and it offered better insights about religion in the Montessori context.

I initially set out to study religion in 3 different faith-based Montessori schools. During the data collection period I realized that in order to get a broader view of religion in Montessori I needed also to look at a Montessori school that had no affiliation to any religion as well. Since the study looks at multiple groups of people, it is referred to as a collective case study approach (Fouché, 2005).

According to Baxter & Jack (2008), qualitative case studies are useful for exploring or describing a phenomenon in context and allows for the use of various data sources. The strategy of using different data sources boosts the credibility of results and is convenient for drawing comparisons. This design is therefore quite appropriate to achieve the broader aim of the study – i.e. for furthering the understanding of religious education in Montessori preschools in the Western Cape.

Observations allowed me to gain some insight and a deeper understanding of the setting and the contemporary practice of teachers. It enabled me to pick up on things people may not necessarily talk about during an interview, and had the added advantage of enabling me to capture the context within which people interact (Strydom, 2002).

Interviews are better suited to gain understanding about the goals of religious education and the impact of Montessori's approach on teachers' practice. According to Cassell & Symon (2004), interviews are useful to establish interviewees' perspectives and how and why they have come to their particular perspectives. As one of the most flexible

methods of data collection, it also allows the researcher to explore different levels of meaning and is a method readily accepted by participants (Cassell & Symon).

As a Montessori teacher trainer in my personal capacity, I realized that engaging with contemporary practice of teachers could directly influence my work with students in the future. Relating theory to practice adds authenticity and relevance to students and the outcomes of this study could directly impact teacher education.

3.2. Research Questions

This study aims to explore what is happening in terms of religion in Montessori schools and has one general question: “What is religious education in Montessori schools?” This question will help me define the landscape of religious education in Montessori schools in the Western Cape. In order to interrogate this question in a variety of ways, I observed the practice and then gain insights into the thinking behind the practices through interviews.

The study also has three specific questions. “How are teachers teaching religion? “Are they aware of Maria Montessori’s approach to religious education?” and “What are the goals of their religious education?” By looking at how they are teaching religion, I aim to evaluate particular schools offering religious instruction, religion education or spirituality. This question also allows comparisons across the schools as it enabled me to look at the similarities and differences in their methods of teaching religion. When trying to establish if they are aware of Maria Montessori’s approach to religious education, I aim to determine to what extent Maria Montessori has influenced their religious education programme. Are they directly or indirectly aware of the uncertainty in Maria Montessori’s approach to religious education? More interestingly, are they encountering the same challenges that she faced in the teaching of religion. Finally, by exploring the goals of their religious education programmes I aim to find out if their goals impact on the manner in which they teach and allow me to determine if they are creating their own definitions of religion and religious education.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection at the faith-based schools took place between November 2014 and February 2015. Due to the late decision to include a Non-Denominational school as well

as the difficulties experienced in locating one willing to participate in the study, the data collection at this school was only done in August 2015.

3.3.1 Observations

Data for each case study was collected through 4 observations and 2 semi-structured interviews at each of the four schools (i.e. a total of 16 observations and 8 interviews). Some of the research questions could best be answered through observations. It is well known that the presence of an observer can impact the behaviour, practices and relationships of the observed. To minimize this effect, I spent 4 days in each school for periods ranging between 2 and 3 hours per observation. This allowed me to observe adults and children in their 'natural setting,' and to desensitize them to my presence. Each observation examined the practices of circle time, greetings, meal times and any celebrations or religious lessons or events that took place during my visit. An open-ended naturalistic approach was followed to enable me to report on what was actually happening in these schools. Field notes taken during the observations contain a chronological description of the observations. Some parts of the sessions were audio-recorded and some were video-recorded to assist me with data capturing. This data was transcribed and added to my observation notes.

3.3.2 Interviews

The use of interviews was vital in determining a layer of understanding that is not possible through observations. I interviewed the principal and directress (teacher) in each school, which helped me to determine their justifications, thoughts and intentions on the subject of religion, and to establish the level of importance they placed on religion in the school. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide with a combination of open and closed ended questions. While the interviews were flexible, I used an interview schedule (Appendix 3) as a guide to stay focused on my research questions. The interviews varied in length between 30 and 60 minutes and were all audio-recorded and manually transcribed.

3.4. Selection of Participants

The participants in the study, located in the Western Cape province of South Africa, were teachers, principals and indirectly children in three faith-based Montessori schools as well as one Montessori school not affiliated to any religion. The Western Cape is a culturally diverse province in South Africa, home to people from multiple religions and

cultures. The final sample shows a good mix of race, socio-economic status and religions representative of the Western Cape communities.

In 2015 the South African Montessori Association (SAMA) provided me with an unofficial count of Montessori schools in South Africa. There are currently 400 known Montessori schools in South Africa, of which approximately 90 are located in the Western Cape. About 15 of these schools are faith-based; leading me to believe it would be quite easy to find schools to participate in the study. This was not the case. In general, people do not like being observed. My role as a Montessori teacher trainer may have aggravated this, but it is more likely that because the study looks at religion that people were not keen to get involved.

3.4.1 Non-denominational School

Despite the fact that the biggest percentage of Montessori schools in the Western Cape are not affiliated to a specific religion, I found it quite challenging to find a non-denominational school willing to participate. At the mere mention of religion, most schools cautiously turned me away. One school went as far as saying that it was a “sensitive topic”. After about 6 failed attempts to secure a non-denominational school willing to participate, I finally turned to the South African Montessori Association (SAMA)’s list of “**authentic**” Montessori schools looking for a school that had no affiliation to a specific religion. (SAMA defines authentic schools as those who adhere to the 6 fundamental principles of Montessori schools – See Appendix 6). It did not matter if the school did not teach religion at all, or if the school chose to teach about various religions. I wanted a school that did not teach only about one specific religion. A Non-Denominational Montessori School about 50 km outside of the city centre finally agreed to participate.

3.4.2 Islamic School

With the recent surge in Islamic Montessori schools I expected to find Islamic schools much easier. However, I had a similar experience in my search for a non-denominational school. One school turned me away with no reason, while another school agreed, but then cancelled the visits on the day. My attempts to reschedule appointments were met with no response. Two schools then indicated a willingness to participate, both regarding themselves as Montessori schools but I chose to go with the school that responded first.

3.4.3 Christian School

At the outset I believed that it would be easiest to locate a Christian Montessori school. However most schools affiliated to Christianity either did not teach the religion, or they considered themselves as Montessori-based (i.e. religious schools using aspects of Montessori). After following up with some leads, I found a school in Oudtshoorn, which is located on the outskirts of the Western Cape Province. They led me to the school used in this study.

3.4.4 Jewish School

The Jewish school was the easiest to find. It was the only one I had heard of in the Western Cape and when I contacted them, they were keen to participate. Once they had agreed, I discovered that there were other Jewish Montessori schools as well. Gaining access to the school required me to apply to the Jewish Community Liaison Officer for clearance and authorization to conduct my research there. The application required me to complete a form with identifying and contact details and to submit proof of identification as well as a letter from my supervisor on the University's letterhead.

3.5. Generalizability

Given the small sample size of this study, I acknowledge that no claims for generalizability or applicability of findings can be made.

3.6. Data Analysis

The main aim for analyzing the data was to find answers to the research questions I had set. The data was analyzed using a Qualitative Thematic Analysis. This approach helps to describe and organize data by analyzing it for ideas, themes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Strydom, 2002). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82).

The data was analyzed in the framework provided by the research questions. The themes identified in sentences and paragraphs were linked to the research questions. Once themes were identified, the data was coded to make comparisons or to identify patterns in the data that may require further analysis (Strydom, 2002). I manually coded the data, which helped me to get really close to the materials and made the identification of themes and ideas much easier.

One criticism of my approach might be that it is subjective as it depends largely on my interpretation and experience. This may also affect the reliability of the results. The flexibility of the approach makes it difficult to determine what aspect of the data is important and in the same light, important data may also be missed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of analyzing the data was a cause of some anxiety on my part as I realized at some points I had just stopped the observation too early, or I found myself asking leading questions in the interviews or not probing enough. I could also associate with the common criticism of this approach to data analysis that it was time consuming. However, I need to acknowledge that the time spent analyzing data could have been reduced significantly through the use of specialized computer programmes.

3.7. Limitations of the study

As with most qualitative studies the sample sizes are usually limited. This ultimately relates to limited data as more data could have been gathered with a larger sample size. However, as explained with the rationale in the research design I sought in-depth data as opposed to the extensive data involving a larger sample size. With regards to the literature, I was also challenged in accessing some of the original texts, as they were over 100 years old and out of print. I wrote to numerous companies locally and internationally, and even posted an advert on Facebook for one of the books.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

The research ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town requires ethical clearance on all research involving human subjects. I applied for, and received ethical clearance for my study before I approached the schools. The schools were approached for consent prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The schools were provided with a letter outlining the aims of the study, and the contact details of the researcher and the Department. Schools were free to pass this information to parents and governing bodies if needed. Each principal and directress also received an information sheet about the research together with my contact details and the contact details of the Department. The letter also outlined the aims of the study, what it involved and their right to withdraw from the study at any point. A sample of this letter can be seen in Appendix 1. The principals and directresses were required to sign as an

indication of informed consent to participate in the study. A sample of the consent form can be seen in Appendix 2.

3.9. Confidentiality

Participants were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially, and that while pseudonyms would be used, the approximate location of the school would be known. I handled all the raw data and ensured that pseudonyms were used for the directress, the principal, the children and the schools. I made every effort to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process; and also tried to minimize the possibility of identification in the manner in which I wrote up the contextual data relevant to the study.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design of this study. It has shown how a qualitative research approach was the most appropriate in advancing my aims; i.e. to establish a deeper understanding of religion in Montessori preschools. A collective case study approach has proved useful in answering the main research questions using both observations and interviews to gather data. The data collection process has yielded some interesting results, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

This chapter has also outlined the limitations of the study, and recognizes that the findings may not easily be generalized. Nevertheless, the research undertaken has been significant in providing some insight on religious education in Montessori pre-schools in the Western Cape. These insights will be discussed in the next few chapters, which provides the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: School Profiles

This research study sets out to explore religion in Montessori early childhood settings in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The main participants in this study were the principals, teachers and indirectly, the children in three faith-based Montessori schools as well as one Montessori school not affiliated to any religion. All the schools are situated in different suburbs in the Western Cape. This chapter provides a short profile of each school. It starts with a brief description of the Western Cape and then goes on to describe each of the schools in terms of its structure and operations to set the context for the findings discussed in the chapters to follow. To preserve anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms have been used for all schools, teachers and children.

4.1 The Western Cape

Geographically, the Western Cape is the 4th largest province in South Africa. It occupies approximately 10% of the total area of South Africa, and is home to approximately 10% of the total national population. According to the 2011 Census there are 5,822,734 million people residing in the Western Cape (Stats SA, 2015). The Western Cape is made up of six Municipalities and all the schools in this study are serviced by the City of Cape Town Municipality.

4.2 The Non-Denominational Montessori School [Non-Denominational]

The Non-Denominational Montessori School is situated in a town in the Western Cape about 50 kilometres east of the city centre. The Non-Denominational Montessori started informally in 1996 as a playgroup in the owner's lounge, and officially opened its doors in January 1998. For the past 17 years, the Non-Denominational Montessori has been adhering to Montessori best practices. The school is a full member of the South African Montessori Association. As a member of the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA), the school is expected to have quality assurance assessments. These are conducted by the Independent Quality Assurance Association (IQAA). The school currently operates from the same residential property (but in a separate building built especially for the school), with special consent from the local municipality to host 40 enrolled learners. One enters the school via the garden, passing the main

house. There is also an outbuilding, which is used as a library and a space for circle time or large group activities. The outdoor environment is set up with distinct areas. There is a space for gardening, gross motor development and caring for pets (the school has rabbits). There is a table, chairs and shelves set out with activities appropriate for use outdoors.

When entering the school building, one steps into a tiny room where some files are kept. This room also has some activities set up and a child-sized table and serves as a workspace for both adults and children. The classroom has two-levels with 5 or 6 steps leading into a space with a low ceiling, which creates the feeling of a children's space. At the bottom of the steps to the left, is a little passage on the lower level where bags are stored neatly out of the way. The downstairs area has one classroom space and another smaller space off it, which has a sink at adult height, a children's table and an art drying rack. The classroom is set up with Art and Practical Life (life skills) Activities.

The upstairs level has the Language, Maths, Culture and Sensorial areas. There is also a sink at child-height upstairs as well as a toilet area. There are 3 cubicles, each with a curtain for privacy. The classroom has bay windows, with shelves custom-made to fit below them.

School starts at 08h30 daily. As children arrive they are allowed to play inside or outside. At 08h30, they ring a bell to signal to the children that it is time to go inside. On some mornings the English and Afrikaans groups will have separate circle time either in the library area, or in the upstairs classroom. They then have a work cycle of 3 hours. On the mornings that they do not have circle time, they move straight into work time. After the work cycle they have a large group snack for the English and Afrikaans children combined in the upstairs area, and then they all go outside to play. After outside play, they have separate story times – one group will use the library and the other will have their storytime in the upstairs room before they go home.

There are approximately 40 children split between the English and Afrikaans classes. The children range in age between 3 and 6 years old. The school is open to all religions and races.

The founder of the privately owned Non-Denominational Montessori Pre-School is both the principal and Afrikaans directress at the independent bilingual school. She is a qualified journalist who studied the Montessori course and changed her career to care for her son. The school has an English class and an Afrikaans class each with its own

directress and assistant. While the groups take turns working upstairs or downstairs, the children share the space during work time (i.e. the children can choose to work wherever they like). During my observations, the school also hosted a student who was doing her teaching practice. Both the directresses are Montessori trained through the London Montessori Centre, who offered training many years ago at the Auburn House School in Kenilworth; and both are registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE). The assistants are both untrained and have only received informal training from the staff at the school.

The school's vision is "to develop independent and self-thinking individuals who help to create a better world for themselves and others by actively contributing to a changing society" (NDS, School Information Documents, 2015). The school aims to provide a nurturing, cooperative learning environment, which respects the diversity, needs and rights of all learners and encourages respect for self, others, the environment and for life. According to the owner, the school's main mission is "to create an environment in which every child can be the best he can be."

When asked about religion, the owner felt that it did not belong in the pre-primary classroom. She was familiar with Montessori's experiments with religion as well as her oscillation with religion in her personal and professional life. Even though she does not attend church regularly, she saw herself as a religious person. She personally struggles to understand the resurrection and the crucifixion and felt challenged by the thought of teaching that to 3-6 year olds in a Montessori context that is anchored in reality. She believes that religious education with this age group will be as superficial as "pictures of Jonah and the whale" to colour in. Like Maria Montessori, the principal also struggled between faith and practices.

4.3 The Islamic Montessori School

The Islamic Montessori School is situated in the southern suburbs of the City of Cape Town in the Western Cape. The Islamic Montessori started as a non-profit organization in 2006 for 5 children in the garage of a local *imam's* (religious leader) house. The school has since grown substantially over the last 9 years and is now located at the back of a family home with 3 classrooms specially built for the purpose of the school. By 2015, there were 48 children registered and they had two pre-primary classes and one primary class sharing the playground at different times.

One enters the school via the front garden, passing the entrance to the main house. Off this walkway, one finds the reception, office, staff toilets and kitchen located at the back of the main house before the gate to the school. The two pre-primary classes are next to each other, each with its own toilet cubicle inside. Next to the pre-primary class is a small room used for individual *Madrassah* (Islamic school) lessons, and adjacent to this is the room used for the primary children. The outdoor area is large with a wooden jungle gym, pot plants, benches and a little wooden house for the children to play in.

The classroom has large glass sliding doors leading into a large rectangular shaped room. As you enter, you see a sink area for washing dishes on the left and to the right you see some shelves, child-sized tables and chairs. The classroom has distinct areas for Art; Practical Life (life skills); Sensorial; Maths, Language and Culture.

There are two pre-primary classrooms, each with approximately 20 children. Both classes have vertical age groupings with children aged between 3 and 6 years old. The school is open to children of all religions and races, but only has Muslim children enrolled.

On completion of her Montessori pre-primary qualification, the founder (and current principal) of the Islamic school enrolled for an Islamic Studies course at a family member's Islamic college. The principal completed her training with the College of Modern Montessori. Each of the two pre-primary classes has a qualified Directress and an Assistant still in training. The Directress of the class I observed completed her Montessori 3-6 pre-primary course at Auburn House in 2014. The teaching staff in the school are all Muslim. While the school has no official specifications that staff should be Muslim, the school has specific expectations of the staff in terms of dress and behaviour. The principal believes that as the "flag bearer of Islam" (IP, Interview, 12th April 2015), the teacher has the responsibility to bring truth to the child and to teach children about the correct *hijab* (religious dress). She requires staff to wear modest, loose fitting clothing, as they are the role models for the children and need to set the correct example. Most of the teachers in the school have completed varying degrees of Islamic Courses. The school requires teachers who have not completed any Islamic courses to start with one as soon as they are employed. This is essential, as the school tries to integrate religion into the daily programme. Teachers employed specifically for religious instruction are not required to have specific qualifications but they are expected to read

the Quran with the correct grammar rules and pronunciations, which is assessed by the principal.

According to the school's website, the primary goal of the Islamic school is to enter paradise and to be saved from hellfire. Their secondary goal is to provide children with the best all-round education based on the teachings and principles of the Quran and Sunnah, within a Montessori based environment. The principal had a vision of offering an authentic Montessori programme together with religious instruction in Islam. She felt that Montessori resonated so well with what she learnt about Islam that she needed to merge the two. While she had heard about Montessori's experiment school, she was not really aware of her religious approach or experiments with religion.

4.4 The Christian Montessori School

The Christian Montessori school is situated in a quiet settlement about 15 kilometres north of Durbanville in the Western Cape. The community has mostly poor and unemployed people and is in the midst of a largely industrial area. The school officially opened its doors in March 2006 in a building especially built for the purposes of a school. In 2004, when the committee which started the school was formed, there was no building available in the community. They aimed to transform the community through the children and believed that the Lord led them to the realization that "if you want people to be uplifted and to develop a good self-image, you must give them the best you can" (CS, Information Documents, 2015). The committee's mandate states that, "You cannot take a child out of a squatter house and put them into a squatter crèche." They felt that containers were not suitable for children as they were designed for storing boxes and goods. It is common practice to convert shipping containers into classrooms in poor communities in South Africa. The containers are known as edutainers and are delivered as ready-to-use crèches with access for disabled learners (Bright Kid Foundation, 2013).

One of the founder members researched alternative options. He came across building material, which was suitable to produce a good-looking building. The building was designed to allow that it be built in phases and could gradually be extended to serve the community at large through various upliftment projects. The committee aims to operate independently of municipal services and therefore built the school to operate as green as possible with the technology at their disposal.

The school is situated on a large plot with classrooms, training rooms and offices leading to a common quad area. One enters the school into this quad area. The school has a large play area behind the classrooms as well as a vegetable garden. The classroom I observed consisted of two inter-leading rooms with small windows and a wooden door on each room. The first room has a child-sized sink, a small dressing table with mirror and shelves with Practical Life, Sensorial and Art activities set out. The second room has Maths, Language, Culture and Religious activities set out. There are a few low tables pushed next to each other and a large floor mat in each class.

The school is a Jubilee Excellence School (JES), which incorporates the Montessori method of education. This curriculum has been developed over a period of 22 years and prescribes lessons taught each day. The curriculum teaches scripture and God's love for children as a foundation on which their lives and futures are built upon. It is based on various aspects of the creation as recorded in The Bible, elements of the National Curriculum as well as the Montessori apparatus and philosophy. The JES curriculum includes approximately 122 boxes of pictures related to various aspects of the broader theme of creation, thereby expanding on themes covered by schools that follow the National Curriculum.

The school has four classrooms, each able to cater for 40 children with four teachers. The school currently accommodates over 140 children between the ages of 3 and 6. The school is open to children from all religions and races. But the community it operates in is predominantly Christian, and the school has only Christian children enrolled. The class has multiple ages from 3 to 5, but Grade R children are in a separate class.

The school is a project of a non-profit organization, which was started in 2004 when a group of people from various ministry projects in the community formed a committee to start a school. The principal (a former manager at a mushroom factory shop and a member of the community), started at the school as a teacher when it first opened.

Most of the teachers are unemployed people from the community with no previous training. They complete a ten-week training in the Jubilee Excellence School (JES) curriculum before they are placed in a classroom for in-service training. They are then sent to the Sustainability Institute in Stellenbosch to complete a Level 4 or Level 5 qualification in ECD, focusing on Montessori. Some of them are then assisted to enroll for a B.Ed. Degree. All the teachers are required to teach religion. They refer to the Bible for guidance and have regular staff meetings in which they read from the Bible. The class

I observed in had an Afrikaans Directress, a Xhosa Assistant and an additional helper who spoke Afrikaans and some Xhosa.

The committee has a vision of uplifting and empowering the community by introducing them to Biblical principles and Godly values. It believed that it would best reach the community through a pre-school, which trained and employed people from its own community. Searching for a curriculum that would achieve their goals, it started the pre-school as a Jubilee Excellence School (JES) with a focus on character transformation, respect, fairness, citizenship, responsibility, caring and discipline. The Montessori element was added later because it resonated so well with the school's principles and teachings. The principal's vision is to see the children make something of their lives that they grow up in the image that God wants them to be.

4.5 The Jewish Montessori School

The Jewish Montessori School is situated about 15 kilometres north of the city centre. The Jewish Montessori School is a full member of the South African Montessori Association and an affiliate of the Chabad Early Childhood Education (CECE) network. The founders set out to establish a Jewish community centre and found a need for a preschool. It was started in 2006 with 6 children in a renovated garage. In 2007, the founders bought the current location for the school and started a second pre-primary class and later a primary and toddler class. The current site is a large double-storey building, with a large playground, shared by all the different age groups at different times. The school is also used as a community centre, where adults come to learn about Judaism or participate in Jewish rituals and religious celebrations. On arrival at the school a security guard opens the gate and leads one to a foyer, which also serves as the reception area. To the left is a staircase to the upstairs classes and to the right is a door to the primary classes. Straight ahead one walks through the staff room into the large playground, which has a jungle gym area, a sandpit and a large walk through rabbit hutch. The staff room is also used as a meeting room for adults in the community who come in for special religious classes to learn about Judaism. The classroom I observed in is upstairs. One walks through another class to get to it. There is another door that leads onto a small balcony, which has a staircase into the playground. The classroom is small and has an adult-height counter with a sink in it. The shelves, tables and chairs are all child sized. The Montessori areas are not clearly defined and seem to be combined in

one space of the classroom. There is also a computer in the corner of this space. There is a dress up area as well as a Jewish cultural area. The class has its own toilet with a door. The class has washing lines hung from wall to wall across the ceiling at roughly adult head height, with some decorations and artwork on it. There is also an upside down umbrella hanging from the curtain rail, which is decorated as a spider web. There are quite a few posters, some of which include children's comments. For example, one poster has hand written headings: "This term we enjoyed", "Next term we'd like to learn about" and below it are answers to this question that appears to have come from the children.

I observed the classroom on Friday mornings leading up to Hanukkah. The school has a special snack planned on their Sabbath Day in preparation for Hanukkah. Shabbat snack is a special time where the children role-play the rituals. Every child has a turn to take the role of the Shabbat *Ima* (mother) or *Abba* (father). Their parents are invited to observe and are given a box to take home, which contains some Shabbat wine (grape juice), Shabbat candles and some home baked *challahs* (bread). They sing blessings over the candles to "welcome" Shabbat, recite the Kiddush-blessing over the wine and sing the motzee-prayer for eating bread over the Challah.

The school has merged a bit of Montessori with what is known as the Reggio Emilia approach to education. Reggio Emilia is a town outside of Milan, Italy, in which schools are built on a social constructivist framework inspired by John Dewey and other prominent theorists. The Reggio Emilia approach sees children as the collective responsibility of the community. It states that knowledge is co-constructed through engagement with the environment and others, and views the child as an active participant in learning (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). It believes that all children have the potential to learn and that preschool education is a right. "One of the key principles of the Reggio Emilia schools is a deeply held belief in the positive image of the child. It builds on the premise that each child has the desire to connect with others, to engage in learning, and to enter into a relationship with their environment" (Dodd-Nufrio, p. 236). The school has two classes for children aged 3-6 years, but the children are split according to ages. The class I observe in had eight 4 – 5 year olds, a Directress and an assistant. The school also has a toddler classroom, a primary class for children aged 6 – 9 and one for children aged 9 – 12. The school is only open to Jewish children, regardless of the family's level of observance, or affiliation. As a Jewish centre with a purpose to

give Jewish instruction, they do not want to reduce the focus on Jewish studies. Being a child-centred organization, the principal believes that if they took children from other religions, they would have to give equal ground to all the religions coming in, and this would diffuse their focus on Jewish education.

The school is owned by a non-profit organization. It is a project of the synagogue and Jewish community centre. It does not have any policies with regards to employing Jewish teachers only. In fact, all the lead teachers in the school are non-Jewish. The principal believes that adults are able to keep their own religion to themselves. When children are aware that their teacher observes a different religion, they can learn to be tolerant, respecting her and at the same time develop respect for the world at large. Non-Jewish teachers are not expected to learn the Jewish *brachas* (prayers) but most of them know it after being in the school for such long periods. Some of the teachers are qualified in Montessori, while others have some levels of Reggio training. During the interview process, non-Jewish teachers are asked if they are willing to “submit” themselves to a Jewish belief system (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015). Finding appropriately qualified Jewish teachers available to work as lead teachers has proven quite challenging. For Jewish instruction however, the school employs only Jewish observant teachers. They undergo special training in Israel called Telam, which they upgrade on an annual basis.

The couple that started the school belonged to Chabad Lubavitch, which is the largest international unified religious, educational and social movement in the Jewish world. The director of this movement recognized the needs of a growing Jewish community and approached the current principal and her Rabbi husband in 2004 to establish a centre of Jewish life on the West Coast of Cape Town. The Chabad was established to strengthen the West Coast Jewish Community by bringing together all Jews in the community, regardless of their level of observation. A community synagogue (Shul) was set up to promote Jewish pride and identity, to enrich Torah study and knowledge and to enhance traditional observance and celebration. Additionally, the centre endeavours to nurture and develop faith and trust in God, to impart a love and flair for the beauty of Judaism and to inculcate a love for the Holy Land of Eretz Yisraell and to inculcate an involvement in the performance of the Mitzvot (precepts) of the Torah. With a goal of achieving high educational standards in a Jewish environment, they started the school as a Montessori school. Later, they discovered the Reggio approach and found that it was quite

compatible with Montessori. The school has moved more towards Reggio. The principal expressed the need to bring in more Montessori again to give it more balance.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the main participants in this study to establish the context in which the study is set. While the schools are all unique, they all share some similarities. The chapter shows that all the schools are situated in different suburbs in the Western Cape. The religious schools were all started in 2006 as non-profit organizations or as projects of non-profit organizations, while the Non-Denominational school started in 1998 and is privately owned. Only the Islamic and Non-Denominational schools are fully Montessori schools, while the Christian and Jewish schools have incorporated Montessori alongside other curriculums. The Christian school is a Jubilee Excellence School and the Jewish school is a Reggio Emilia inspired school. With the exception of the Jewish school that is only open to Jewish families, all the other schools are open to other religions. They however, only have children from their own religion enrolled at the school. The Non-Denominational school is multi-religious. The Jewish instruction teachers are required to have specific training, while the religious teachers at the Islamic and Christian schools are only expected to have a certain level of general knowledge about their own religion. Finally, the religious schools all share a goal of strengthening their religions. With the exception of the Islamic school, all the other schools have expressed the aim to develop children that will have a positive impact on the community or society at large. Having set this context, the next chapter will look at the differences and similarities these schools have with regards to religion.

Chapter Five: Justification and Rationale

This chapter explores the justification and rationale of the schools for religious Montessori education. The data gathered are outlined under the headings directly related to the research questions. The previous chapter has provided a short profile of each school in a way that the reader is able to identify the types of schools and areas in which they are located. In this chapter and the next one, I begin to answer the general question of “What is religious education in Montessori schools?” I do this by looking at the specific questions “What are the goals of their religious education?” “Are they aware of Maria Montessori’s approach to religious education?” and “How are teachers teaching religion?”. This chapter explores the schools’ justifications for including or excluding religion, and then the goals of its religious programmes. By exploring the goals of the religious education programmes of the schools, I can establish whether or not their goals impact on the manner in which they teach. The chapter ends with a look at the level of awareness of Montessori’s approach to religion. I should be able to determine to what extent Montessori has influenced their religious education programmes by establishing their level of awareness of her approach to religious education, as well as their awareness of the uncertainty in her approach to religious education.

This chapter is closely connected with the next chapter. There, I will look at how they are teaching religion. By investigating the way they are teaching religion I explore if the schools are also struggling with teaching religion from a faith perspective and if they find rituals or abstract ideas easier to teach in a Montessori context. I also draw comparisons across the schools and analyze the findings in terms of the framework I have followed in this study to establish if religious education at the schools are modeled on religious instruction, religion education or spirituality.

5.1 Religion & Montessori: Why or Why not?

As shown in Chapter 2, religion and Montessori has always had an interesting relationship. Montessori had very clear ideas of how to teach with the concrete, but did not realize that this could be done in religion as well. She struggled to teach the more abstract ideas in religion. Montessori battled with teaching faith, but implemented

religious practices successfully. In these experiments, she prepared environments and concrete practices, which conformed to her overall approach.

While Montessori leaned towards spiritual education, it is believed that on the eve of her death, Montessori sent a letter to a Catholic Association encouraging them to establish religious schools (Montessori, 2008). By the time she died, she had not confirmed the place of religion in the Montessori pre-primary classroom. It is therefore of great interest why the schools in this study have followed their particular course. The study found religion to be quite central in the lives of the founders of all the religious schools. The principal and founder of the Non-Denominational school also saw herself as religious but, as she defined it, “did not attend church regularly” (NDP, Interview, 14th October 2015). In most cases, the principals and directresses at the religious schools saw the Montessori approach as secondary to their religion and they placed great importance on their own religions. These findings are described per school in more detail below.

5.1.1 The Non-Denominational school

The principal at the Non-Denominational school believed that religion did not belong in the Montessori pre-primary classroom and that young children should not be taught religion at school. She believed that because the Montessori approach was anchored in reality, it meant that religion would only be taught to young children in a superficial way. She felt it would be very difficult to explain concepts like the crucifixion and the resurrection in a Christian context to 3-6 year olds.

Because I'm a Christian and um I struggle to understand the resurrection and the crucifixion; so how can I actually explain that to a 3 – 6 year old if we're really anchored in reality? There is a difficult jump of faith to be made...

but no, the children aren't gonna go home with pictures of Jonah and the whale. Because that's how superficial it would be.

(NDP, Interview, 14th October 2015)

Like Montessori, the principal of the Non-Denominational school struggled with the idea of presenting faith aspects of religion. She found abstract ideas challenging to teach to young children, but despite this, she believed that the spiritual development of children was a vital part of the Montessori environment.

I think everything we do centres around that (spiritual development of the children). Because um...if you respect wherever you are with whomever you are and by what you surrounded, then that to me is a spiritual experience. So, to me, everything we do is basically a spiritual preparation.

(NDP, Interview, 14th October 2015)

She saw spirituality as an embedded part of everyday life. She did not see the value in teaching religion and believed that if she could teach children values and respect then she has provided them with the necessary spiritual preparation. The directress disagreed with the principal. She believed that religion could be included, but it should not be restricted to one religion. Children should learn about religion in a non-denominational and secular context as part of the culture area in the classroom. She said:

I think it's...I think that's what Montessori is. I think...I don't think it should pertain to any particular religion. I do think it's um nice if children learn about other religions

(NDD, Interview, 14th October 2015)

The directress at the Non-Denominational school also saw spirituality as the “most essential thing...” that should “come into everything” (NDD, Interview, 14th October 2015). While the directress and principal at the Non-Denominational school had different views on the place of religion in a Montessori pre-primary school, they both agreed that spirituality was an essential part of the Montessori method. The school did not teach a specific religion or about religions, but placed great emphasis on spiritual development of children.

5.1.2 The Islamic School

The principal at the Islamic school believed that religion was an essential part of the classroom environment. She believed that through the school, she was fulfilling her duty to God and ultimately earning a place in heaven,

So this was what I was trying to strive for to know that when I strive for the academic side it's not something secular, it is indeed something Islamic because this is what *Allah* guided us to...to intellectualize *Allah* in the way that *Allah* intended for us, not to attain the *Dunya* (world) at the expense of our *Aakhirah* (Hereafter).

(ID, Interview, 12th April 2015)

She thought that by providing children with religious and academic knowledge, she was fulfilling a duty and commitment to God:

I make a commitment to *Allah* that I'm going to teach this child that means I'm going to teach this child with a holistic approach. Which means that I'm going to ensure that the Islamic aspect needs to be sound and authentic and sincere and in place, but the academic side plays an equally, rather as an important role.

(IP, Interview, 14th October 2015)

She used the Montessori method as a tool to providing the child with academic knowledge, which is necessary to be able to understand God:

The reason being is because (1); the child cannot intellectualize *Allah* if you are going to neglect the academic side. So yes many parents were saying what can my child do with Islamic studies, you know, what can my child do in the world today, can my child earn a living? And no you can't. You gonna earn your *Aaghira* (Hereafter), um, but at the same time if you focus on something neglecting the academic side of it, your children will never be able to conquer the world, never be able to ere um intellectualize the laws, the *kalaam* (word) of *Allah*, the wonder of *Allah*, the magnificence of *Allah*, the greatness of *Allah*, if the intellectual facets are not in its place.

(IP, Interview, 12th April 2015)

The principal also believed that Montessori echoed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s sentiments that we should be striving for excellent character all the time. She therefore, emphasized the importance of the teachers' behaviour and manner with the children. She believed that teachers should follow the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who never frowned at young children, never raised his voice or his hand, and also worked with them lovingly. She compared this to Montessori's emphasis on the spiritual development of the teacher. She placed great emphasis on the importance of children gaining both religious and academic knowledge. She believed that without the academic side, children would not be able to understand God or the laws of God.

The directress at the Islamic school also believed that their school had found a fit between religion and Montessori, and was unique in merging it.

Um, I think it works well in our setting...I think it works well, because what we've discovered is a lot of Montessori's teachings links directly to Islam, so it makes it fit in very easily for us, with the Sunnah and different things in Islam.

(ID, Interview, 12th April 2015)

She also felt that Montessori did not limit her focus to religion,

...I think her viewpoint basically wasn't to sort of, um make the main focus of the school based on a religion as far as I know.

(ID, Interview, 12th April 2015)

As the founder of the school, the principal believed that both Religious and academic knowledge were important. She was equally committed to the Montessori method and her religion and made a big effort to balance these two in her school. The directress felt that they had been successful in making Montessori and religion fit, and that they were unique as an "Islamic Montessori" school.

5.1.3 The Christian School

The founder of the Christian School believed that it was his duty to teach the community about God. He believed he had received direction from God to open a pre-school, and felt that children's lives should be shaped around the teachings of the scriptures. He thus formed a committee with others from ministerial projects in the area to start the preschool based on biblical principles in this poor, underprivileged community (CS Information Documents, 2015).

The directress and the principal of the Christian school also saw their work as a calling. Both believed that religion could not be separated from education. The directress stated that she was "meant to be" at the school (CD, Interview 4th March 2015), while the principal believed that her being at the school was a sign from God:

It was in a church. The priest ...just give a prophetic word. He said, the Lord said I give in front of you an open door and no one can close that door. And at that time I said thank you Lord for an open door. And I did feel something was happening while I was saying that. And um then, more or less a month after that or ...and then my aunt comes to me and she says to me you know what? We want to build a preschool. How do you feel like working at the preschool?

And I was thinking, but I got a job. But then suddenly this voice comes to me again, I give in front of you an open door and no-one can close. (CP, Interview, 4th March 2015)

The principal believed that teaching children about religion is vitally important and saw Montessori merely as a medium of education

Um, you know. We are not a Montessori school. We are a Jubilee school. We're just using the Montessori apparatus to help our kids

(CP, Interview, 4th March 2015)

Christianity was the centre of the Christian school. Montessori was an academic tool, but it was vitally important for children to learn about God and to live their lives according to Biblical principles. These sentiments were shared by the founders, principal and directress at the school.

5.1.4 The Jewish school

The principal at the Jewish school also made it clear that her first priority was Judaism and that the aim was to “enrich the children’s lives with Judaism” (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015). She believed that Montessori was another tool used at the school to meet their goals.

Look, I can't say my emphasis on the whole schooling was, my emphasis is not necessarily on the Montessori or on the Reggio, my emphasis is number 1, we're a Jewish school. Number 2, we use whatever mediums out there in education are designed to fit into us... (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015)

And to emphasize this belief, she later repeats it:

Number one is we're a Jewish school. If we chucked out Montessori tomorrow, we would still be a Jewish school...

(JP, Interview, 11th March 2015)

She emphasized that Montessori was not their religion but merely a tool they used

Montessori is not our religion...there are Montessori schools [for whom Montessori is] their religion and...only Montessori, it's nothing else... By us, we've adapted Maria Montessori's tools etcetera, as a tool to use in our classroom, like the Reggio tool, like

the traditional tools that we'd use...It's a tool for us to use, it is not our religion. (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015)

The directress at the Jewish school disagreed. She believed that religion should be included in the Montessori pre-primary classroom, but that it should not be restricted to one religion.

I think...my understanding is that, to be exposed to as much as possible from different aspects, and not to make anyone right or wrong, just give the children...you know because there are different religion and there are different beliefs and not to say, oh no you're wrong and this is how it actually is, but as I said to...combine them together to give them an overall view about what's going on in the world, because they're not living in a bubble, so they need to know little bit about everything.

(JD, Interview, 11th March 2015)

The directress at the Jewish school believed that children should be given religion education. She felt that children needed to be taught about different religions and given the knowledge they needed when engaging in society. The principal, on the other hand, was extremely committed to Judaism and saw this as her main focus, shaping all other tools to fit in with a Jewish ethos and philosophy.

In summary, the study found religion to be quite central in the lives of the founders of the religious schools. There was a strong link between teaching children and fulfilling a religious obligation. The founder of the Islamic school believed she was fulfilling a duty to God and the founder of the Christian school believed that he was responding to guidance from God. The principal and Directress at the Christian school believed that their work was a calling from God. Most of my informants saw the Montessori approach as secondary to their own religions. Two of the schools viewed Montessori merely as a 'tool', with one participant pointing out that this view is quite different to others who viewed Montessori as their religion! The other two schools on the other hand, were committed to Montessori, seeing it as an important part of their identity. One participant believed there was absolutely no place for religion in a Montessori pre-primary classroom, while two others felt that religion could be included, but should not be limited to one religion.

5.2 Goals of the schools

When looking at what the schools wanted to achieve, all the schools had different goals. The most common goals were (1) for children to develop their faith and a love of God and (2) the spiritual development of children. The goals of the schools are detailed below.

5.2.1 The Non-Denominational school

At the Non-Denominational school, both the directress and the principal differentiated between religion and spiritual development, placing greater importance on spiritual development in the Montessori pre-primary environment. They viewed this as a central goal of their classroom. The principal also emphasized teaching values to the children and said,

I think with the respect comes the compassion. And I think compassion is the part that you teach through your grace and courtesy, when somebody's injured, or somebody's indignant or somebody's self worth has been sort of touched. And that's normally when 3 to 6s are also quite vocal because they report um injustices

She went on to say,

And I think it's incredibly important that you, listen to them and that you do the whole peace talk. You know... how did you feel? What did you feel? How would you have? Should you have? Could you have? That sort of thing. And then the, the sort of clarification and then the confirmation at the end. And I like doing that a lot with my children because I see they start doing that amongst themselves.

(NDP, Interview, 14th October 2015)

Both the directress and principal at the Non-Denominational school saw the spiritual development of children as the main aim and focus of their school. The directress also believed that spiritual development included the development of tolerance when learning about the similarities and differences between the self and others.

I think spirituality is sort of just being...like what we all have in common and what we all have that's different and like the whole

thing about everyone having their own opinion and their own beliefs and respecting that in everybody regardless.

(NDD, Interview, 14th October 2015)

Spiritual development was the fundamental goal of the Non-Denominational School. The focus was on teaching children values, which included teaching children respect, compassion, tolerance, consideration and how to resolve conflicts. The directress and principal also felt that the spiritual development of the children were embedded in their everyday interactions. Their interactions are explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

5.2.2 The Islamic School

According to the school's website, the primary goal of the Islamic school is to enter paradise and to be saved from the hellfire, while their secondary goal is to provide children with the best all-round education based on the teachings and principles of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*. The principal aimed to integrate Montessori while nurturing a love of God,

It just became so overwhelming for me, that I most definitely needed to nurture within the young child the love of Allah...And let the child understand who Allah is in essence

The principal believed that within the community, many schools had tried to combine the two, but were unsuccessful, and saw the merging of Islam and Montessori as an opportunity for success,

...one of the, *Hadith* (sayings) the Prophet (S.A.W) said that "Allah says that I love when my slave does something that he perfects it" ...there was nothing in the community that I could say was practicing um, you know, nurturing this love of Allah in a way that I had come to understand it in my experience at *My Islamic School* and the Montessori aspect as I've seen at *My Montessori Teaching Practice Site*...for me it was like a real recipe for success.

She believed that because children were in the Absorbent Mind phase between birth and 6 years, the pre-primary years was the ideal time to provide children with religious and academic knowledge (IP, Interview, 12th April

2015). She saw the holistic development of the child as a commitment she was making to God.

We cannot neglect any side of striving to teach the young child. It's not only Islam and it's not only academic, because to be an holistic or a holistic human being and I make a commitment to *Allah* that I'm going to teach this child, that means I'm going to teach this child with a holistic approach (i.e. religion [Islam] and academic)

(IP, Interview, 12th April 2015)

The principal also placed emphasis on the child's spirituality, believing that it is nurtured concretely through every activity that the child does,

...any spiritual development that occurs within the child has to start outwardly, so every physical activity that the child encounters is a spiritual activity for the young child.

(IP, Interview, 12th April 2015)

The Directress in the Islamic school, on the other hand, believed that children were too young to learn about punishment or Hell and needed to develop a love of God first

...a blanket statement rule at our school that you do not talk to any child about Jahannam, about punishment, about anything of the sort, because they are still very young.

She emphasized the importance of nurturing the child's faith saying,

...Believing and loving *Allah* as their creator and understanding that first. So in order to get them sort of, to gain a bond with them, with a link to Islam and link to Allah that is like the utmost, most important thing.

(ID, Interview, 12th April 2015)

The school's primary goal is the attainment of paradise and salvation from hell. Interestingly, the directress believed children were too young to be taught about punishment or Hell. She saw nurturing a love of God as the most essential thing. The principal too, believed that nurturing a love of God was important, but focused on striking a balance between religious and academic teaching, which she saw as a commitment to God. She also cited the importance of spirituality being developed through every physical activity the child encounters. It was not clear how she defined

spiritual development, but I will look more closely at the everyday activities in the Islamic school in the next chapter to ascertain this.

5.2.3 The Christian School

The main goal of the principal at the Christian school was for children to grow up in the image of God. She saw the person living in the image of God as a person who is responsible and able to provide for his family's needs (CP, Interview, 4th March 2015). She believed that the school would achieve this goal mainly through talking to the children,

The bible stories and stories and the songs and also talking about it even when something goes wrong. Talk with the child about the bible uh uh and stuff like that.

(CP, Interview, 4th March 2015)

The directress believed it was more essential for children to develop a love of God. She believed that when you explain to children that God loves them, the children would naturally love God,

You teach the child um what God did for us, you teach them that God love us first, neh, like now we're going to Easter...we teach the child that God sent his son, he died on the cross...because he did it out of love, he loved us first so just we just have to return that love...

(CD, Interview, 4th March 2015)

She believed that when the children understand the trinity and the love of God, everything would "just flow into it" (CD, Interview, 4th March 2015). She said,

They have to understand about the trinity, God the father, God the son, and God the holy spirit. What is each one's job in the trinity. I want them to understand that, but really I want them to understand about the love of God. (CD, Interview, 4th March 2015)

She also felt that children should be taught respect, which is made so much easier if they loved God, as they would then do things because of their love of God

I really think the respect going with religion, they really need to learn that...And you try to teach them, but really I think that at home...maybe it lacked, but really that respect...when you love God

or your God, then you will eventually love your friend, you won't hit them, you won't swear at them, you won't do stuff that is going to hurt him (CD, Interview, 4th March 2015).

Both the principal and directress at the Christian school believed that their goals would be achieved by preaching to children. The principal also believed that through Bible stories, songs and discussions, they would achieve their goal to have children who grow up in the image of God. The directress, on the other hand, saw the value of telling children about the sacrifices God had made for them. Through these, they would achieve their goal to have children who loved God and who naturally treat others with respect. In the next chapter, these activities (sermons, stories, songs and discussions) and everyday interactions are explored more closely.

5.2.4 The Jewish School

The main aim of the Jewish school was to make Judaism a part of the daily lives of the children and the families who come to the school. The principal said,

Our religious objectives is to provide space and opportunity for um, for all our children and families to experience Judaism and to be able to tap into their Judaism (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015).

She also emphasized the importance of providing a space and opportunity for families to be able to serve God, but emphasized the importance of having a non-judgmental space

but we don't ever force religion on anyone, we don't – um we – we view...we don't judge we don't judge anyone, we view everyone as whole and complete no matter their religious affiliation. We have um, an ethos that you know, everybody has a Godly soul and they can tap into their Godly soul a direct link to Hashem, what we call God...

(JP, Interview, 11th March 2015)

Integrating Judaism into the community was an important focus of the principal. She aimed to provide a space as well as the opportunity for children and families to practice Judaism and to serve God in a non-judgmental environment.

In summary, the most common goal amongst the schools was the development of faith and nurturing a love of God. The focus at the Christian school was entirely on faith development, with the aim being on nurturing a love of God and children who grow up in the image of God. The Islamic school also saw nurturing the love of God as important, but cited salvation as their primary goal. They also mentioned holistic education defined as balancing the academic and religious aspects. The Jewish school was focused on integrating Judaism into the community, while the main goal of the Non-Denominational school was spiritual development through teaching values and through everyday interactions. In the next chapter, I look at how the schools are implementing religious education and will reflect on whether or not they are achieving their goals.

5.3 Montessori's Approach to religious education

The extent to which Maria Montessori has influenced the religious education programmes of the schools is of interest to me. Here, I explore the participants' level of awareness and understanding of Montessori's approach and uncertainties with regards to religion to determine to what extent it has influenced their religious education programmes.

5.3.1 Non-Denominational School

The principal and directress at the Non-Denominational School approached religion differently, representing the ambiguity of Maria Montessori. The principal was well aware of Montessori's oscillation with religion. Yet, she believed that religion did not belong in the Montessori 3-6 environment and that it was the duty of parents to provide children with religion during this age. She also felt that including or excluding religion from the programme did not determine whether or not the school was "Montessori". She specified that if religious schools adhered to the 6 basic principles of a Montessori school stipulated by the South African Montessori Association (Appendix 6), they could indeed then still be classified as Montessori schools.

The directress at the Non-Denominational school indicated that she knew Montessori was a very religious person, but at the same time had a non-denominational view of religion in the classroom. The directress was very much in favour of including religion in the pre-primary classroom in a non-denominational manner, i.e. that children should learn about different religions.

5.3.2 The Islamic School

The principal at the Islamic school understood that Montessori was a very religious person and believed that Montessori strongly encouraged one to teach children about God. She did not know much about the experiment school or about Montessori's vacillation with religion, but compared Montessori's views of the spiritual development of the teacher to *Hadiths* (sayings and practices) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The directress at the Islamic school believed that Montessori had a non-denominational approach to religion and believed that their school was unique in marrying religion and Montessori. She felt that it worked quite well because of the links they had made between Montessori and Islam.

5.3.3 The Christian school

The principal at the Christian school did not know much about Montessori and her approach to religion. She did not explore this aspect, as her focus has always been on the academic side of Montessori. She was most intrigued by Maria Montessori's work with underprivileged children. For the religious development of the child, she has looked at the Jubilee system. In contrast, the directress at the Christian School believed that Montessori was a staunch Roman Catholic who told children that they needed to respect other religions. She also believed that Maria Montessori and her schools taught children about evolution and for this reason they have chosen the Jubilee system, which focuses on the story of the creation instead. She felt that Religion and Montessori worked very well together.

5.3.4 The Jewish School

The principal at the Jewish school regarded Montessori as a tool for educating the children. She believed that Montessori had a non-denominational approach, even though some Montessorians saw the movement as a religion. She has adapted aspects of the Montessori approach to suit the school's educational ethos.

The directress at the Jewish school believed that on a philosophical and methodical level, Montessori and Judaism worked very well together. On a content level, however, she believed that Montessori contradicted some Jewish beliefs. For example, Jews believed that the Earth is the centre and everything revolved around it, which is contrary to

research and what Montessori teaches. She felt that Montessori should be non-denominational and that children should be exposed to a wide range of religions.

In summary, the ambiguity of Maria Montessori comes through very clearly in this study. The directresses and principals at each of the schools differed in their views about the place of religion in the classroom. Five participants had a general belief that Montessori advocated a non-denominational approach to religion. Two participants believed that Montessori advocated that children learn about God and are encouraged to respect other religions, while one participant concluded that religion does not belong in Montessori 3-6 classrooms. Two participants saw Montessori merely as an academic tool.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the schools' justification for including / excluding religion, the goals of its religious programmes and the level of the participants' awareness of Montessori's approach to religion. It has shown that majority of the participants has placed a priority on religion seeing it as the main focus of their classrooms, and that Montessori was merely an educational tool. It also shows that only one participant believed that religion did not belong in a Montessori pre-primary classroom, while two participants believed that religion should be included, but not be limited to one religion. The chapter shows that the most common goal of the religious schools was faith development. This was especially important in the Christian school whose focus was to develop a love of God and to raise children in the image of God. The Islamic school mentioned salvation as their primary goal, but they also saw faith development as important, especially in balancing it with academic development. The primary goal of the Jewish school was integrating Judaism into the community and the Non-Denominational school cited spiritual development as their primary goal.

Finally, the chapter shows that only one participant was aware of Montessori's approach to religion. Despite this, they too grappled with where to place religion. This is the essence of Montessori's struggle and is evidently still present today.

While this chapter has reported on the explicitly stated goals of the schools, I turn in the next chapter to how the teaching of religion was manifested in the schools under study. This chapter has also shown that the religious schools see Montessori as compatible with

their ethos and that Montessori could be used albeit with different foci, namely spirituality in the Non-Denominational school, salvation in the Islamic school, faith in the Christian school and community in the Jewish school.

Chapter Six: Implementation of Religion

This chapter looks at how the schools in this study teach religion. It starts with a brief look at the Montessori principles and guidelines for a pre-primary classroom. This is to develop a context for this study of Religion Education in Montessori schools. It then explores the contemporary practices of the schools in this study in more detail by looking at how they incorporate religion in a Montessori day. I analyze these findings in terms of what they have taken from Montessori, what they have omitted and what they achieve for their particular religious focus. I conclude with a look at the type of religious education offered – i.e. religious instruction, religion education or spirituality?

6.1. Principles of the Montessori Method

Despite not finalizing the place of religious education in her system, Montessori articulated her philosophy of education and child development very well. She was clear about what her method encompassed and excluded. The Montessori philosophy of education is based largely on Dr Montessori's observations of children.

Dr Montessori observed that when children are left in freedom they display a predictable work cycle, which has two peaks and one valley and lasts approximately three hours (Haines, 2016). During the second peak (after the valley), children will engage in self-directed, purposeful work for extended periods of time if given the opportunity, thereby enhancing the development of concentration. A typical Montessori school's work cycle would therefore be a minimum of three hours of uninterrupted time. During this time, one will see the child perform many individual work cycles (differing in length of time as well as degree of difficulty), which involves selecting, doing and completing a task (Cossentino, 2006). According to Montessori, children who are constantly interrupted during their cycles of activity, or who are only allowed to work for short periods, will lose courage, constancy and the determination necessary for achievement (Montessori, 1989).

Maria Montessori advocated that one would see a change in character in children who are free to choose independent work, to repeat exercises for as long as they like and as often as they wish without interruption (Montessori, 1995). She was not in favour of an education which interfered with the child's natural work cycle, or which was directed by the adult. She saw the adult's role as the custodian of the environment and believed that the Directress was responsible for preparing the environment with activities that are

designed to captivate the child's interest while teaching an important concept. The directress ensures that each activity has a purpose and involves movement and a sensorial exploration (Montessori, 1972[a]). Activities should also have a control of error to enable children to work independently. As Dr Montessori said,

Every effort should be made to see that the materials offered to a child contain in themselves a control of error... The control of error through the material makes a child use his reason, critical faculty, and his ever-increasing capacity for drawing distinctions (Montessori, 1972[a]).

Montessori believed that children learned best when they explored a concept in a material form and therefore designed concrete, didactic materials to represent abstract concepts. She believed that children allowed to explore these materials, with no interruptions should be able to easily internalize the concept. She believed that children should not be forced to sit still, especially without the availability of concrete materials. Montessori did not conduct any circle times or large group activities in her schools. While she did not explicitly object to such activities, the only activity in her schools that involved all the children at the same time was lunch.

I will now look more closely at the daily programmes of the schools in this study in order to examine how they have incorporated religion into their day. I look at whether or not children are allowed to work uninterrupted for a minimum of 3 hours, and whether or not the child achieves the second peak Maria Montessori speaks about. I focus specifically on their practices of circle time, meal times and recitals and scripture lessons. I also look at the special resources used to teach religion, before turning my attention to the way in which they teach values in their everyday interactions. I will be focusing on how they use the Montessori philosophy in teaching religion.

6.2. Daily Programmes of the schools

While the typical morning at each school differed slightly, there were attempts by all the schools to adhere to Montessori's recommendations. Only the Non-Denominational school had an uninterrupted three-hour work cycle. The Islamic school had a 2-hour work cycle, while the Christian and Jewish schools both had work cycles that lasted just over an hour each day. Directed by the adults, religious lessons were mainly presented in large group activities, like circle time and mealtimes, which interfered with the three-

hour work cycle in the religious schools. While the group activities focused on praying and teaching the practices and rituals of each religion, individual lessons and interactions were more focused on teaching values. Below I look in closer detail at the daily programme of each school.

6.2.1. The Non-Denominational School

The class at the Non-Denominational School was separated into English and Afrikaans groups. They started every day at 08h30 with a work cycle, but on one of the mornings the English group started with circle time. The two groups combined every day for a large group meal at 11h30 and then went out to play. After outside play, they came back inside for story time in their separate language groups before going home.

The Non-Denominational school was able to conduct their day with a work cycle that lasted at least 3 hours each day. There was no teaching of religion in the Non-Denominational school and besides the one circle time I observed, their only large group activity was the meal they shared at the end of each day.

6.2.2. The Islamic School

The Islamic School started every morning at 08h30 with a circle time focusing on religion. The children were expected to follow the teachers who recited short *surahs* (chapters) from the *Quran* (Holy Book) and some *duaahs* (prayers). After their circle, they had a work cycle until 11h00. During the work cycle, the *Madrassah* (Islamic School) teacher would call children out for individual scripture reading lessons. After the work cycle, at 11h00 they went outside to play and came back inside just before 12h00 for another circle time in which they sang songs, discussed the weather, days of the week and had a short discussion on the theme. They said some more prayers and were then dismissed from circle for lunch, which they brought from home. Some children left after lunch, while the ones that stayed, prepared for an afternoon nap.

Religion was mostly introduced in large group activities. The school started and ended their work cycle with a circle time each day and children received individual religious lessons during the work cycle. Since the teacher(s) directed all the religious lessons, children were not given freedom of choice in participating in these lessons. To accommodate the religious lessons, the Islamic school was only able to have a 2-hour work cycle each day.

6.2.3. The Christian school

As the Christian school is located in a poor community, they open at 07h00 to accommodate working parents. Children arrive between 07h00 and 08h00 and start working immediately. Some of them therefore have up to an hour of free time before breakfast. Breakfast was served at 08h00 and was followed by a morning circle, which focused on the religious lesson of the day stipulated by the Jubilee Excellence School (JES) curriculum. They also sang hymns and religious nursery rhymes. Circle time was followed by a work cycle, which lasted just over an hour each day. After the work cycle, they had group snack and then went outside to play. At 12h00 they were back in the class for another circle time, which they spent listening to Bible stories in different languages, and they sang more songs and hymns. After their second circle they had lunch followed by an afternoon nap. Most of the children stayed for afternoon care. While the morning cycle lasted for 4 hours, they had frequent interruptions for group activities. Like the Islamic school, religion was mostly directed in large group activities, which included circle time and all meal times.

6.2.4. The Jewish School

At the Jewish School, children arrived between 08h00 and 09h00 and were free to explore the class or play outside. The school referred to this period as “social integration.” They started their morning officially at 09h00 with a special prayer circle (*davening*), which involved singing nursery rhymes, saying prayers with actions and some role-plays. “Free choice” (their work cycle) ran from around 09h25 until roughly 11h00 and then the whole class would sit down for their *Kosher* snack. During their work cycle, the Jewish teacher would call out individual children for scripture reading lessons. On Fridays, the school had a slightly different work cycle. They had Xhosa for about 20 minutes after their circle, followed by work time and then a special Shabbat snack celebration. After snack they played outside and then came back at 12h00 for a story and a music ring before going home.

Like the Christian and Islamic schools, the three-hour work cycle at the Jewish school was interrupted by the large group activities. Religion was also taught in circle time and at mealtimes, but children also received individual religious lessons during the work cycle like at the Islamic School.

The religious schools all adapted Dr Montessori's recommendation for a work cycle. None of them were able to have an uninterrupted work cycle for more than two hours each day. This was mainly due to the fact that the large group activities (circles and meal times) for teaching religion interfered with the child's natural work cycle advocated by Montessori. These large group activities are further explored below.

6.3. Circle Time

Circle time is a session within the day when children are intentionally brought together in a structured manner to experience activities as part of a group (Tait, 2005). It is a time when the children sit together in a circle on the floor or on chairs to greet each other, share, listen, sing songs and / or are introduced to new lessons or review concepts like the calendar, weather, and numbers. Circle times in pre-schools are typically directed by the teacher and since Montessori is a strong advocate of child-directed learning, it is no surprise that she never conducted circle time in her schools. Despite this, circle time is a big part of many Montessori schools today.

One of the key components of the Montessori method is that it teaches concepts in a concrete way. It is therefore ideal that when Montessori schools choose to include circle time in their daily programmes, that they supplement lessons during circle time with concrete materials, sensorial exploration and movement. For e.g. singing songs about the Bible is very abstract for the child, but holding the bible while singing allows the child to make a connection between the words of the song and the bible they are holding (i.e. it may give meaning to the words they are singing about). Montessori teachers are expected to keep circles more flexible and follow the child's lead, should they include circle time .

While there were some variances, the schools in this study were quite similar in the way they conducted circle time. Songs and recitations were most often relied on for teaching children about God or religion in all the religious schools. Repetition of songs through rhyme is great for the child's language development and for memorizing facts. However, without role-playing the song or manipulating concrete materials to reinforce the meaning, young children may be unable to make an association between what they are singing about and their personal experiences. From a religious perspective, it is however not always necessary for children to understand the meaning, but rather to be able to

perform the ritual or repeat the recitation or hymn. Learning these things during circle time allows children to develop the skills to apply it in wider social situations (Tait, 2005).

According to Tait,

The circle format is a symbol of unity. It enables everyone in the group to have a clear physical view of everyone else and hopefully, in time, this will also become a clear psychological view (Tait, 2005, p.25).

It is recommended that adults and children should always be seated in equal positions, i.e. either all on chairs or all on the floor. All the schools in this study used the circle format but differed between sitting on the floor or on chairs. The adults and children at the Islamic and Jewish schools were all seated on the floor and on chairs, respectively. At the Christian school, all adults sat on chairs, while children sat on the floor. The adults did not always sit in the circle but often sat behind children or on the sides of the circles. At the Non-Denominational school, the assistant sat on a chair while the directress and children sat on the floor.

Circle Time was a daily activity in the religious schools, but the Non-Denominational school only had one circle time during my time there. In all the schools, the adults directed all activities in the circles and it appeared that children did not have the freedom to choose to participate in circle time or not. The Jewish and Non-Denominational schools made use of concrete materials to supplement the circle time lessons, but this was not present at the Christian and Islamic schools. Below is a detailed description of circle time in the schools in order to identify how religion is brought into the circle.

6.3.1. The Non-Denominational School

During my observations at the Non-Denominational School, the Afrikaans group had no circle time sessions, while the English group had one. A new girl had recently joined the English group, and the circle introduced her to one of the ground rules in the classroom (i.e. how to disturb someone who is working, and how to wait patiently). In the circle time I observed, the directress modeled compassion and respectful behaviour while showing the children the start of life in the form of an egg on a mulberry leaf. This was followed by a presentation on co-operation and consideration for the girl who had recently joined the school. The group was in the library in the outhouse when I arrived.

The Directress and children were seated on the floor, but the assistant was sitting on a chair. The directress walked around the circle with her hand stretched out, holding a mulberry leaf with an egg on it. She showed it to the children, bending down in front of them and waiting while they looked at it. She answered all the questions they had. After she had gone around the circle, she sat down and explained to them that she needed their help to watch quietly while they showed their new friend how to wait patiently. She then presented a tong transfer activity to the new girl. During her presentation, the assistant walked over and put her hand on her shoulder then waited for the directress to finish. When the directress completed her presentation, she turned to the assistant and said, "How can I help you, *Sarie**?" The assistant then asked her to work with her and the directress replied that she is coming now. The Directress and the new girl then packed away their work and the Directress thanked the assistant and the children for helping her show the new girl how to wait patiently. (NDS, Observation Day 3, 17th August 2015)

This was the only circle that took place during my visit to the Non-Denominational school. While there is no teaching religion or about religion, the circle was used to teach children how to consider each other when they are working, how to co-operate and display patience.

6.3.2. The Islamic School

In contrast to the Non-Denominational school, the Islamic school started every morning with a circle on religion. The adults and children all sat on the floor with the Directress and Assistant sitting opposite each other, separating the boys and girls who were seated on opposite sides of the circle. Children were reminded to wash their hands before joining the circle. To gather them in a circle, the directress would sing a prayer in Arabic praising the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Once they were all seated, the teacher greeted them and told them that they should all recite their daily *duahs* (prayers). This included a prayer for a beautiful day and prayers for protection, asking "Allah to protect our bodies with a *duah* that will be like a special armour" (MS, Observation Day 4, 18th February 2015). They also recited a verse of the *Quran* (known as *Ayatul Qursi*), the opening chapter (*Al-Fatigha*) and the last 3 short chapters of the *Quran* (known as the *3 Quls*) everyday. These are popular prayers in Cape Town recited at houses and mosques, and knowing these would enable children to participate in

activities and rituals in the community. The teachers would say the prayers and the children were expected to recite along, although they did not always do so.

Before lunch they would have another circle, which the Directress explained to me is usually a 'secular' circle to discuss the weather, days of the week, the theme and also to sing songs. According to the directress, they integrated religion into the theme. In one of the circles I observed the theme was "homes and houses," but the directress quickly brought the discussion back to religion. She reminded the children that the first thing they do when entering their home is to greet their house; and when entering someone else's house they should remember to knock, wait and greet when the doors are opened (MS, Observation Day 1, 11th February 2015). The Directress also used circle time as an opportunity to teach children other forms of etiquette, like praising God when they sneeze or when they hear someone else sneezing. One child shared a story about how her cousin runs straight to her bookshelf without greeting, but this was unusual, as the children do not really participate in the discussions.

During circle time at the Islamic school, religious lessons were done mainly through the adults talking about things and the children reciting prayers. The teachers ensured that girls and boys were seated separately and that all the prayers were said every day, but they did not do much to encourage participation by the children.

6.3.3. The Christian school

As children arrived at the Christian School (from 07h00 onwards), they would start working until 08h00 when breakfast was served. They would have circle immediately after breakfast, with all the children seated on the floor and the adults seated on chairs. There was not much effort made to ensure that the circle was well formed and adults often sat outside of the circle. During the morning circle, the class would sing hymns and religious nursery rhymes, which included "*Die Here het my mooi gemaak om my ligaampie op te pas*" (God made me beautiful to guard my body); "*Maak plek vir Jesus*" (Make place for Jesus); "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine" and "I've got a feeling everything's gonna be alright". In addition to the songs and rhymes, circle time was the main religious lesson of the day. The content of this lesson was prescribed by the Jubilee Excellence School (JES) curriculum. The lesson required the teacher to do a group presentation from a specific Cultural Box and also tell them a bible story. The boxes had pictures related to specific themes around God's creation, which the teacher

had to show and discuss with the children during circle time. For example, one set of boxes were based on the theme “God said, let there be light” (CD, Interview, 4th March 2015).

I observed the assistant doing a lesson on light from one of the JES boxes, which contained pictures about light sources. She held up each picture, named it and provided a one-line description about each picture. Thus, she held up a picture and said “*Sonlig. Die son gee vir ons sonlig*” (Sunlight, the sun gives us sunlight). She did not discuss the topic with the children, nor did she relate it to God or to the story of creation (as the Directress pointed out in the interview). The children were not concentrating, but the teacher continued until she had shown the children all the pictures in the box. Once they were done, they started saying the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father...) (CS, Observation Day 4, 13th February 2015).

In a different circle I observed, the teachers used puppets to reinforce a lesson about how God created each person to be unique. The directress reminded the children how to show respect to their friends, and then told them a story in Afrikaans about their uniqueness using the puppets. The assistant then took the puppets and repeated the story in Xhosa. Thereafter, the two teachers continued the story in tandem and the children and puppets all sang a song about Jesus before the puppets said goodbye (CS, Observation Day 1, 2nd February 2015).

On a few occasions, the teachers reminded children about manners. They however, did not display good manners in their interactions with the children. On one occasion the directress barged into the class during circle time saying, “*Maaitjies, ek wil dit nooit weer sien nie*” (Friends, I never want to see this again). She interrupted a religious song they were singing to reprimand them about toilet paper in her hand. She explained that tissues are for blowing their noses as she had shown them, and that they should use one tissue at a time and throw them in the bin afterwards. She did not explain the toilet paper in her hand at any point (CS, Observation Day 3, 9th February 2015).

Later that day, in their second session, there was another focus on manners. The children were not seated in a circle, but rather behind each other facing the Directress and the Assistant. The Directress was sorting out a box while asking the children if they remembered that she had taught them that God has made the trees (plants), animals and man. She then turned immediately to manners. She started naming children, telling them she was waiting for them and reminding them that they were at school. When they

come to school, they must remember to leave their “*maniere daar buite*” [manners outside] (CS, Observation Day 3, 9th February 2015). At the end of the session, they were told “*Maak toe die oë en vou die handjies*” (Close the eyes and put the hands together). They say the Lord’s Prayer in English but before she dismisses them, she reminds a few boys by name how to behave in class.

Like the Islamic school, circle time at the Christian school mainly involved the adults talking about religious lessons and the children saying prayers and singing songs from memory. The teachers did very little to encourage participation by the children. In both schools, the focus was placed on manners and etiquette. Ironically, the adults at the Christian school did not behave in the way they expected the children to. The adults had an authoritative relationship with the children, telling them what to believe and how to behave and expecting them to be obedient. Their ‘authority’ was reinforced during circle time by the directresses and children not sitting in equal positions.

6.3.4. The Jewish School

Like the Islamic school, the Jewish School had circle time every morning. Teachers and children were all seated on chairs. Their morning circle was specifically for *davening* (Morning Prayer) which was a big part of the Jewish School’s morning ritual. On my first day at the school, I arrived before they started and one of the girls kept asking the directress, “When is it time?” After she asked about 3 times, the Directress put a timer on for her to watch. When the timer went off she ran outside excitedly calling the others saying, “It’s time!” (JS, Observation Day 1, 31st October 2014). On another occasion two boys run into class and asked the Directress, “Is it *davening*?” She replied, “In five minutes” (JS, Observation Day 4, 3rd December 2014). The children clearly looked forward to these prayers.

A separate Jewish teacher came in everyday to do *davening* with the children. This involved singing Jewish nursery rhymes, saying prayers with actions and some role-plays. On one of the days I observed, the Jewish teacher was absent and the non-Jewish class teacher took up this role by playing the songs on a CD Player (JS, Observation Day 2, 14th November 2014). For *davening*, a child is chosen as a *chazzan* (the person who leads the congregation in songful prayer). He or she is allowed to choose which prayers to sing for the morning, and the rest of the class follows. The children do some role-plays as they sing along. One such song is about *Tzedakah* (charity), that when you give, it comes back.

While they sing this song one child goes around handing out coins to each child and another child follows with a moneybox to collect the coins. To demonstrate the importance of the *Torah* (Holy Book) that *Hashem* (God) had given them, one child takes the *Torah* around the circle and gives everyone a chance to kiss it as they sing, “*Hashem* gave us a present.” The daily ritual of *davening* was practically the same each day, with only the child and the order of the songs changing. The children were also reminded that *davening* is about talking to *Hashem*, and to reinforce this they sang a song, “When we are *davening* we are talking to *Hashem*” (JS, Observation Day 2, 14th November 2014).

Like the Islamic and Christian schools, circle time focused on teaching religion. Unlike these schools though, the Jewish school used role-play, active engagement and concrete materials to impart the religious information to children. They used an interactive approach, which the children looked forward to each day.

Contrary to Montessori’s emphasis on child-directed activities, all the schools in this study conducted adult-led, non-demonstrative circle times. Participation appeared to be compulsory for all children. The three religious schools used circle time as the main time during which children received religious lessons, with many references to God. Religious schools saw this as the easiest manner in which to transmit religious information. In the authoritative relationship of the adult and the child, the adult holds all the religious information and knowledge that the child needs to know. Religious information is imparted in this manner as absolute truth. All the schools used circle time as a time to open discussions and to sing songs. The Non-Denominational school did not do circle time every day, but when it did, it used concrete materials and role-play to demonstrate a lesson. Circle time at the Christian and Jewish schools were exclusively for religion, while the Islamic school said they had one circle dedicated to saying prayers and learning a bit about the religion, and another one for ‘secular’ topics. As I observed, though, in practice both circles were used to teach religion. Children learned about religion at the Christian and Islamic schools mainly through the teacher talking, with no manipulation of concrete materials or active engagement or discussion with the children. Circle time, in general, did not consistently follow the Montessori approach. Religious education did not follow the Montessori Philosophy.

6.4. Meal Times

Mealtimes are another important part of a Montessori day and worthy of closer attention for identifying the place of religion and religious education in schools. Traditional pre-schools usually have all children sitting down together to have a snack that has been prepared by an adult. Montessori pre-schools ideally have children preparing their own snack and eating by themselves or with a few friends, whenever they feel hungry during the morning work cycle. The children in Dr Montessori's own schools would set and clear the table; cook their own eggs and clean their own dishes (Montessori, 1965, p.44). For lunch, a few children were appointed as waitresses and would be responsible for preparing the tables (with a tablecloth, a vase of flowers and a table setting for everyone in the class) and for serving the hot soup. The table setting often included a napkin or place mat for each person as well as a glass / ceramic plate or bowl, drinking glass and cutlery. Children and adults would then sit down together for lunch in a relaxed, sociable manner (Montessori 1965).

While most Montessori schools allow and even encourage children to prepare their own snacks, very few allow children to serve hot lunches or even sit down to enjoy the meal with the children. In this study three of the four schools allowed children to prepare and have a snack during the work cycle. All of the schools had at least 1 meal as a large group. At the Non-Denominational and Islamic schools, the large group meal was lunch, whereas at the Jewish school the large group meal was snack. The Christian School had all their meals (breakfast, snack and lunch) as a large group activity. None of the schools had adults sit alongside children to have a meal. At the Non-Denominational and Jewish schools, the children were all involved in setting the tables for mealtimes, whereas the adults dished and served lunch at the Christian school. Children brought lunch from home at the Islamic school and did not set the table, but ate directly from their lunchboxes.

Meal times were another time of day (in addition to circle time) when children said prayers. The only mention of God during the 4 days I was at the Non-Denominational school was a song the children sang as they were settling down for lunch. The religious schools would say prayers before and after all their meals, with an exception at the Christian school where children did not say their prayers at snack time. I observed in great detail the food preparation and consumption, looking for minor and major clues when religion is directly and indirectly introduced into the mealtime.

6.4.1. The Non-Denominational School

At the Non-Denominational school children helped themselves to snacks as part of activities during the work cycle (i.e. these 'snacks' are on the shelves as activities, and not on a special snack table). I observed a boy squeezing a grapefruit and then sipping the juice nervously thereafter. He disliked it and then discarded it on the advice of the assistant. A girl grated a carrot and then made herself a cookie with oats and banana, which the assistant 'baked' for her in the microwave. Two other children made themselves oats and banana biscuits after observing her. One little boy did a nutcracker activity one morning. They were only allowed to take two nuts at a time, but could repeat the activity as often as they like. He cracked eight nuts in total, eating all of them. One girl also crushed cornflakes, which she ate and another girl squeezed half an orange and then sucked the leftover orange and drank the juice.

In addition to the snacks during work time, the class had a group lunch at the end of their work cycle every day. Preparations for lunch started as children arrived at school, and the whole class would get involved. Children brought fruit from home and placed it in a large basket at the entrance as they arrived. The assistant would invite 4 or 5 children to assist her in preparing lunch during the work cycle. She ensured they washed their hands then gave them fruit to peel and sharp knives to cut the fruit. On one occasion, I saw an assistant sitting outside with three children spreading butter and peanut butter on bread. Inside, three different children were peeling and cutting fruit and making fruit platters (NS, Observation Day Two, 3rd August 2015)

On my first day, I observed the following preparation for group lunch. The assistant pushed two tables together, placed a tablecloth on it and some glasses and plates stacked up. Two boys carried two platters with freshly baked banana bread, which was sliced and buttered (I did not observe if this was prepared by adults or the children). The children who prepared the fruit platters placed the platters on this table too. Two girls carried a basket of placemats and placed it on the tables, one for each child. Two adults brought in a table from outside and the children assisted with bringing in chairs and placing it at the table. Once the tables were set up, children took a seat and started to sing songs, including a song that ended with "we're in God's hands." They then lined up at the table and collected a plate and some fruit (using tongs). The assistant assisted with serving bread and one girl went around delivering glasses of water for each child.

After lunch the children took turns to wash their plates (NS, Observation Day One, 31st July 2015).

I learnt that there was a birthday celebration on the first day, but during my other observations I saw that the routine for lunch was the same. Their routine of involving children in the preparation and serving of the meal is very much in line with Montessori's practice. Being involved in the preparation and serving lunch to others do not only lead children to independence, but also reinforce life skills and self-esteem. It also allows children the opportunity to practice their social etiquette (Beydler, 2010). It is quite interesting that the Non-Denominational school did not include religion at all in their programme, discussions or daily routines, but was unable to have a meal without saying a blessing.

6.4.2. The Islamic School

During the work cycle at the Islamic school, children could find snacks on a special table from which they could help themselves. The snack table had wheat cracker biscuits with small tubs of butter as well as fruit cut up by one or two children. The child could then take a plastic plate and tongs to serve him/herself when hungry. In addition to the snacks during work time, the class had a group lunch at the end of their day. Before lunch, they were reminded to say *Bismillah* (In the name of *Allah*) before they ate and then to wash their hands. They took their lunch from their bags and then sat down to eat. While they did not set their tables, there was a focus on etiquette. The teachers would remind children to say *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to *Allah*) after they had eaten, to sit when eating and not to talk while eating. At one point a teacher pleaded with a child not to throw food away. The child had spat the strawberry piece in his yoghurt into the bin. The teacher explained to him that if he doesn't like something, he can take it home but he should not throw it away (MS, Observation Day 1, 11th February 2015). After lunch the children washed their hands and went home.

At the Islamic school, meal times were used to focus on teaching etiquette on eating. Children were expected to wash their hands before and after eating, and were reminded to start and end their meals by praising God. They were not allowed to talk while eating and were expected to sit while eating. Religious practices were deeply woven into the mealtimes.

6.4.3. The Christian School

At the Christian School adults prepared and served breakfast, lunch and snack. The cook would push a trolley into the class, containing breakfast or lunch dished into plastic bowls or plates for each child. The children had to stop whatever they were doing when the cook arrived, sit at the tables and wait until the adults had placed their plate/bowl in front of them. Before eating they had to say a prayer in three different languages (Xhosa, Afrikaans and English), ending with "God bless our food." After eating their breakfast or lunch, they took their bowls to the sink. The assistant washed most of the bowls, but allowed some of the children to wash their own bowls.

At snack time, children were required to sit on the mat in a circle. For snack, they were given a biscuit and a glass of water or juice. They were also allowed to eat any fruit they may have brought from home. During one of my observations, the directress told the children that they could only get snack when they sat properly and quietly in the circle. The children took a long time to get settled and were then handed a biscuit by another child. The child followed his own order, skipping a few children and in some cases, giving children twice (CS, Observation Day 1, 2nd February 2015). No prayer was offered at snack time.

In addition to the group meals, some children were involved in food preparation activities throughout the work cycle. I observed children peeling nectarines, cutting and grating apples, peeling and cutting a banana and peeling and slicing an apricot. The children were given quite a bit of independence to use sharp knives and ceramic plates during the work cycle, but were not given ceramic plates at meal times. On the day of interviews, I spent about an hour in the class as well. The cook had brought in a bowl of carrots, which the children peeled. The Directress then took the carrots they had peeled from them and went over the spots they missed. Eventually the cook collected the carrots, which she used in her lunch preparations.

Meal times were a big part of the day at the Christian school. This is likely because the school is located in a poor community and it is important to ensure the children are well fed. While children were given quite a bit of independence with preparing snacks as part of activities, they were not involved in the preparation, setting up or even cleaning up of breakfast or lunch. Children were only reminded to say a prayer when they were seated at the table for a group meal, but when they sat on the mat for snack they offered no prayer.

6.4.4. The Jewish School

The Jewish school had snack as a large group activity. The children assisted with setting the table. The Directress provided cut-up fruit, biscuits, marmite and jam (which the children could spread themselves). They were reminded to say a *bracha* (prayer) before eating and after they had eaten they were reminded to *bench* (say a blessing after the meal). Children were also reminded that they could not eat from something someone else had eaten. On one occasion a child made himself a marmite snack, which after tasting, told the directress that he did not like it. She then asked him why he put marmite on everything and explained that he had to throw it in the bin as it was now wasted (JS, Observation Day 4, 3rd December 2014).

On Fridays, the Sabbath Day, the children had a special snack, which was referred to as the *Shabbat* Snack. The children washed their hands then sat around the table while the Jewish teacher lead the ritual. For one of my observations, the principal stood in for the Jewish teacher who was absent that day. She explained to the children:

When the sun goes down on Friday afternoon, we get ready to bring in Shabbat. At sunset, the *Ima* (mother) lights the candles, covers her eyes with her hands and turns her head from side to side while saying a prayer. The candles do not get blown out. They then go to shul. The principal hands out *Kiddush* (grape juice) then they wash their hands before they sit down to eat. The *Aba* (father) takes a piece of the *chala* (bread) and goes around sharing it for all. The *Ima* also goes around offering all. While they eat, the principal tells them a story. Sarah is the mom of Jewish people. Laya, Rifqa, Rebecca are all moms. Abraham, Yakof, Hisgaq are all fathers. The children each get a turn to say their Hebrew names. The Directress moves the candles off the table for safety (JS, Observation Day 2, 14th November 2014).

Each week a girl has a turn to be the *Ima* (mother) and a boy has a turn to be the *Abba* (father). In preparation for Hanukkah, the parents of the *Ima* and *Abba* are invited to observe the *Shabbat* Snack. They are given a box to take home, which contains some *Shabbat* wine [known as *Kiddush* (grape juice)], *Shabbat* candles and some home baked *challahs* (bread), enabling them to perform the ritual at home as well. They sing

blessings over the candles to welcome *Shabbat*, recite the *Kiddush*-blessing over the wine and sing the *motzee*-prayer for eating bread over the *challah*. At school, the candles are removed from the table for safety, but at home the candles remain on a tray on the table and children are taught about safety.

At the Jewish school there was a special focus on the ritual of the *Shabbat* meal. As with all their other religious activities, this involved the manipulation of concrete materials and active participation by the children. By giving each child an opportunity to participate as the mother or father, children were actively engaged in the ritual. Children (or parents) could also carry out the ritual at home, if they so wished, as parents were invited to witness and then take a special box home with everything they required to conduct the ritual. This was very much in line with the school's goal of making Judaism a part of the daily lives of the children and the families who came to the school (JP, Interview, 11th March 2015). It was also in line with the Montessori philosophy to introduce role-play for teaching rituals.

Meal times were executed quite differently at the schools in this study, with each school placing varying degrees of emphasis on this daily activity. Religion was directly incorporated with meal times in the form of blessings and prayers at all of the schools. The Islamic school did not have a big focus on mealtimes, but focused on Islamic etiquette and religious practices when eating. There were constant reminders to thank and praise God before and after eating. At the Non-Denominational school, they followed Montessori's practice to involve both adults and children in the preparation and serving of lunch after their work cycle. This is in great contrast to the Christian school, where the work cycle was structured around mealtimes for breakfast, snack and lunch. Mealtimes played a central role in the day at the Christian school. When children sat down formally for a meal (breakfast and lunch) they were told to say their prayers, but this was not the case when they sat on the floor for snack. At the Jewish school, parents were invited to observe the weekly *Shabbat* ritual. It is quite clear that the motive for this is closely linked to their goal of making Judaism a part of the daily lives of the families. Giving parents the box of items will likely lead to the children asking their parents to perform the ritual at home.

The daily programmes of the schools in this study are adaptations of Dr Montessori's recommendation of a typical day. Circle time and mealtimes interfered with the

opportunity to have an uninterrupted three-hour work cycle at the religious schools. The Non-Denominational school did not have circle time every day and had lunch after the work cycle, which enabled them to have a three-hour uninterrupted work cycle each day. The Islamic school followed closely with a two-hour work cycle, while both the Christian and Jewish schools had work cycles that lasted just over an hour. Circle time was a vital part of the day at the religious schools. These sessions were held on a daily basis and were used as the main medium for teaching religion. Religious education conducted during circle time, in general, did not follow the Montessori philosophy. It was a compulsory activity where children enjoyed no freedom to choose to participate or not. While the Jewish school used role-play and concrete materials to reinforce the songs they sang, the Christian and Islamic schools did not. Instead, children at these schools learnt about God and religion through repetition of songs and prayers, and also through listening to their teachers preaching.

Mealtimes were also used for religious lessons. The Non-denominational, Islamic and Jewish schools all kept mealtimes for the end of their day, while mealtimes at the Christian school were constant interruptions to their work cycle. At the Non-Denominational school, preparing for and serving lunch was the collective responsibility of the class. The focus here was on the social etiquette needed to function in a community. At the Christian school, mealtimes were directed and managed by the adults. On occasion, a few children would assist in washing the dishes. The focus was largely on saying their prayers before and after meals. Interestingly, this was only done when the children were seated at the table for breakfast or lunch. The Islamic school used mealtimes to reinforce religious practices and etiquette of eating, while the Jewish school used their Friday mealtimes as an opportunity to role-play a ritual and also to encourage the practice of the ritual at home.

6.5. Recitals And Scripture Lessons

Prayer and recitation is understandably an important part of a religious school's day. In all the religious schools, prayers were said in circle time and when eating. With the exception of the blessing said before snack, the Non-Denominational school did not say any prayers. Recitation and recitals are slightly different from prayers, with recitations being part of the cultural presentations of some religions. The daily recitations at the schools in this study were also conducted during circle time, but even these took

different forms in each of the religious schools. At the Christian and Islamic schools, the teachers lead recitations while the children sat in circle. At the Jewish school, recitations were done with role-plays, actions and materials and a child chose the specific recitals for the day from a book. Recitations at the Jewish and Christian schools were done in English. The children at the Islamic school performed their recitations in Arabic.

In addition to the daily recitations and prayers, children also had daily scripture lessons at the religious schools. At the Christian school, this took the form of Bible stories. At the Islamic and Jewish schools, it was in the form of individual lessons to learn to read and memorize the *Quran* and *Torah* respectively. In both schools, the focus was on learning to read the scriptures, rather than on understanding it. Recitations, scripture lessons and prayers are described in more detail below.

6.5.1. The Christian School

The Christian school said the Lord's Prayer whenever they transitioned from one activity to the next. Adults led all prayers and recitations, while children were expected to recite along. Prayers were usually said during circle and meal times, while recitations were often kept for circle time. A few children would get up and dance as they performed the various recitations.

The school did not have individual Bible lessons, but according to the principal, the class listened to a Bible story every day (CP, Interview, 4th March 2015). As I observed, this was not really the case in practice. During my observations, I witnessed one story being told about how God created each person to be unique (CS, Observation Day 1, 2nd February 2015). There were no other stories about God, creation or the bible during my time there.

6.5.2. The Islamic School

As at the Christian school, prayers and recitals were lead by the adults in the environment. Children were expected to participate, even though they did not always do so. Prayers were incorporated into circle time, meal times and even daily actions (for e.g. when going to the bathroom). Recitations were done from memory in Arabic, only during circle time.

The Islamic school had individual scripture lessons daily. The lessons involved teaching children to read Arabic, so as to enable them to read the Quran. The principal at the

Islamic school advocates that children should learn to read Arabic from the age of 3, instead of waiting for the age of 5, as she believed children are ready at such a young age (IP, Interview, 12th April 2015). The *Muallimah* (teacher) invited a few children to join her in a separate class throughout the day. Her class was a small room, which had posters of the Arabic alphabet on the wall, a basket of *Musallahs* (prayer mats) and a bookshelf with some books and materials on it. The children had to sit on the mat and wait their turn for their reading lesson. They would sit with the teacher at a small table facing the wall and read a few lines from a *surah* (book preparing the child to read the *Quran*). The *Muallimah* started each lesson with *Bismillah her Raghman nir Ragheem* (In the name of *Allah*, the beneficent, most merciful). She would point to the letters or words for the child to identify. With some of the children she started by reading a few letters or words and then let them repeat after her. With one of the children, she taught the Arabic letters using Arabic sandpaper letters, a well-known material in Montessori used for teaching reading.

There is an obvious attempt at keeping the lessons in line with the Montessori philosophy. Materials and individual lessons are adapted according to each child's progress and reading capability. The lessons are short and conducted in a way that fosters concentration. There was some freedom of choice for children who were allowed to refuse to go for their lesson when called, however, they were required to do their individual lesson on the allocated day. Children were also not allowed to stay longer than the required time or repeat a lesson on the day. On one occasion I observed a girl asking if she could go next even though she had already finished her lesson for the day. The teacher got up from her chair, bent down to the child's level, looked into her eyes and told her that recitation is finished and that she needed to return to class (MS, Observation Day 3, 16th February 2015). While this interaction was firm and respectful, it did not accommodate the child's need to repeat the lesson. Montessori advocates that children should be given the freedom to repeat activities as often as they like and for as long as they like.

In addition to individual Arabic reading lessons, the school also offers preparation lessons for *Hifz* (memorizing chapters of the *Quran*). According to the principal, *Hifz* is unfounded at such a young age (in the community, one finds *Hifz* programmes only catering for children older than 6). Nonetheless, parents who request that their children do *Hifz* pay for extra lessons, which focus on exposing and nurturing the love of

recitation of the Quran (IP, Interview, 12th April 2015). The lessons lasts for 30 minutes each day, and are used as a preparation for *Hifz*.

6.5.3. The Jewish School

Unlike the Christian and Islamic schools, the Jewish school only said prayers and recitations as part of role-plays in which children were actively participating. These were done during circle time and are already described above. While most of the recitations and prayers were done in English, the children also received individual Hebrew reading lessons. The same teacher who did the *davening* circles with the children, did the Hebrew lessons at a table in the class. Like the *Muallimah* (teacher) at the Islamic school, the Hebrew *Morah* (teacher) appeared to have a roster for these lessons. She would look at her records and then call a child / children over for their lesson. As in the Islamic school, children at the Jewish school were given the freedom of choice to refuse to do the lesson when called. During one of my observations she called a girl for a lesson, but left the girl when she refused to come. She called a boy who appeared to be wandering around the class instead (JS, Observation Day 3, 21st November 2014). With one boy, she did tracing the *alef bet* (Hebrew Alphabet) letters in sand. With another boy, she reviewed the *Alef bet* by pointing out letters on a chart and asked the boy to identify them. Here too, there was an attempt to keep lessons in line with the Montessori philosophy. While children had the freedom of choice to participate or not, they were not really able to repeat the activities if they liked, nor could they work with them independently. The lessons were also adapted for each child, based on their level of progress and knowledge.

While children prayed many times during the day at the Christian school, there was not much that happened in terms of recitals and scripture lessons. In contrast, at both the Islamic and Jewish schools, children had daily recitations and received individual lessons to learn to read their relevant scriptures. These lessons were provided in a foreign language to the children both at the Jewish and Islamic schools, as the focus was more on learning to read than on understanding. Both the Jewish and Islamic schools also employed concrete Montessori techniques when teaching the children to read. These included sandpaper letters and tracing the letters in the sand. While there were some

levels of freedom of choice with regards to the individual lessons, there were no opportunities for repetition or independent work in either school.

6.6. Everyday Interactions

As I have shown, religion assumes a top down approach at the schools, with adults having all the knowledge that they want to impart to the children. This often leads to an authoritative relationship where adults lead the learning process. In a Montessori class, it is typical to use every discussion or engagement with the child as an opportunity for learning. Children receive lessons in the form of role-plays on how to control their body and how to interact with others, making it ideal for imparting religious lessons on etiquette and rituals. During my observations at the school, I paid attention to the everyday interactions between adults and children to see how, if at all these were used for teaching religion, or if teaching religion was reserved for formal lessons only.

The study found that everyday interactions were not really used as opportunities to teach about religion in the schools. The Christian school made use of one opportunity to say a blessing after a child sneezed and the Jewish school used some opportunities to bring religion into their interactions. The Islamic school used a few more opportunities during everyday interactions to remind children to say blessings or prayers and to remember God. While the Non-Denominational school did not teach religion or about religion at all, the everyday interactions at the school were focused on co-operation, consideration and respect. The adults at both the Jewish school and the Islamic school also kept most of their interactions with the children respectful. The same cannot be said about the adults at the Christian school.

6.6.1. The Non-Denominational School

Both the directress and the principal at the Non-Denominational school emphasized spiritual development as defined in Chapter 1 as the most essential part of a Montessori school. The principal also emphasized the importance of compassion and respect as part of spiritual development. Many of the interactions I observed at this school, were geared towards spiritual development. On a few occasions I observed co-operation, consideration, respect and moments of giving among the children.

On one such occasion, two girls had taken out a sugar scrub. They were each seated on a chair next to the table, facing each other. One of the girls had a cloth on her lap and her

friend's foot was placed onto the cloth. She proceeded to rub some foot scrub onto her friend's foot and a bit of her leg, with the instruction of her friend not to go too high. She then rinsed her foot in a bowl of water that was on the floor between them. They then swapped roles and the friend gave her a foot scrub too (NDS, Observation Day 1, 31st July 2015). I saw this activity and variations of it (hand massages with lotion) a few times during my observations. While there were mostly girls doing it, I also observed a boy giving a girl a hand massage. This simple act of giving fostered a sense of consideration and respect among the children. This became evident in other incidents I observed.

On another occasion, a girl was sitting at one of the outside tables, knocking nails into a slab of bark. She was rocking when she fell over bringing the table and the bark slab with her. Before the assistant could get to her, two boys had already jumped up to help her back onto her chair and placed the bark slab back on the table (NDS, Observation Day 2, 3rd August 2015).

At another time a few children were at a table painting when another child came over to join them. She is told that there is no paint for her, but she picks up the paint, places it between them and tells them that if they place it like that she can also use it. The girl accepts her proposal and makes space for her to join them (NDS, Observation Day 4, 24th August 2015).

The interactions suggest that the school is indeed placing emphasis on the spiritual themes of co-operation, consideration, respect and giving. While everyday interactions did not involve religion at all, it certainly focuses on the spiritual development of the children.

6.6.2. The Islamic School

The principal at the Islamic school also believed that spiritual development is a big part of the everyday activities of the child,

...every physical activity that the child encounters is a spiritual activity for the young child (IP, Interview, 12th April 2015).

Despite this, the activities and everyday interactions at the Islamic school did not focus on spiritual development as defined in the literature (Refer to Chapter 2). Instead, it focused on etiquette, with adults reminding children to say a blessing after sneezing (*Alhamdulillah – praise be to Allah*), to say *shukran* (thank you) when receiving something and to greet, by saying *Assalaamu Alaikum* (Peace be with you).

On one occasion, the assistant reminded a child to enter the toilet with her right foot; and then assisted her to say a prayer when she stepped out (MS, Observation, Day 2, 12th February 2015).

The adults always made a point of bending down and looking into the child's eyes when addressing them. The teacher got up from her chair, bent down to the child's level, looked into her eyes and told her that recitation is finished and that she needed to return to class (MS, Observation Day 3, 16th February 2015). This did not always have a positive connotation though. On one occasion, a boy complained to the assistant that a girl had pointed a knife at him. He says, "I have karate skills, but I can't protect myself from a knife." The teacher does not investigate or facilitate a discussion between the children. Instead, she expresses her disappointment at the accused child by bending down, saying:

Can I see your eyes, *Amina**? *Amina** do you think it is nice to do that? Would you like it if he did that to you? Do you think Allah would like it if you did that?

The assistant did not give the child a chance to answer or provide her side to the story. The child looks down to her feet, with her hands behind her back. She looks ashamed (MS, Observation Day 1, 11th February 2015).

On another occasion, a child drinks from someone else's bottle. The assistant calls the child over, bends down and looks into her eyes saying,

"Whose name is this? *Aasiya**? Would you like it if *Aasiya** drinks from your bottle? It's not nice to take things that do not belong to you. It's not a joke, *Shehaam**. When teacher is speaking to you, you need to look into my eyes. You need to respect your teachers. When you don't listen to me that is not showing respect. When you respect me, then I can respect you" (MS, Observation Day 3, 16th February 2015).

While the teacher in both instances made a point of bending down and looking into the child's eyes while addressing her calmly and with respect, her words did not convey that message. In both instances, the child appeared ashamed.

While both the directress and principal advocated the importance of spiritual development through everyday activities, this was not really seen in practice. On one occasion, the opposite can be seen, when the teacher uses God to instill feelings of

shame on a child. The everyday interactions at the Islamic school served more as reminders to say prayers and blessings. Prayers were important whether they were going to the bathroom or interacting with their peers.

6.6.3. The Christian School

At the Christian School religion or God was not mentioned outside of the group sessions. There is only one occasion during my final observation that the Directress simply says a blessing when a child sneezes (CS, Observation Day Four, 13th February 2015). So here too, everyday interactions or individual engagements with children were not seen as opportunities to teach children about God or religion.

6.6.4. The Jewish School

Only a few opportunities were used at the Jewish school to bring religion into everyday interactions. This is possibly linked to the fact that the Directress in the Jewish school was not Jewish herself. While she had learned and even participated in most of the rituals and songs for *davening* and the *Shabbat* snack, she does not bring religion or God into many interactions.

On my first day at the Jewish school, I observed the Directress reflecting with two girls on work they had done the previous day. She showed them an A5 black card that had star stickers on the top and sand glued to the bottom of the page and asked them to tell her all about it. The girls explained to her, “*Hashem* said you would have as many kids as the stars and the sand” (JS, Observation Day 1, 31st October 2014). There is no further interaction on the topic, which left me feeling like it was purposefully aimed at giving me some insight into the activity.

On my final day at the school, I observed another interaction where the Directress and a child has a discussion about a Kosher sweet;

“What’s in your pocket?”

“Sweeties”

“We are not allowed to bring sweeties to school.”

“It’s kosher”

“Let me see it”.

“Its strawberry. **IS** strawberry kosher?”

“Let me see it”.

“I’m just pretending”

“Well, at least you pretended about a kosher sweet.”

Everyday interactions were not really used to teach religion. At the Jewish school, a limited number of interactions were related to religion, but as shown above, this could be due to the fact that the class teacher was not Jewish. At both the Christian and Non-denominational schools, they did not use everyday interactions as opportunities for teaching about God or religion at all. However, everyday interactions at the Non-Denominational school, focused on the spiritual development of the children. At The Islamic school, everyday interactions were used to encourage etiquette. Children were reminded to say prayers throughout the day, and also to consider what God would think about the way they engage with each other.

6.7. Special Resources For Teaching Religion

Dr Montessori advocated the use of concrete materials in teaching concepts to children. She had certain principles that activities should comply with before being placed on a shelf in the classroom. The directress should ensure that when placing materials on the shelf, especially homemade or commercial material, met some basic principles advocated by Dr Montessori. At the bare minimum, the concepts taught should be presented in a concrete form that a child can hold and explore sensorially; and each material should have a purpose of activity as well as a control of error to enable auto-education to take place. Auto-Education is an important aspect of the Montessori method. It is achieved by adding a way for the child to assess his or her own progress in each activity by means of a control of error (Haines, 2016). The child is therefore able to work independently with materials that have a control of error.

All of the schools in this study had a reasonable collection of Montessori equipment. The Non-Denominational school had no special resources for teaching religion, whereas all the religious schools had special resources for children to use to learn about religion.

6.7.1. The Islamic School

Most of the religious resources at the Islamic school were either locally sourced or handmade. Following Montessori’s approach to reading, they had made Arabic sandpaper letters (these are Arabic alphabet letters cut out of sandpaper and glued onto individual boards). They also had Arabic alphabet puzzles and homemade Arabic reading

booklets. The sandpaper letters and the reading booklets were part of the *Madrassah* (Islamic school) class, whereas the puzzles were on the shelf in the main classroom for children to choose to work with during the work cycle. During my observations at the school, I observed two different children on two separate occasions working with the Arabic alphabet puzzle (MS, Observation Day 2, 12th February 2015 & Observation Day 4, 18th February 2015). On both occasions the children removed the puzzle pieces, built the puzzle and then returned it to the shelf. The puzzles met the basic criteria for Montessori activities in that the concept taught was presented concretely (individual Arabic alphabet letters), the activity had a purpose (to build the puzzle) and a control of error (each letter had a specific place in the puzzle). The children were therefore able to engage independently with the resources available to them in their class. The sandpaper letters, however, were kept in a different room. Children could therefore not opt to take them out and work with them whenever they felt like it. The lack of religious resources in the school meant that independent engagement with materials was limited. When resources were available though, the children chose to work with them and were able to complete the activity and return it to the shelf.

6.7.2. The Christian School

The Christian school had the largest collection of religious resources. The materials that formed part of the JES curriculum (as described in Chapter Four), and was duplicated for each class. All 122 boxes were placed on the shelves in the classroom and there were no additional resources, with the exception of some books.

Teachers were required to present one of the boxes to the children each day. During my observations, I only witnessed one presentation on light sources, where the teacher held up each picture and named it. She did not use this presentation to make an association to God (for e.g. manmade light sources – lamp; or God-given light sources – the sun) or to creation (for e.g. saying that light was created on Day 1).

The boxes were always on the shelf for children to choose freely to work with. On four occasions I observed children working with the boxes during the work cycle. On two of these occasions, the children were working independently, and on the other two occasions, they worked with an adult. One of these presentations, the directress tells a child that she is going to teach him about wood. She stands and throws out a mat, then walks to the other room. She fetches a child and goes to fetch a culture box. She sorts out the box while the child is waiting on her. The child appears disinterested as he looks

around the room. The box has sequence cards in it (pictures that should be placed in a sequence in order to tell a story). There is no control set in the box. She tells him “*Ek gaan vir jou vertel die storie van hout*” (I am going to tell you the story about wood). She points to the tree in the first card and describes the process of how wood gets sawed (CS, Observation Day 1, 2nd February 2015). She does not, for example, show or explain to the child that God made the wood, or that it was created on Day 3.

On both occasions of the children working independently with the boxes, it appears they are unsure of what they should do with them. One child looks at the pictures, and then watches the children around her. She sits with the box for about 45 minutes, not touching them after her initial look at the cards, but instead spends the time watching those around her. Eventually she packs it away and joins the class for snack (CS, Observation Day 1, 2nd February 2015). On the other occasion, a child has taken a box of pictures with moths and butterflies. The Directress walks past her, points out the differences between moths and butterflies and then walks away. The child then packs the pictures back (CS, Observation Day 2, 6th February 2015).

The boxes did not meet Dr Montessori’s criteria for activities and therefore children struggled to engage with them independently. The boxes contained pictures, which needed a more knowledgeable teacher or assistant to discuss them with them. Most of the boxes had no built-in purpose of activity (for e.g. matching, classifying, etc.) and when they did (in the case of the sequencing cards in the “story of wood” box), there was no control of error. The child therefore still relied on the adult to impart the knowledge. The materials on religion therefore were not integrated into a Montessori method.

6.7.3. The Jewish School

The Jewish school had a large variety of materials that reinforced Jewish identity. These included Jewish stories; Jewish resource books; child-sized *chanukiah*s (Candle-holders used for Hanukkah); cookie cutters with Hebrew Letters; *yarmulkes* (skull caps) and various child-sized items that were put out in the Jewish cultural area of the class. On the door of each classroom was also a *mezuzah* (a piece of parchment inscribed with Hebrew verses from the Torah). In addition to the resources in the classroom, the office also served as a fully stocked storeroom for teachers to find more resources to add to the classroom.

The children engaged with the materials every morning during their circle time, as part of their *davening* rituals. On the last morning of my observation, two children explored the materials on the recently set up Hanukkah table (See picture of Hanukkah table in Appendix 7).

Despite being so well stocked with concrete materials, the children did not opt to engage with the Jewish resources independently. This could be because they used it as part of the *davening* rituals they did each morning, but it is more likely because the resources at the Jewish school did not have a purpose of activity (for e.g. matching, classifying, etc.). For e.g. the *chanukiahs* (Candle-holders used for Hanukkah) were plastic holders with plastic candle in them. Children could not place the candles nor light them.

Despite being the most poorly resourced school in terms of religious resources, the Islamic school was the only school where children engaged actively with the resources. The available resources met Montessori's principles and when children worked with them, they were able to complete the cycle of activity including returning it to the shelf. Like the Christian school, the Jewish school had also not considered Montessori's principles for activities before making them accessible to the children. While both the Jewish and Christian resources were concrete, they did not have a purpose for activity nor did they have control of error. Auto-education was not enabled in either of these environments. The resources at both the Jewish and Christian school had religious identities embedded in them. It presented children with concrete, child-sized 'toys' and pictures that children could hold and look at, but children could not learn from them unless an adult discussed intervened.

6.8. Analysis of Religious Education

In this study, I have identified Religious Instruction to be teaching exclusively about one religion, whereas Religion Education advocates the teaching about different religions. Spirituality, on the other hand, proposes that religion should not be taught, but that the nurturing of values is of vital importance to children at this age. In analyzing the findings in terms of these definitions, it is evident that the religious schools in the study all offered religious instruction, whereas the Non-Denominational school offered spirituality. None of the schools in this study offer religion education. In this context of Cape Town, children were not introduced to other religions in the city

The programme at the Non-Denominational school was consistent with that of a spirituality model where the focus was on the ethical development of the children. The findings demonstrated numerous examples of values being taught, both in circle time and in everyday interactions, but there was no religious education. The Non-Denominational school identified strongly with Montessori, and thus used her principles throughout.

The religious schools used Montessori mainly as an educational tool, depending on their level of commitment to the Montessori identity. The Christian and Jewish schools did not have strong Montessori identities and have professed to only using aspects of the Montessori method. The Islamic school, however, saw Montessori as an important part of their identity and thus made greater attempts at adhering to Montessori principles.

Aspects of the dilemma Maria Montessori faced were evident in the schools in the study. The principal of the Non-Denominational school was opposed to including religion at the pre-primary level. It seems that like Montessori, she struggled to see how one could teach faith in a Montessori environment. She had not considered just focusing on practices nor had she considered offering religion education as the Directress at her school advocated. Despite the religious schools' professed limited knowledge about Montessori's approach to religion, they all had adapted versions of Montessori in their programmes.

In terms of religious education, the religious schools did different things. What they had in common was the attention they placed on developing religious practices and etiquette in their particular religions. Children were taught what to do or say (e.g. prayers before or after eating), when to do or say it as well as how it should be said or done. They were taught rituals and were given the opportunity to practice it. This prepared them for being part of their communities, an important focus in both the Islamic and Jewish schools. The adults at the Islamic school made a concerted effort to keep the girls and boys separate during circle time, as would be customary in the Muslim community. The community focus was more prominent at the Jewish school, where they went as far as sending items home to enable parents to conduct the ritual in their homes. At the Christian school, the focus was on discipline and obedience as a means to faith. Here religion was imparted largely through the adults preaching and reprimanding the children. The activities at the Islamic school were also focused on the individual, with elements of respect, obedience and self-etiquette present in various forms. Finally the

special resources for teaching religion in these schools were used to further enhance these goals by reinforcing the value of communities and practice.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative research approach, this study has explored the phenomenon of religious education in Montessori pre-primary schools in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. It has looked at the changing views of spirituality in Early Childhood Development scholarship over the last half of the 20th century and found Dr Montessori's beliefs about the importance of spirituality in the early years to be consistent with the contemporary views of scholars around the world. Despite this, Maria Montessori left a mixed legacy for teaching religion in schools. The study highlighted Dr Montessori's personal and professional struggle with religion and showed that the debate about whether or not to include religion in early childhood settings is not unique to Montessori. The study found that the struggles Dr Montessori faced in terms of Religion have still not been resolved today, and schools in the Western Cape also differ about the place of religion in pre-primary classrooms. The study has explored what religious education in Montessori schools in the Western Cape is. It also looked at what the religious education was in each school; and whether or not they were aware of Maria Montessori's approach to religious education.

There are currently about 90 Montessori pre-schools in the Western Cape, of which approximately 15 are religious. A sample of 4 Montessori pre-schools were selected based on their diverse demographics and their religious programmes. These included a Non-Denominational Montessori school, an Islamic Montessori School, a Christian Montessori School and a Jewish Montessori School. It demonstrates that the Islamic and Non-Denominational schools are full Montessori schools, while the Christian and Jewish schools have incorporated Montessori alongside other curriculums, namely the Jubilee Excellence School Curriculum and Reggio-Emilia approach, respectively.

A collective case study approach was adopted and data was collected through observations and interviews. While the findings cannot easily be generalized, it is significant in providing a starting point to understanding the phenomenon of religious education in Montessori pre-schools in the Western Cape. The study looked specifically at the schools' level of awareness of Montessori's approach to religious education, the goals of their religious education, and finally at how they have implemented religion in their schools.

Only one participant was aware of the Montessori approach to religion. Despite this, the schools still grappled with the essence of Montessori's struggle, i.e. where to place

religion and how to integrate it in the Montessori Method and philosophy. Religion was, understandably, the main priority in the religious schools. Where the schools did not have a strong Montessori identity, Montessori was only used as an educational tool. The religious schools all had some aspects of Montessori in their religious education programmes. The Non-Denominational school, on the other hand, had no religious education. They implemented a spirituality model and had not even considered teaching children about different religions or about the practices of religions.

The goals of the school were closely linked to the way religious education was implemented. The religious schools all shared a goal of strengthening their religious communities, and entering children into Heaven. At the Jewish school, the focus was on the community, while at the Islamic school the focus was on the individual and self-etiquette. The focus of the Christian school was on discipline and obedience. The schools had various commitments to spiritual and ethical development of the children. The religious schools followed guidelines of their own religions when deciding on which values to focus on.

Finally, the study found that the Montessori method was ideal for teaching the practices of religion, but when schools delved into issues of faith or love of God, they switched to other modes of teaching (e.g. preaching). This disjuncture between teaching faith and practices was ultimately Dr Montessori's reason for abolishing religious education from her method.

References

- Ahmad, N. (2014). Reviving Preschool Education in Muslim Schools: Can Islamic schools use the Montessori model to help lay a stronger foundation of learning? *Islamic Horizons* (November / December 2014)
- Allen, H. C. (2008). Exploring children's spirituality from a Christian perspective. In H. C. Allen (Ed.), *Nurturing children's spirituality: Christian perspectives and best practices* (pp. 5-20). Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Bakker, C., van der Want, A., ter Avest, I. & Everington, J. (Eds). (2009). *Teachers responding to Religious Diversity in Europe: Researching Biography & Pedagogy*. Waxmann: Münster, Germany
- Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*. Volume 13 (4) December 2008. P. 544 – 559. Accessible at:
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf> Date Accessed: 1st March 2016
- Benson, P.L., Roehlkepartain, E.C. & Rude, S.P. (2003). Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Towards a field of Inquiry. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7:3, p.205-213. Available at:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_12 Date Accessed: 23rd September 2014
- Berryman, J. (May – June 1980). Montessori & Religious Education. *Religious Education*, 75:3, p. 294 – 307
- Beydler, J. A. (2010). Bring a Montessori Lunch Program back to school Available at:
<http://www.montessoriservices.com/ideas-insights/bring-a-montessori-lunch-program-back> Date Accessed: 8th August 2016
- Bone, J., Cullen, J., & Loveridge, J. (2007). *Everyday Spirituality: an aspect of the holistic*

curriculum in action. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8:4, p. 344 – 354.

Bone, J. (2008). Creating relational spaces: everyday spirituality in early childhood settings. [Online]. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. 16:3, p. 343 – 356. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13502930802292122> Date Accessed: 30th August 2013.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology: *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 77-101.

Bridges, L.J. & Moore, K.A. (2002). Religion and Spirituality in Childhood and Adolescence. *Child Trends*: January 2002

Brierley, J. (1987). Give me a child until he is seven: brain studies and early childhood education. Lewes: Falmer Press.

Bright Kids Foundation. (2013). The Solution – The Edutainer. Available at: <http://www.brightkidfoundation.co.za/index.php/the-solution> Date Accessed: 20th September 2016

Byrne, C. G. (2010). Spiritual Development of Young Children. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.youngchildministries.com/research-and-young-children/spiritual-development/spiritual-development-of-young-children> Date Accessed 26th September 2014.

Cassell, C. & Symon, G. (2004). *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. Sage Publications: London

Cavalletti, S. (1993). *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with young children*. Liturgy Training Publications

Cavalletti, S. (1998). *Living Liturgy: Elementary Reflections*. Liturgy Training Publications

- Cavalletti, S. (2002). *The Religious Potential of the Child: 6 to 12 year old*. Liturgy Training Publications
- Cavalletti, S., Coulter, P., Gobbi, G. & Montanaro, S. Q. (1996). *The Good Shepherd & The Child: A joyful Journey*. Liturgy Training Publications
- Chidester, D. (2006). Religion Education and the Transformational State in South Africa. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Cultural and Social Practice* 50, 3 (2006): 61 – 83
- Coates, M. (2011). *Judaism & Montessori*. Montessori Life Publication. American Montessori Society. Winter 2011-2012, 23:4, p.22-25
- Cossentino, J. (2005). Ritualizing Expertise: A non-Montessorian view of the Montessori Method. *American Journal of Education*. 111:2, p. 211-244
- Cossentino, J. (2006). *Big Work: Goodness, Vocation, and Engagement in the Montessori Method*. *Curriculum Inquiry* 36:1, p. 63-92; Blackwell Publishing
- Dodd-Nufrio, A. T. 2011. Reggio Emilia, Maria Montessori and John Dewey: Dispelling Teachers' Misconceptions and Understanding Theoretical Foundations. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39: 235-237
- Duckworth, C. (2006). Teaching peace: a dialogue on the Montessori Method. *Journal of Peace Education*, 3:1, 39-53
- Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle: selected papers*. International Universities Press: New York
- Eaude, T. (2003). Shining lights in unexpected corners: New angles on young children's spiritual development. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. 8:2, 151-162

- Eugene, T. M. (1990). Teaching Theory: The effect of practice on theory. In: I.V. Cully & K. Brubaker Cully (Ed.) Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education. Harper & Row: San Francisco. p. 640 - 642
- Ferguson, R. & Roux, C. (2004). Teaching and Learning about Religions in Schools: Responses from a Participation Action Research Project. *Journal for the Study of Religion*. 17:2, p. 5 – 23.
- Fouché, C.B. (2005). Research Strategies. In: A. S. de Vos, H. Strydom, C. B. Fouché, C. S. L. Delport (eds). *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. 2nd edition Van Schaik Publishers. Chapter 18
- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Harper & Row
- Gallego, M. A. & Cole, M. and the laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. (2001). Classroom cultures and cultures in the classroom. In: V. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 4th Edition p. 951 – 999. American Education Research Association: Washington D. C.
- Giesenberg, A. (2000). Spiritual Development and Young Children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 8:2, p.23-37, Accessible at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13502930085208551> Date Accessed: 23rd September 2014
- Graham, S. (2007). Adapting Godly play for the Inclusive Classroom. *Research Resources for Religious Education*. Edited by James Nelson & Norman Richardson. Occasional Paper No.1
- Grajczonek, J. (2010). *Spiritual Development and Religious Education in the Early Years: A Review of the Literature*. Unpublished Report: Queensland Catholic Education Commission

- Gobbi, G. & Rojcewicz, R. (1998). *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children*. Treehaus Communications
- Gudmundsdóttir, S. (2001). Narrative Research on School Practice. In: V. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 4th Edition p. 226 – 237
- Gutek, G. L. (2004). *Montessori Method: An Abridged Version*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. USA
- Haines, A. (2016). Montessori Glossary. [Online]. Available at:
http://mariamontessori.com/mm/?page_id=414 Date Accessed: 11th August 2016
- Halstead, J. M. (2005). Religious Education. In *Encyclopedia of Religion*
- Hay, D. & Nye, R. (1998). *The spirit of the child*. London: Harper Collins.
- Hull, J. M. (1984). *Studies in Religion and Education*. Lewes, Falmer
- Hyde, B. (2011). Montessori and Jerome W. Berryman: work, play, religious education and the art of using the Christian language system, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 33:3, p.341 - 353
- Jackson, R. (1999). *Religious Education: An interpretive approach*. Hodder & Stoughton: Great Britain
- Jackson, R. (2009). *Studying Religions: The interpretive approach in brief*. European Wergeland Centre: Norway
- Klassen, P. (2008). Practice. In *Keywords for Religion, Media & Culture* by David Morgan, ed. London: Routledge. P. 136 – 147

Kramer, R. (1976). *Maria Montessori: A Biography*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press

Mardell, B. & Abo-Zena, M. M. (2010). Kindergartners explore spirituality. *Young Children*. 65:4, p.12 – 17.

May, S. (No Date). *Maria Montessori* [On-line]. Available at:

http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/catholic/maria_montessori/ Date Accessed: 19th April 2013

Miller, R. (2002). *Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo: The Educational vision of Maria Montessori*. In J. P. Miller, & Y. Nakagawa, *Nurturing Our Wholeness: Perspectives on Spirituality in Education*. Foundation for Educational Renewal.

Montessori, M. (1917). *Spontaneous Activity in Education*. Introduction by John J. McDermott. New York: Schocken Books.

Montessori, M. (1946). *The 1946 London Lectures*. Edited by Dr. Annette Haines. The Netherlands: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company

Montessori, M. (1948). *From Childhood to Adolescence*. Oxford, England: Clio Press.

Montessori, M. (1965). [first published in 1914] *Dr. Montessori's own Handbook*. Introduction by Nancy McCormick Rambusch. New York: Schocken Books.

Montessori, M. (1966). [first published in 1936] *The Secret of Childhood*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Montessori, M. (1972)[a]. [first published in 1948] *The Discovery of the Child*. New York: The Random House Publishing Group.

Montessori, M. (1972) [b] [first published in 1949]. *Education and Peace*. India: Kalakshetra Publication.

- Montessori, M. (1989). What you should know about your child. Oxford, England: Clio Press.
- Montessori, M. (1991) To educate the Human Potential [first published in 1949]. 12th Edition. India: Kalakshetra Publication.
- Montessori, M. (1995) [first published in 1949]. The Absorbent Mind. USA: Saint Martin's Press Inc.
- Montessori, M. (2008). Unpublished speeches and writings of Maria Montessori. Tranlated, where necessary from the original manuscript by Caroline Juler and Heather Yesson and with introductory texts by Günter Schulz-Benesch. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company.
- Montessori, M. J. (2002). Education for Human Development: Understanding Montessori. Oxford, England: Clio Press.
- Mosley, J. (1993). Turn your school round: A circle-time approach to the development of self-esteem and positive behaviour in the primary staffroom, classroom and playground. Wisbech: Lda.
- Morrison, G. S. (2007). Early Childhood Education Today, 10th Edition, Pearson Education, Inc.: New Jersey. Available at: <http://catalogue.pearsoned.co.uk/preface/0132286211.pdf> Date Accessed: 17th December 2015
- Ratcliff, D. (2007). The Spirit of Children Past: A century of children's spirituality research. Christian Education Journal: Series 3, Vol 4. No. 2
- Ratcliff, D. & Nye, R. (2006). Childhood spirituality: Strengthening the research foundation. In The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, eds EC Roehlkepartain, PE King, L Wagener & PL Benson, Sage

Publications, California, pp. 473 – 483.

Reck, S. (2012). Analyzing and evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula. *Christian Education Journal*: 9. 1 (Spring 2012). 27 - 42

Röhrs, H. (1994). Maria Montessori: 1870-1952. UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 1/2, 1994, (89/90), p. 169-183. Paris

Roux, C. (2003). Playing games with religion in education. *South African Journal of Education*. 23:2. P.130-134.

Schein, D. L. (2013). Research and Reflections on the Spiritual Development of Young Jewish Children, *Journal of Jewish Education*, 79:3, 360-385. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15244113.2013.817238> Date Accessed: 23rd September 2014

Schmid, J. (1970). Religion, Montessori, and the home: An approach to the religious education of the young child. New York: Benziger

Seldin, T. & Epstein, P. (2003). *The Montessori Way*. USA: The Montessori Foundation

Smith, J. Z. (1982). The Bare Facts of Ritual. In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P. 53 – 65

Spilka, B. (2010). Ritual. In: D. A. Leeming, K. Madden & S. Marlan. *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*. Springer: USA. p.789 – 791.

Standing, E.M. (1962). *Maria Montessori: Her Life And Work*. Mentor: New York

Stats SA Library Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP). (2015). *Data Census 2011: Population Dynamics / Statistics South Africa*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa; Report-03-01-672011

- Strydom, H. (2002). Information Collection: Participant Observation. In: A. S. de Vos, H. Strydom, C. B. Fouché, C. S. L. Delport (eds). *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. 2nd edition Van Schaik Publishers. Chapter 19
- Tait, M. (2005). Circle Time. *Montessori International*. July – September 2005. p.24 – 26.
- Tregenza, V. (2008). Looking back to the future: The current relevance of Maria Montessori's ideas about the Spiritual wellbeing of young children. *Journal of Student Wellbeing* 2:2, p. 1-15.
- Watson, J. (2000). Whose Model of Spirituality Should Be Used in the Spiritual Development of School Children? *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. 5:1, p.91-101. Accessible from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713670894> Date Accessed: 23rd September 2014
- Wolf, A. D. (1996). *Nurturing the spirit in non-sectarian classrooms*. Parent Child Press: USA
- Wright, A. (2008). Critical Religious education and the National Framework for Religious education in England and Wales. *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 103:5, p. 517 – 521

Fieldwork Reference List

Observations

Islamic School

- Islamic School (MS), Observation Day One, 11th February 2015
- Islamic School (MS), Observation Day Two, 12th February 2015
- Islamic School (MS), Observation Day Three, 16th February 2015
- Islamic School (MS), Observation Day Four, 18th February 2015

Jewish School

- Jewish School (JS), Observation Day One, 31st October 2014
- Jewish School (JS), Observation Day Two, 14th November 2014

- Jewish School (JS), Observation Day Three, 21st November 2014
- Jewish School (JS), Observation Day Four, 3rd December 2014

Christian School

- Christian School (CS), Observation Day One, 2nd February 2015
- Christian School (CS), Observation Day Two, 6th February 2015
- Christian School (CS), Observation Day Three, 9th February 2015
- Christian School (CS), Observation Day Four, 13th February 2015

Non-Denominational School

- Non-Denominational School (NDS), Observation Day One, 31st July 2015
- Non-Denominational School (NDS), Observation Day Two, 3rd August 2015
- Non-Denominational School (NDS), Observation Day Three, 17th August 2015
- Non-Denominational School (NDS), Observation Day Four, 24th August 2015

Interviews

Interviews at Islamic School

- Principal (IP), Interviewed at the Islamic School, 12th April 2015
- Directress (ID), Interviewed at the Islamic School, 12th April 2015

Interviews at Jewish School

- Principal (JP), Interviewed at the Jewish School, 11th March 2015
- Directress (JD), Interviewed at the Jewish School, 11th March 2015

Interviews at Christian School

- Principal (CP), Interviewed at the Christian School, 4th March 2015
- Directress (CD), Interviewed at the Christian School, 4th March 2015

Interviews at Non-Denominational School

- Principal (NDP), Interviewed at the Non-Denominational Montessori School, 14th October 2015
- Directress (NDD), Interviewed at the Non-Denominational Montessori School, 14th October 2015

School Documents

- Christian School (CS), Information Documents, 2015
- Non-Denominational School (NDS), Information & Admissions Documents, 2015

Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to Schools

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Shamiemah Jassiem, a Masters student in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town. I am currently conducting research as part of the Religion and Education project, which is dedicated to critically examine what is happening at schools and learning institutes in South Africa. The project is funded and supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF).

This research looks at Religion in Montessori Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres within the Western Cape. It looks at how Religion is incorporated in these schools (if at all). This study will investigate why schools are choosing to be *Religious* Montessori schools? (Or why they have chosen not to offer Religion at all). What are the goals of these schools in terms of Religious Education and are they achieving these goals? How are they teaching Religion? Have they developed a model for teaching Religion? How does it relate to the Montessori method? How have these Religious Montessori schools interpreted Maria Montessori's writings? It will investigate the way schools react to and engage with Religious Education. Are there differences in the way different faiths teach religion? Do they have different approaches? Teachers and principals will be interviewed to establish what their reasons are for starting the school. How they interpret the Montessori Philosophy and how it applies to Religion. It will look at the way teachers and children engage with and react to religion and / or religious education. What are they doing when they do things? What is happening in the experience of transmitting information? Through observing what they do in their schools, I hope to see how they are interpreting and adapting Montessori's views of Religion Education and implementing it in their classrooms; and I also hope to see what their model for teaching religion is.

A sample of 4 Montessori Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres within the Western Cape region will be approached to conduct the study at their school. Schools will be selected for the study if they regard themselves as Montessori and offer some education about Religion in their programme (One school will offer no Religion in their programme). Participants will not receive any payment for their involvement in the project. The study will be conducted in:

1. A Jewish Montessori School
2. A Christian Montessori School
3. A Muslim Montessori School
4. A Non-Denominational Montessori School

This study will be conducted within a qualitative framework through semi-structured interviews and observations. I will spend 3 – 4 days in each school, observing for a period of about 4 to 5 hours at a time. In addition to the observations, interviews of about 45mins to an hour will be conducted with teachers and principals at each school, using a semi-structured guide with a combination of open and closed ended questions. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any point of the research, as well as to skip any questions.

Field notes will contain a chronological description of the observations and will be written up and included in the final report on the study. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The field notes and interview transcripts will be analyzed by means of a qualitative content analysis. This is a process where data is analyzed for ideas, themes and categories and is then coded to make comparisons or to identify patterns in the data that may require further analysis.

All information will be dealt with confidentiality. No names will be mentioned and schools will be referred to by their religious affiliation only, i.e. the Jewish school, the Christian school, etc. Schools may have a look at the descriptive aspects of the final report prior to it being submitted. As the researcher, the interpretive aspects will be at my discretion. Participants may receive an electronic version of the completed thesis if they wish.

Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact me on 083 944 9772 / shamiemah@gmail.com

Thank you once again for your interest in this study and for being willing to consider participating.

Kind Regards

Shamiemah Jassiem

Appendix 2: Consent Form



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Religious Studies

Informed Consent Form for Key Informants

Name of researcher: Shamiemah Jassiem

Title of research project: Religion Education in Montessori ECD centres in the Western Cape

By filling out this questionnaire / answering the questions put to me:

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected, subject to the following: - (tick as appropriate)

	Yes	No
My name may be used in the published research		
My personal details (e.g. age, occupation, position) may be included in the published research		
My responses can only be used in a way that I cannot be personally identifiable		

- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.
- I understand that this research might be published in a research journal or book. In the case of dissertation research, the document will be available to readers in a university library in printed form, and possibly in electronic form as well.

Name of Participant :

(or Guardian if participant is under 18)

Signature of Participant :

(or Guardian if participant is under 18)

Date :

The researcher must supply you with an **Information sheet** which provides his / her contact details, outlines the nature of the research and how the information will be used and explains what your participation in the research involves (e.g. how long it will take, participants' roles and rights (including the right to skip questions or withdraw without penalty at any time), any anticipated risks/benefits which may arise as a result of participating, any costs or payment involved (even if none, these should be stated)

Has this been provided?	Yes	No
Have you received verbal confirmation/explanations where needed?	Yes	No

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

The School

1. Tell me about the history of the school..When and why was it established? Who wanted religion in the school and why?
2. How did it come to be located here?
3. What is the religious make-up of the school (children, staff, parents)?
4. What is the school's policy in terms of enrolling children, or employing staff from other religions?
5. Are there any objections to having religion in the school? If yes, from whom?
6. Does the school have a religious advisor?
7. What is the school's educational philosophy and mission?
8. What is the school's religious philosophy and religious objectives?

Religion in the Classroom

1. How is Religion incorporated into the daily programme?
2. Do you have a separate period for religious instruction and is it provided within or outside school hours? How is this done?
3. How much time is allocated to teaching religion?
4. Who teaches religion? What qualifications does this person have to have?
5. How do you teach Religion at your school? (How do you teach beliefs, rituals, stories & values to the children). Is rote learning used? Why / why not? For what?
6. Is Religious Instruction restricted to the Muslim / Jewish / Christian children? Or is it open to all?
7. Do children have a certain time period in which they need to know things?
8. Do you have special resources for teaching religion? If yes, can you elaborate? Do you find these resources adequate? Why / why not?
9. Are children assessed in terms of their religious knowledge? If yes, how and how often?
10. Which religious observances are followed at the school? Is participation in these observances compulsory, or can children (or parents) opt out of it?
11. Are children taught about other religions? If yes, which ones. If no, why not? How is it done? How do you choose which religions you present? Who teaches these religions? How? Are children informed about other Religious observances? If yes, how and which ones?
12. Do you think that Montessori incorporated religion in the philosophy?
13. Why are some Montessori schools Religious, but others are not?What do you believe is important for young children to be exposed to in terms of Religion?
14. What would you like to achieve with religious education?

Appendix 4: Interview Transcript Sample

Shamiemah Okay so can you tell me about the school? How did the school start? How did you end up being here?

Interviewee Okay, so basically, we started a Jewish community organisation (noise)...um, I (noise)...we came down from, my husbands from the States and I'm from Joburg, but we met in the States and then we started, we basically part of of a bigger world wide network, Jewish organisation for outreach and um, we came down here to open up a Jewish community centre and one of the needs on the ground as we saw in the first year was that there wasn't a Jewish preschool in this area. The closest one was Milnerton and the traffic, you know how it is...to get to Milnerton, so we decided to open up a Jewish preschool and we started off with...

Shamiemah Er – when was that about?

Interviewee Um, that was in 2006. So we started in 2006 with just 6 children and then, and that was in someone's renovated garage and then in 2007 we bought the location for this school, and we had a second class. And then we grew the primary school from ... 6 years ago, so it was 2000 around...

Interviewee Ja, something like that. We started the primary school and now we've grown to till grade 6. So we started with our toddlers going up, basically, so it's been, now this is our, its almost 10 years

Shamiemah For the whole school?

Interviewee Ja

Shamiemah So its been ten years. Wow. Okay and then what was the reason you decided to keep it exclusively Jewish?

Interviewee Okay, so the reason being that we didn't want to filter down the Jewish studies and the whole, because as a project of the Synagogue and a project of the Jewish community Centre, it is a non-profit organisation and the reason, the whole reason for this school is to give the Jewish instruction.

Shamiemah Okay

Interviewee And Um, if we had all different religions coming in etc. we would have been very child centred and we would want to give equal ground to all the religions coming in and it would diffuse our purpose...so we wanted to

keep it, um we wanted just to keep, you know, to our mission of being able to enrich the children's lives with Judaism, because a lot of these children don't have much of it at home, some do, but most of families are, you know, some are traditional, some are very non-affiliated or observant and so that they are getting the most of their Judaism from school.

Shamiemah Okay

Interviewee Obviously we had to create a high general secular environment as well, in order to have a balance, but our reason for existing is to give the Jewish culture over.

Shamiemah Ja. And when you started the school, did you start off as Montessori or did you change at some time?

Interviewee We actually started off as Montessori and then we continued, we grew into Reggio Emilia, and now we're actually the regional representatives of Reggio Emilia in Cape Town, um, and so now we've married Montessori and Reggio as two – as our two educational ethos that we use in the school.

Shamiemah And um are you Montessori trained?

Interviewee I am personally not Montessori qualified, but I'm trained, ja so...

Shamiemah So is that why you decided to do Montessori...?

Interviewee I actually started with a partner, um, we brought someone in to start with. I mean, um, our Jewish organisation owns this place, but we had a woman in the community who was Montessori trained, who started, who designed the classrooms for me, and she was the original teacher in the first little Toddler class.

Appendix 5: Fieldwork Notes Sample

Observation Notes: Christian Montessori School

Date: Monday, 2nd February 2015

Time: 09h45 to 12h45

Pre-Primary Class (3 – 6 year olds) 1 Directress, 2 Assistants

Its 09h45. Finally! I find the school. I receive a warm greeting from Melinda* and after a short catch up, she leads me to Freda's* class. We pass a teacher who is doing handprints with the children at a table outside the class. The children appear to be working freely. Freda starts a number rods presentation with a child, stops halfway through the presentation and goes over to a few boys to restore order. She whispers to them. Then returns to the presentation. She continues her presentation, showing the child the differences in length, without counting – placing the rods at the bottom of the mat from shortest to longest. Once she has built the stair, she pushes the rods to the top of the mat leaving rods 1, 2 and 3, then creates spaces between these rods. She does a three-period lesson by naming each rod and handing it to the child as she names it, again without counting. She has 4 spectators. They are not involved in the presentation, nor does she engage them.

One child, aged about 3 or 4 has taken out a set of culture cards. She looks briefly at the pictures. She appears bored, gets distracted by the boys behind her and starts observing them intently.

The class consists of two rooms. The room I'm in seem to have Maths and Culture and the other room has Art, Practical Life and Sensorial. I can't see the Language area from where I am sitting (but I discover later that Language is in the Maths and Culture room).

Freda has finished her presentation. They pack away together. She tells her spectators (in Afrikaans) to go and find their own work. It is clear that she is very aware of my presence, going around "fixing" all the children working around me. She stands and throws out a mat, then walks to the other room. She fetches a child and goes to fetch a culture box. She sorts out the box while the child is waiting on her. The child appears bored. The box has sequence cards in it. She tells him "*Ek gaan vir jou vertel die story van houd.*" She points to the tree in the first card and describes the process of how wood gets sawed.

The little girl who had a culture box out is still observing her friends. She watches as the teacher present to the boys. The teacher takes out one activity after the next. She engages the children in conversation as she presents the world map using the three period lesson. She does not pack it away, leaves the work on the mat and comes over to where I am sitting to work with some boys who are building the tree puzzle. They were having fun taking turns to build. She turns it into a language lesson, teaching them the names of the parts of the tree. I step out quickly to fetch water.

Its 10h15. I'm back. Freda has moved to a new presentation. The little girl who has the culture cards out is still sitting on her mat, not touching her work, unnoticed. She is observing the rest of her class. Freda is presenting the spindle box to a child nearby.

A little girl in the other room is wiping her nose. She looks in the mirror and carefully cleans her face. The assistant is presenting a chalkboard activity to a child. Writes a name. She notices quite a few children are on the mat, not working and starts to redirect them.

3 girls are working with cards at a table. They have a mat on the table. I walk through to the other class. One child is doing a washing activity. Two kids are doing chalk drawings and erasing. Two tables are pushed together, making a long table that seat 8 children on each side. There are trays on the table, but children are not working. One child is playing with a dough cutter, pretending it is a razor. He pretends to cut his friend's hair, then neck. A boy tries to draw the assistant's attention. She responds by bending down and whispers something to him. He runs off to find new work. The directress comes over and checks if all is good in this class, then goes back to the other class. The assistant goes over to the children. She tells them to be quiet and to start packing away. The teachers are constantly whispering, telling the kids to be quiet.

Appendix 6: SAMA's Fundamental Principles



www.samontessori.org.za
admin@samontessori.org.za
NPO 141 – 155

SAMA Fundamental Principles

Principle 1:

Classes in Montessori Schools are mixed-age and non-graded.

- Mixed-age classes comprise at least three-year groupings corresponding to the Planes of Development: 0 – 3; 3 – 6; 6 – 9 and 9 – 12 or 6 – 12; 12 – 15 and 15 – 18 or 12 – 18.
- Mixed-age groups are not correlated to grades, nor are they divided in other ways according to achievement levels or normative standards.

Principle 2:

Montessori schools accommodate an extended period of uninterrupted self-chosen activity – a period during which children can choose their own activity and work undisturbed for a minimum of three hours.

Principle 3:

Rewards and Punishments are not used in a Montessori environment.

Principle 4:

A prepared environment is a critical component of Montessori Pedagogy.

The prepared environment

- Serves the developmental and pedagogical needs of the children using it;
- Supports freedom of movement, speech and association;
- Supports free choice of activity;
- Facilitates normalization and valorization;
- Includes a full range of Montessori materials appropriate to the age for which it is prepared.

Principle 5:

The adults in the Montessori environment exhibit and apply the principles of Montessori pedagogy through

- A disposition of respect and patience towards the child;
- An ability to balance the principle of non-intervention while at the same time not abandoning the child;
- Trust in Montessori principles, methodology and pedagogical aims;
- Seeing the role of the adult as primarily observer, scientist and interpreter of the environment rather than as a teacher in the conventional sense;
- Guiding the child to normalization and development appropriate to each Plane of Development.

Principle 6:

Montessori schools develop curriculum guidelines which conform to the vision of child development and the educative goals outlined by Maria Montessori.

*Principles adopted at the 2011 SAMA AGM/Amended at the 2016 SAMA AGM

PO Box 5338, Walmer, 6065 Fax: 086 561 8774 Cell : 072 609 5979 Tel: 041 367 4936 NPO 141 -155

