

Interfaith Education for All

**Theoretical Perspectives and Best
Practices for Transformative Action**

Duncan Wielzen and Ina Ter Avest (Eds.)



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*Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices
for Transformative Action*

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SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM / BOSTON / TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-94-6351-168-1 (paperback)

ISBN 978-94-6351-169-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-94-6351-170-4 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858,
3001 AW Rotterdam,
The Netherlands
<https://www.sensepublishers.com/>

All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

Printed on acid-free paper

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THE REV. VICTOR H. KAZANJIAN JR.

PROLOGUE

Interfaith Education for All: A Global Imperative

In communities around the world people struggle to find positive ways to establish a shared commitment to community, cooperation, mutual understanding, the respect for the rights of others and the corresponding responsibilities that we each share as global citizens amidst a sometimes-dizzying array of diversity. There is no power greater than education to develop the future cadres of citizens, scholars, professionals, and public servants, essential to cohesive and vibrant societies. But not just any education. Education that transforms students into global citizens is one that aspires to be that place where diverse identities and points of view are brought together in a common task deepening understanding of self, other, and the World that leads to positive social relations. Education that embraces diversity is not a place of a particular ideology nor theology but rather that place where a diversity of all viewpoints becomes the central ingredient of a vibrant learning community. It is in such a place that educational experiments show us how human beings whose identity is so often forged along lines of difference can take up responsibilities and craft together a common life.

As multicultural education emerged into the mainstream at the end of the 20th century as a response to the increasing cultural diversity of communities around the world, religious diversity was largely absented from this paradigm. Religious and spiritual identity was rarely seen as a significant identity factor in the same ways as ethnic or national identity. Seen as antithetical to a secular or religion-specific learning environment, interfaith education that engaged the diversity of beliefs as an essential element of preparation for life in diverse communities was largely absent. However, the rise of religious identity as a recognized factor of social relations (all too often seen in a negative way as leading to social fragmentation and intergroup violence), thrusts religious diversity into the educational arena. Too often the answer to the conundrum of engaging diversity in education (especially religious and spiritual diversity), has been to mute particularist voices in favour of a single normative identity, whether this be religious, nationalistic, or secular in nature. This reaction to the complexity of religious diversity in society continues in today's political world whether it be debates over school curriculum, dress, or national identity. But gradually an educational experience has been envisioned that offers students the experience of reconstructing themselves in ways that make them better at seeing religious diversity as a resource rather than a barrier to healthy and peaceful human community.

In *Interfaith Education for All: Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action*, the authors take us on a journey of discovery through the

V. KAZANJIAN JR.

theoretical and practical worlds of an interfaith educational paradigm which invites the identity forming narratives of each student into the commons of the classroom where students are recognized in such a way that the learning environment becomes a place of dialogue and interaction, of encounter and conversation, of essential and healthy conflict, but conflict that ultimately seeks the common cause of citizenship in diverse communities, countries and world.

Among the many resources that reflects this paradigm referenced in these pages is the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the Office Security and Co-operation in Europe. This document suggests that

it is vital to grasp the confluence rather than the clash of civilizations. Throughout Europe – as with the church of San Roman in Toledo – there are layers of civilization built on and interacting with other layers. Modern-day Europe is the result of the interweaving of migrations of disparate peoples, interactions of religions within a cradle moulded by Christianity and by other religious and cultural forces for more than twenty-five centuries, through borrowing, copying, transforming, transmitting, and absorbing. Toledo offers us not only visual reminders of interwoven civilizations, but also remnants of civilizations alternatively fighting each other, living together under tension, prospering together, suffering together, as well as exhibiting examples of tolerance and intolerance.

The powerful theory, practice and reflections expressed in *Interfaith Education for All* call us to a vision of interfaith education for global citizenry that rejects intolerance as an inevitable human condition, does not stop at tolerance as the desired outcome, but embraces that which lies beyond tolerance, interdependence, as that which we must seek if we are to meet the challenges of a troubled world. As Executive Director of the United Religions Initiative, a global grassroots interfaith peacebuilding organization, I see the power of interfaith education to help communities move beyond tolerance to an interdependence essential for coexistence.

For centuries tolerance has been the goal towards which forward thinking people have worked in seeking to respond to the diversity of ethnic traditions, religious beliefs and cultural experiences in societies around the world. This work of tolerance has been carried out while intolerance has dominated much of human history and been a contributing factor to horrific destruction of human life. At a time when tolerance has often been replaced by overt acts of hate in many of our communities, tolerance would seem a worthy goal for which to strive. And yet as the authors in *Interfaith Education for All* suggest, the path towards just, peaceful, diverse communities, pushes us to consider what lies beyond tolerance.

For me tolerance is conflict arrested. It is a great harness applied to the destructive forces of ignorance, fear and prejudice. It provides a wall between warring parties. At best, it is a glass wall where protected people can see one another going about parallel lives. But nonetheless it is still a wall dividing us from each another. When I agree to tolerate you, I agree only to acknowledge your

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existence and not to injure you. I make no commitment to get to know you, to learn about you, and to see our lives as interdependent. As such, tolerance is not a basis for healthy human relationship nor will it ever lead to true community, for tolerance does not allow for learning, or growth or transformation, but rather tolerance keeps people in a state of suspended conflict and ignorance.

For us to begin to understand the creative possibilities that are held within the diversity of human experience, we must move beyond the tendency to settle for tolerance as the goal for human encounter and risk the possibility that our lives are in fact inextricably connected one to another. As people of different religions, spiritual expressions, indigenous traditions and humanistic beliefs, we are too often segregated from each other, which leaves us ignorant of the values and practices that are significant to our lives. Ignorance is the enemy of peace. Tolerance does not dispel ignorance. Only through interfaith education which encourages us to embrace our diversity and claim our interdependence will we learn about each other, form true relationships, and build communities of mutual respect that are essential for establishing cultures of peace.

I am particularly grateful to my friend and colleague Duncan Wielzen, and his co-editor Ina Ter Avest for the gathering and shaping of these powerful essays, which provide an invaluable resource illustrating the importance of interfaith education as an essential component of educating people for citizenship in the diverse communities that comprise our world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Looking ahead at Contested Concepts and Practices

Since the beginning of the 21st century migration intensified globally. Wars, armed conflicts between sectarian groups, and poverty have uprooted and displaced millions of people. Refugees fled amass to neighbouring countries in search for safe havens or humane living conditions. In Turkey, Lebanon, South-Africa and many Western countries the socio-demographic landscape altered significantly due to migration within the Southern hemisphere and migration to the Western world.

In many European countries, primary schools are becoming increasingly religiously diverse as a direct result of global migration. In the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch government already began developing policies for intercultural education in 1974. The Dutch government first introduced a system for education in the native languages and cultures (OETC) of children of primarily Muslim (Turkish and Moroccan) migrants. With this measure, the government tried to cope with the ethnic and cultural pluralism in Dutch society, although the initial focus was on the migrants' eventual return to their birth countries. A decade later, in 1985, 'Philosophical Movements' (lessons *about* world religions and philosophies of life) became part of the curriculum of all primary schools, irrespective of their corporate identity. It was mandated by law (Griffioen & Bakker, 2001).

Similar measures were taken and are still being taken in other Western countries vis-à-vis incremental pandemic, ethnic and religious pluralism in their respective societies. Hence, in 2014 the Council of Europe published *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Nonreligious World Views in Intercultural Education*. And more recently, for example, Flanders in Belgium introduced a new education model for its catholic primary schools, the so-called *catholic dialogue school*. In this model, catholic education commits itself to an open and constructive dialogue with other religions and philosophies of life (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). Moreover, in Australia and Wales there is a growing concern about how religious education (RE), which for long time was taught monolithically (teaching in religion), can now meet up to the challenges and new demands of ethnic and religious pluralism (teaching *about* and/or *from* religion). There are serious efforts to abandon the monolithic fashion of teaching for a more interfaith conscious and friendly approach.

Interfaith education is accompanied by neighbouring concepts such as: interreligious education, multi-religious education, and (inter) worldview education. The different contextual approaches in this book yield to a variety of perspectives on interfaith and its neighbouring concepts in relation to education.

The term itself – interfaith – raises various complex questions, especially in relation to education (Byrne, 2011). To understand what this term means, we turn to James Fowler's (1981) conceptualization of faith and his Faith Development Theory.

Fowler defines faith as “a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Fowler further distinguishes between faith, religion and belief. But this distinction, and the evaluation of the concept of faith, departs from a Christian viewpoint. A critical assessment of faith, however, must also consider the values, perspectives and evaluations from non-Christian and secular sources. It is therefore essential to distinguish between religious and secular worldviews or convictions, since faith itself is not limited to the religious domain. Bertrand Russell underscores this view by asserting: “Christians have faith in the Resurrection; communists have faith in Marx's Theory of Value” (Russell, 1992, p. 216). Russell sees both as systems of faith. Moreover, in discussing the concept of belief – i.e., from an interfaith perspective – one cannot overlook the input of so-called secular or philosophical movements/convictions. Good interfaith praxis and theory require examining “the entire spectrum of beliefs and include authentic voices of the other rather than the dominant culture's representations” (Byrne, 2011, p. 57).

Even though Fowler's Faith Development Theory has been ground-breaking, it has also attracted critique. Heinz Streib (1991, 2001, 2005), for example, points to the lack of “narrativity of faith” in Fowler's conceptualization. He therefore proposes contextual modifications of the concept of faith and faith development. For Streib these are necessary due to incremental religious and secular worldview orientations in contemporary societies that go beyond Fowler's ‘narrow’ conceptualization of faith and faith development (Streib, 2005, p. 107). Furthermore, Streib (2003, pp. 19-22) and Coyle (2011) catalogued substantial criticism levelled against Fowler's Faith Development Theory, with regard to the overemphasizing of cognition at the expense of emotional/psychodynamic dimensions like processes of transition and transformation, and for ignoring cultural specificity. In addition, Fowler's theory is also criticized for not accounting for diversity in faith structures and for ignoring how diverse faith development can be.

The comprehensive discourse on faith and faith developments can provide a key for understanding the concept of interfaith in relation to education. That is why we utilize this concept in relation to its neighbouring concepts. Faith development, according to Fowler (1981) is a relational process. Hence, interfaith education becomes a *pleonasm*, since the ‘inter’-aspect is already included in the concept of ‘faith’ and its developmental processes. Adding to the disparate positions on the concept of faith renders the term ‘inter-faith’ a contested concept in relation to education.

Some argue that interfaith is also about respecting and appreciating the other (Patel, 2004). Interfaith therefore, encourages individuals and groups to build

engagement and commitment with and toward each other despite existing social, religious and ideological differences. But if faith is understood in relational terms, ‘inter-faith’ becomes redundant which requires further research that highlights the dialogical aspect of faith in relation to education. Such faith, which is undergirded by religious and/or secular worldviews, must and can be learned. It requires therefore a critical pedagogical method that is transformative, empowering, transgressive, and even subversive, thus in line with Freirean pedagogical terms (Puett, 2005). Such a method comes close to the concept of *Bildung*, understood in postmodern terms (Schreurs, 2006; Van Stralen & Gude, 2012). It aids pupils to construct their own spiritual, (inter)religious or (inter) worldview identities (both religious and secular), but in relation to the space they inhabit (family, school, neighbourhood, and the wider society). The ultimate goal concerns transformative processes that advance the integral development (moral, affective and intellectual) of pupils, who concomitantly grow to become strong personalities with adequate social skills necessary for living together harmoniously in plural milieus. Amongst these skills are the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, to argue, defend or critically assess any given moral position, and to value diversity as an enrichment to culture and society. This concurs with the purpose of the United Religions Initiative (URI) that seeks to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. This book is inspired by the URI, a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world. Against this background, any kind of *faith*-based education – i.e. faith in the broadest sense, thus also originating from secular traditions – must be accompanied by critical pedagogy and provocative pedagogy – and must also at all times be subjected to critical assessment – if it wants to achieve its ultimate objectives in transforming our world (Puett, 2005).

In this book, authors from a variety of countries and religious backgrounds (mainly Christianity and Islam, and to a lesser degree Paganism and Hinduism) enter the broad domain of RE from their own respective positioning on faith-based education. The international orientation on key concepts related to religion, faith and belief reflects the pedagogical discourse.

The contributors to this book are scholars, researchers and practitioners in the wider field of RE. Their contribution in this book is motivated by an eagerness to enrich the wider discourse on Interfaith Education. The chapters in this book breathe a diversity in approaches: philosophical, theological, pedagogical, and given form by the perspective of RE. We hope that, at the end of the day, the reader can come to the conclusion that the outcome of the authors’ exertions is an ongoing dialogue on living together amidst diversity in religious and secular worldviews.

This book is divided in three parts. Part One consists of contributions of highly respected scholars in the field of RE and Interfaith Education. It begins with a contribution from the Dutch pedagogue Siebren Miedema, followed by a

contribution from the German Protestant theologian Johannes Lähnemann. We then leave the European mainland and turn to the United Kingdom. The British Muslim scholar Abdullah Sahin underlines the importance of the psychological development of students for Interfaith Education. We then take a huge leap to the Sultanate of Oman where Argentinian-born scholar, Sergio Saleem Scatolini, presents his view on Islamic Religious Education. He therefore reflects substantially on his teaching period in Flanders, Belgium. From there, we return to the Netherlands where the Dutch Catholic theologian Aad de Jong writes about the intentions of Interfaith Education. What follows is a Euro-Asian collaboration with a contribution by Mualla Selçuk from Turkey and Ina Ter Avest from the Netherlands. With their description of a model for worldview education we then conclude the theoretical elaborations on the concept of Interfaith Education.

Siebre Miedema explicitly relates the concept of 'interfaith' and its neighbouring concepts to citizenship education and human rights education. He notices that the use of the concept 'faith' seems to be rooted and mostly used in the USA and Australia, whereas in European and other western countries people write and talk about 'religion,' and by consequence about inter-religious education. Miedema himself prefers to use the concept 'worldview,' and 'religion' as a sub-concept of 'worldview.' A distinction is made by Miedema between teaching and learning *about* the other, with a focus on the *content* of interfaith education, and a functional approach with a focus on the *bridging role* of religion in the construction of peaceful cohabitation in a plural society. '9/11' is seen by Miedema as a turning point in locating religion in the public domain. Prior to '9/11,' religion was seen as a private matter. Starting from 2002, in publications of the Council of Europe, religion is increasingly seen as part of a culture, and religious education has been treated as included in intercultural education. It is striking that the Council of Europe uses the term 'intercultural dialogue' in its publications. In *Signposts*, one of the Council's publications (2014), the concept 'faith' was removed and replaced by 'religious and non-religious convictions.' Miedema is in favour of combining interfaith education with citizenship education and human rights education, not only in the sense of teaching and learning about such issues, but even more so in the sense of acquiring skills to participate democratically in plural societies. To develop this, Miedema refers to the concept of 'maximal citizenship education.' The school as an embryonic society is seen by Miedema as a place to practice citizenship. The aims of interfaith education, or in his own words of 'inter-worldview education' are to prevent "conflicts between adherents of different religions and worldviews, of people of different faiths, and to break down existing walls between 'us' and 'them' and prevent the rise of such walls." Miedema's conclusion is: "As educators and religious educators we know what we need to do!"

The ultimate objective of interfaith education according to Johannes Lähnemann is building trust. Aims in line with this ultimate objective are helping people to find orientation, assist with (religious) identity construction and offering examples of social responsibility as they are narrated in religious traditions. Lähnemann elaborates on the three well-known pedagogical strategies of teaching and learning

in, about and from, and points to the latter as the most promising for interreligious education. The question Lähnemann raises is how the ‘added values’ of different religious traditions can be presented in European classrooms. To answer that question, he presents an overview of developments in the field of religious education in Europe, for which he refers to a publication issued by the Peace Education Standing Commission (PESC), *Interreligious and Values Education in Europe. Map and Handbook*. The good news is that religion is increasingly seen as a field for public discourse and public learning. One of the problems mentioned is the very poor situation of religious education due to lack of expertise in the field of pedagogy, specifically regarding pedagogical strategies of (inter-)religious teaching and learning. Religious communities are mentioned as sources of expertise. In the publication *Signposts* of the Council of Europe, the author notices a change of perspective from religion as a private matter, to religion as part of the public sphere and of intercultural education in public schooling. Three projects, according to Lähnemann examples of interreligious education, are presented: “*Offene Türen*,” an alternative City Guide (Nürnberg), a project of Religions for Peace in Belgium Hopen Deuren, and *The Global Ethic Project* that started in Tübingen. Research on the representations of religions is of particular relevance according to Lähnemann in the face of the sweeping generalizations, stereotypes and prejudices regarding other religions. Recommendations, based on preliminary findings of these research projects, are presented by Lähnemann as a guide for the construction of textbooks.

The question Abdullah Sahin aims to answer in his contribution, is firstly how faith traditions understand difference in the challenging context of the modern world, and secondly how religion can contribute to an attitude of ‘critical openness’ amongst European Muslim youngsters, which is preconditional for interfaith encounters. Sahin states that in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the Qur’an, diversity is seen as a sign of the Divine Majesty and Creativity – an aspect of human life to be articulated, since it contributes to human flourishing. Despite the influence of secularisation in the western world and beyond, the role of Islamic faith communities and the strengthening of their voice in European societies cannot be denied anymore. Sahin points to the need for reflection on the role of Islam in the public domain. “Inclusive social and political structures [have to be created] where presence of the ‘other’ is not simply tolerated, but integrated into the fabric of a shared social space.” This is conditional upon the will to rethink and contextualize the religious tradition and develop the competency of ‘critical openness,’ according to Sahin. This includes reclaiming the legacy of critical education as constitutive part of Islam. ‘Difference’ has to be respected, and is seen by Sahin as a possibility to learn from each other. Human dignity has to be safeguarded. Serving the common good is central. “If there is any need to compete, the Qur’an insists, we should compete in doing what is good ensuring that the dignity and welfare of all is served.” Sahin stresses the need for self-relativisation and self-transcendence. The recognition that we have limitations encourages us to go beyond ourselves; and encourages us to remain open to the world around us and the reality beyond us, according to Sahin.

At the psychological level, Sahin takes as his starting point the need for the encounter with the other in order to know yourself. At the sociological level, Sahin points to the danger of expanding worlds and diverse contacts, with the risk of raising anxiety and fear. Facilitating the development of 'critical faithfulness' is at the heart of the education of Muslim youngsters in a European context, according to Sahin. Sahin's model, with its focus on religious literacy and dialogicality, shows a way to fulfil this task.

Sergio Saleem Scatolini's starting point are Muslim communities as a minority in the Belgian society, which is populated by a majority of secularized Christians – most of them affiliated with the Roman Catholic church. Adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe to have received divine revelations providing instructions for living together in peace. According to Scatolini, time (history) and place (culture) influenced the wording of these revelations. Islamic Religious Education (IRE), in Scatolini's view, should not indoctrinate pupils and students with the (semi-)divine character of Holy Scriptures, but inform pupils and students about their connection to time and place – a contextual approach. IRE as a school subject should be at the service of general education; education is "... the assistance that we owe our younger generations so that they find and claim their role in God's creation, and can feel at home in their own bodies, in the stories which they are a part of, and the places where they live." Scatolini distinguishes between religious education in schools on the one hand, and religious upbringing in mosques, Qur'an schools, or madrassas on the other. In schools, IRE contributes to the general process of pupils' and students' identity development. Scatolini further elaborates upon the core concepts of IRE (search, knowledge, wisdom and values), and concludes that IRE has a confessional character, and that IRE classes are workshops on "how to think Islamically by searching, analysing, reflecting, and learning in the presence of and in collaboration with others, including non-Muslims." The difference with 'the other' is a challenge for educators, that presents opportunities to facilitate the development of pupils and students in terms of learning to respect difference and acknowledging the right to be different. Scatolini coins this approach as a 'pedagogy of faith,' combining a critical approach to 'the other' with a critical approach to one's own tradition. IRE should encourage pupils and students to be in dialogue with 'the other' who is different from me. Preconditional for dialogue is religious literacy "... as a doorway to wisdom and about striving for the realization of higher Qur'anic and human values in the presence of and together with other Muslims as well as non-Muslims."

Aad de Jong starts with presenting the intention of the United Religions Initiative (URI) "to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings." The aim of De Jong's contribution is to shed a clear light on the intentions underpinning interfaith education. According to De Jong, the 'speech act'-theory of Searle is useful in the communication with people adhering to different beliefs. Regarding the objectives of interfaith education, De Jong distinguishes ultimate intentions from immediate goals (of a religious education curriculum and of a religious education class). As an ultimate aim, De

Jong chooses ‘participation in a plural society.’ For this participation, understood as contributing as a citizen to living-together-in-peace, ‘we-intentions’ and ‘we-knowledges’ are required, according to De Jong. Consequently, the recognition of constitutive and regulative rules is required as well. Interfaith education should provide pupils and students with good reasons to make their choice to respond to society’s needs as a free citizen. To make free participation happen, a shared language is preconditional, and thus the teaching and acquiring of communication skills should be prioritized in interfaith education. These skills should include the ability to understand the beliefs of ‘others,’ but also the capacity to express one’s own faith. Helpful to structure this specific language acquisition related aim of interfaith education is Searle’s distinction between locutionary (sounds and written signs), perlocutionary (one-sided, like when convincing the other) and illocutionary speech acts (opening up for exchange of ideas, like when asking questions) is helpful; the latter being subdivided in assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. In interfaith education, these speech acts should always be related to characteristic religious concepts – not only to concepts derived from one’s own tradition but, in an equal way, related to the tradition of ‘the other.’ Prior to all interventions in interfaith education is the motivation of the students. Several strategies are mentioned, like staying close to the students’ own experiences, raising the curiosity of students, provoking them or triggering their imagination. Basic in all the strategies is the involvement of each of the students. For De Jong, participation as a citizen starts with participation in the classroom.

The starting point for the development of Mualla Selçuk’s model for religious education, lies in the challenge of Muslims living in a secularizing context – which is the case in Turkey as well as in Europe. Every understanding of the Qur’an, according to Selçuk, is related to the context in which a person lives and his or her psychological framework. To understand the meaning of the Qur’an today, students have to learn about the way the Qur’an was understood by the listeners living in the time of its revelation. The description of the relation with ‘the people of the Book’ is seen by Selçuk as one of the first examples of the Islamic perspective on interreligious encounters. Following Selçuk’s interpretation of Qur’anic verses, the dialogue within and between religions should take its starting point in “the *willingness* to question what is different, the *desire* to learn the meaning of this diversity, and the *ability* to appreciate those differences as enriching experiences which stimulate the mind and the heart.”

This message of the Qur’an is at the basis of the ‘Communicative Model’ as developed by Selçuk, in close cooperation with the Canadian theologian John Valk. Religious education today, according to Selçuk, should not aim at literal presentations of texts and ready-made solutions to existential questions, but should include “the exploration of a variety of perspectives in order that every participant in the dialogue is able to find his/her own religious positionality.” The implementation of such a model requires the meeting of certain criteria, of which an open and safe space to ask questions is the first requirement. The approach of texts in Selçuk’s ‘Communicative Model,’ or ‘conversation with texts’ as she prefers to call it, facilitates the emergence of an interpretation of Qur’anic texts that

is relevant for the lives of students today – in a secularized context. As an illustration of this conversational approach, Selçuk presents three topics: the relationship between Islam and democracy, the concept of Jihad, and the question of Islam and other religions. This latter topic is of pivotal importance in interreligious education classes, where teachers are confronted with questions like: “Are all religions true? Or is only one religion (Islam) true?” The aim of Selçuk’s ‘Communicative Model’ is to “empower students, by enabling them to relate to different understandings of what it means to be a Muslim, both historically and in today’s pluralistic world.”

Part Two of the book consists of *grassroots stories* – stories emerging from classroom practices taking place in a variety of cultural and educational contexts. Suhailiah Hussien, Rosnani Hashim and Nazatul Akmar Mohd. Mokhtar, introduce Malaysia as a country with many ethnicities, cultures and religions. To create harmony is prioritized, but until now this has not been very successful. The educational system of Malaysia is inherited from British colonial times. In public schools, the language of instruction is Malayan. Students are expected to be bilingual (Mandarin-Malayan, Tamil-Malayan). Malaysian culture is taught to students, with attention to cultural and religious diversity. However, intercultural competencies are neglected. The Hikmah pedagogy was developed to create a community of inquiry in Malaysian classrooms.

Hikmah pedagogy is rooted in the Philosophy for Children program (P4C), which states that philosophy is an appropriate tool to trigger and develop the natural curiosity of children emphasizing critical, creative, ethical and caring thinking. Students in the Malaysian context are usually devout followers of a particular religion. A Community of Inquiry (CoI) aims at students becoming aware of their religious beliefs, which “provokes deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues; disagreement is common and allowed.” The five stages constituting a CoI are described and illustrated with concrete examples. For a CoI a democratic classroom is preconditional, in conjunction with the presence of a well-informed and sensitive teacher to facilitate the dialogical classroom conversations. The P4C/CoI approach has been remodelled with an emphasis on the inclusion of religious and ethical values relevant to Muslims in the Malaysian society; and consequently, the new model has received the name of *Hikmah* (wisdom) Programme. According to the authors, this pedagogical strategy can be infused in the whole curriculum of a school, or it can be implemented as a ‘stand-alone’ subject. In the latter case, it is taught outside school hours and focuses on thinking skills. In case of infusion, the acquisition of thinking skills is interwoven with every subject that belongs to the curriculum. Preliminary research findings show that Hikmah pedagogy stimulates the development of open-mindedness on behalf of students, as well as tolerance and respect for the religious views of others. Hussien et al. end their contribution with a call for teacher training institutes that educate future teachers to be “open minded, tolerant and respectful of [their] students’ views before [they] can encourage [their] students to do so.”

INTRODUCTION

Naïma Lafrarchi explores the potential strength of the Hikmah pedagogy for the Belgian context. First, Lafrarchi describes the Belgian constitutional framework for education. Article 24 of the Belgian Constitution describes the freedom of education. The vast majority of schools in Flanders today are schools with a Catholic identity – it is on these Catholic schools that Lafrarchi focuses. Catholic schools include 3 hours of RE per week in their curriculum. In accordance with article 24 §2 of the Constitution, public schools have to organise two hours of RE per week.

Secularisation and pluralisation are great challenges for teachers in public schools and Catholic schools alike. The Muslim Executive Board (EMB) is responsible for the organisation of Islamic religious education in public schools, as well as for teacher training, teaching materials, and the ongoing professional development of teachers. Lafrarchi describes several pedagogical-didactical and educational concepts in order to give an overview of, and better insight into crucial elements as preconditions for a successful implementation of the Hikmah pedagogy in the Belgian context. In addition, she gives a short overview of the roots and the core characteristics of the Hikmah model. Lafrarchi proposes to implement the Hikmah model in the RE lessons given in public schools, during the interconvictional competences classes (ICC). Another possibility, according to Lafrarchi, is to implement the Hikmah model by making use of possibilities provided by the transversal curricula learning objectives on citizenship and social skills.

Philosophising about Qur'an verses and *Hadith* literature according to the Hikmah pedagogy, will stimulate pupils to start their own reflection on the meaning of the verses, living in the contemporary Flemish/Western context. Although the Hikmah model cannot be directly applied in the Flemish education context, public schools offer a particularly promising environment for experimenting with this model, according to Lafrarchi.

From Belgium, we travel to the Netherlands. Two consecutive contributions articulate the diversity of approaches that are available for interreligious education in Islamic education in this country 'behind the dikes.'

Leo Van der Meij describes the beginning of Islamic education in the Netherlands, which was founded by guest workers of Moroccan and Turkish origin. As of 2016, 50 Islamic primary schools exist in the Netherlands; a central organization assists these schools in their identity development, i.e. the ISBO, Islamic School Board Organisation. As regards their confessional identity, the majority of the schools is described as orthodox Islamic. School rules and regulations are based on the Qur'an and the *Sunna*; the pupils are socialized in every day's practicalities of Islam. In the media, these schools have been portrayed in a predominantly negative way.

According to Van der Meij, there is little support in Dutch society for encounters initiated by Islamic schools, due to the reason that in the main discourse regarding confessional education, Islamic education is questioned because of the perspective that it leads to segregation in society. Islamic schools themselves differ in the way they either promote or not promote encounters with other confessional

schools; the attitude depends on the religious identity of the schools, which ranges from Salafism and Islamic orthodoxy to liberal or Islamic Sufism.

To describe the different positions of these Islamic schools, Van der Meij refers to the 'Four-point model' of the Christian theologian Paul Knitter, which maps out four different religious perspectives: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and acceptance. Using Knitter's model, it can be demonstrated according to Van der Meij that there are many possibilities for interreligious encounters with other confessional schools, ranging from joint, friendly sports activities, to projects based on interreligious themes like prayer and visiting holy places. Terrorist attacks – in the name of Allah – that occurred in Europe recently and the phenomenon that Muslim youngsters leave the Netherlands to support the Islamic State, have reduced the support for Islamic education in the Netherlands. Islamic schools that enter into a dialogue with others, contribute to a positive image of Islamic schools in the Dutch society. It is only by dialogue, according to Van der Meij, that we can defeat religious intolerance.

Ismail Taspinar writes about Islamic education in the Netherlands as well. Diversity takes a central place in his contribution, in which he refers to intra- and interreligious encounters. His contribution begins with a personal recollection of his early years in the Netherlands, when he was a small boy and a regular visitor of his Roman Catholic neighbours.

The vision and mission of the SIMON schools is based on 'Islam,' which is understood as 'to become part of the peace of God.' In line with this interpretation, the role of all educators, teachers and parents alike, is to enable each child to respond to her/his Creator in an authentic way. As regards the diversity of religions, Taspinar refers to the Qur'anic concept of 'the people of the Book'; diversity within Islam is seen as a difference in focus, whereby some traditions focus on law, while others focus on rituals or socio-economic aspects, for instance. All SIMON schools are ordinary Dutch schools. The school board of the SIMON school network strives to gather a staff of teachers that is composed of 50% Muslims and 50% teachers with a different religious (or a secular) background, with the intention to create interesting possibilities for the encounter with 'the other' in this way.

The motto that summarizes the pedagogical strategy of the schools is 'becoming who you are.' The concepts of value education and character education inform the pedagogical strategies of teachers. In everyday classroom practice, the teachers often refer to sayings taken from the Prophet or a narrative taken from the *Hadith* literature to underline their corrective remarks. The core values of the SIMON schools are summarized in the so-called 'seven pearls' – including awareness of the unity of God, tolerance and responsibility – and apply just as much in the school environment as they apply as values in the context of the Dutch plural society. By consequence, the subject of 'developmental citizenship' is given a central position in the curriculum of the SIMON schools. Communication skills, according to Taspinar, are basic for intra- and interreligious encounters. Taspinar points to the fact that much depends on how the Dutch society communicates with newcomers. Integration is seen by Taspinar as a double-sided process – involving

native-born Dutch people and so-called ‘newcomers’ alike. Taspinar concludes by sharing his dream: he envisions vulnerable people who long for community and dreaming of living together in peace – a dream that is sometimes realised in the here and now, at unexpected times.

From the Netherlands, we turn northwards and arrive in Finland. Heidi Rautionmaa and Arto Kallioniemi inform us about the Finnish situation, and about their exploration of integrated religious education and dialogue in the context of inter-worldview education. An important double aim, according to the authors, is to stimulate a positive attitude on behalf of the students towards ‘the other,’ and to teach them skills for interacting dialogically with such others. The subject of ‘inter-worldview dialogue’ gives the students space to critically reflect upon their own thoughts, and to respectfully discuss the ideas of others about existential questions. The implementation of such a school subject in the Finnish curriculum takes centre stage in this chapter.

In Finland, there is a very strong tradition of state schools, and only a couple of confessional private schools exist. RE is a compulsory subject in the school system, and RE courses are seen as playing a part in the acquisition of civil skills. Schools offer Lutheran, Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox RE according to the parents’ wishes, or secular ethics as an alternative for RE if so desired. Next to that, up to eleven other religions can be included in the curriculum. Like in other European countries, as a result of the changes in the cultural and religious context, segregated RE classes have been a subject of intense debate in Finland. In response to these discussions, the concept of ‘integrated religious education’ has been explored in a limited number of schools. The starting point was to partially integrate the contents of the curriculums for the various religions and the different types of secular ethics, with inter-worldview dialogue as a constituting part. Different strategies to meet the expectations are discussed. According to the authors, integrated RE creates opportunities for students to learn to present their own perceptions and points of view regarding their faith and worldview, and to get acquainted with the corresponding perspectives of their classmates. Inter-worldview education, according to the authors, takes place in seven stages ranging from merely becoming aware of difference to a personal transformation process. Respect for the personal stories of others and for the narratives that originate from the tradition they adhere to, is preconditional in this practice-oriented learning process. The authors express the wish that the experiences gathered with this innovative model for inter-worldview education may prove useful – and can be applied – in international contexts.

While narratives are mentioned regularly in Part Two of this book, Vicky Garlock’s focus is explicitly on storytelling as a means to make children familiar with sacred texts. Her starting point is the global citizenship and plurality which children nowadays will experience at an unprecedented level. They will have encounters with people from different faith traditions, and will have to live with these people and their beliefs about creation and the afterlife – to mention but a few beliefs which can conflict with beliefs of others. For that reason, a curriculum

‘Faith Seeker Kids’ was developed, first for children raised in Christian families, later incorporating narratives from other religious and secular worldview traditions.

The curriculum consists of fifteen lesson plans, each describing developmentally appropriate teaching materials and offering at least one story. The curriculum is based on theories of development, like Piaget’s stage theory of cognitive development, Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and Fowler’s faith development approach. The limitations of a stage approach are discussed by the author and exemplified with quotes from young children. However, stage theories can inform teachers about the average level of cognitive and affective development of the pupils they are working with. Research on metacognition and memory capacities informed the developers of the teaching materials that the stories should contain up to 1000 words for the youngest children, and up to 2000 words for the older children. An example is presented of the Moses-narrative and its perception and reception by children of different age groups. In their puberty, pupils are open for questioning their own beliefs and those of others, and can arrive at conclusions that differ profoundly from the positions taken by their parents or educators. By way of conclusion, the author states that pedagogues informed by stage theories of development should not underestimate the cognitive abilities of children they meet in real-life situations, in the classroom.

Ina Ter Avest and Duncan Wielzen start with a discussion of human rights and children’s rights. The authors refer to Friedrich Schweitzer, who not only points to the legal aspects of these rights and duties, but also – and with greater emphasis – to their pedagogical and moral aspects. Following Schweitzer, Ter Avest and Wielzen argue that children have innate religious and spiritual needs, and that by consequence these dimensions should be included in education. Aware of the fact that this fulfilment of needs can be realized by socialization into a religious tradition, the authors favour an interreligious approach which goes beyond mere enculturation. They take ‘the voice of the child’ as their starting point, leading to a child-centred approach, and they underline their approach by referring to ‘theologizing with children.’ Theologizing with children is a process in which educators encourage children to reflect on questions about God, human(s) (relations) and the world, and how these are (inter)related. This cannot be realised without the input of parents, by interacting with teachers about their way of upbringing – religiously and culturally – at home. The role of the professional educator is exemplified with a biographical perspective on the life of the former principal of the interreligious Juliana van Stolberg School.

The authors refer to research showing the creativity of children to include different religious concepts in their own authentic images, for instance their image of God. The authors also present preliminary findings on the ongoing ‘slow research’ with children, now young adolescents, who were formerly pupils of the Juliana van Stolberg School.

By way of conclusion, the authors state that ‘space’ is of pivotal importance for interreligious and interfaith education – space which is provided in schools so that the voice of the parents and ‘the voice of the child’ is heard.

INTRODUCTION

Fiona Tinker explores the possibility to have paganism included in the curriculum of religious education in Scotland. The present-day education system in Scotland grew from the context of a system put in place by the church. Christianity is part of the history of Scotland and its education system. From 1918 onwards, churches were no longer responsible for the running of schools. Their input remained however, resulting in two kinds of RE: Protestant based and Roman Catholic based RE. Scottish education aims at developing the learning competency of students, strengthening their self-confidence, and at making students aware of their responsibilities as citizens who can contribute in a constructive way to society. The religious and moral part of education is based on the Toledo Guiding Principles. Pupils are encouraged to explore other belief systems, like Judaism and Hinduism. According to the author, paganism should be included as well. She constructs her arguments on solid grounds. First of all, the author points to the need to counteract prejudice based on ignorance and lack of information. Second, schools have to take account of the context in which a child is raised. Thirdly, the author points to global citizenship as a reason to include paganism in the curriculum. To counteract lack of knowledge the author informs the reader about the main characteristics of paganism, among which love for nature is only one. A programme was developed to counteract the lack of knowledge about paganism and to contribute to its recognition, hopefully leading to a positive attitude as regards civic involvement, equality and inclusion of paganism in Scottish curricula, in accordance with the motto: 'One Scotland, Many Voices.' The author describes the long way to go for those parents who do not want to check the box 'other' in the list of options for religion, but who – for their own sake and for their child(ren) – want to be recognized in their pagan faith. Protests from these parents, according to the author, contribute to the process of achieving an inclusive vision, both in schools and in the Scottish society of which pagans are a part.

Jessica Bouva takes us down south, to the African continent, and describes a pilot study on interreligious education in the Gambian context, detailing its challenges and hindrances. The religious and educational landscape of The Gambia is described in the introduction.

The Supreme Islamic Council plays an important role in RE in schools all over the country. Both Christian and Islamic private schools exist. Private Christian schools have classes comprised of a mixture of Christian and Muslim pupils, while private Islamic schools only have classes with Muslim students. RE is a compulsory subject in all of these schools, and is given in line with the religion of the pupils.

Teachers at these schools receive their training at the Gambia College School of Education (GCSE). *Arkade* (the Dutch counterpart, an organisation for coaching and consultancy on RE) was asked by lecturers of this College to provide assistance in the development of a module for interreligious education. To be taken in consideration in this innovative module, was the need to abandon the didactical transfer model of teaching in favour of a constructivist learner-centred model. A pilot model was designed based on the input of semi-structured interviews and a validating meeting, and based on relevant literature of scholars in the field.

Interviews, among other means, revealed the need for development of tolerance; literature research put forward the concepts of ‘teaching and learning in, about and from religion’ the ‘interpretative approach’ and the ‘dialogical approach.’ The subsequently developed module focused on dialogue. The module was tested in a pilot study, showing that – after overcoming the shortcomings and the first fears – students were enthusiastic as well as their teachers. In their reflection on the pilot module, the authors reveal a variety of aspects needing to be improved, like the monolithic way in which dialogue is presented in the lessons. For the implementation of such a module, maximal effort from all actors is required – this being preconditional for success not only in the Gambian context.

In the last chapter of Part Two of this book Doerga, De Ruiter and Ter Avest provide a description of the Dutch context of public education and its practices for (inter)religious education. The focus of this chapter is on RE in public schools. Public schools have to organize RE classes whenever parents ask such classes for their children. Both Christian RE classes and Islamic RE classes are organized. Teachers who teach these classes sometimes meet with team members of other schools, discussing questions like ‘Can a teacher with a Christian background teach Islam?’, and the other way around: ‘Can a teacher with an Islamic background teach Christianity?’ Contrasting, or even conflicting positions resulted in the publication of a document stating the competencies for teachers of religion(s) in public schools; being a graduate from a Teacher Training College is preconditional.

The first case study is presented from the perspective of a Christian teacher, who teaches Christian RE lessons in classes mainly comprised of Muslim pupils. This teacher frequently refers to the fact that there are similarities between the two traditions, i.e. Christianity and Islam, who are “different and similar at the same time.” The case study is about heated discussions (“always, there really is no exception”) about the different meanings that texts can have for people. The clarification of different interpretations of the concept of *haram* results in a classroom atmosphere that creates some space for tolerance of difference.

The second case study is presented from the perspective of a Hindu teacher who teaches Hinduism RE lessons. As a child, she went to a Christian school, which was an enriching experience for her. In her RE lessons she informs her pupils about the history of the Hindu religious tradition, ‘the ten principles’ (including knowledge, tolerance, forgiveness and patience) and the core narratives of Hinduism. As a teacher, her aim is to give her pupils a sense of their divine spark. Teaching RE in this way, in the opinion of this teacher, turns the children into virtuous citizens – virtuous in the sense that they “flouris[h] on the personal level, and on the societal level balancing between the extremes of emotional responses.” One of the conclusions that follow from the case studies is the insight that the teacher’s biography plays a pivotal role. It is a prerequisite for an effective interreligious pedagogical strategy that teachers reflect about their own positionality.

Part Three of this book focuses on the perspectives on interfaith education. It comprises three reflective chapters, each written by John Valk, Ryan Gardner and Ursula Günther (scholars originating from Canada, the United States and Germany, respectively). They reflect upon the ‘state of the art’ as presented in the first part of the book, and upon the sometimes successful, sometimes unruly interfaith experiences at the grassroots level, related in the second part of the book.

John Valk points to different crucial aspects that are mentioned briefly in Part One and Part Two. Valk mentions that interfaith education seems all too often to be focused largely on the individual pupil and his/her personal beliefs and identity development. Less attention is given to religious and secular perspectives and their influences on individual and collective beliefs and values. These perspectives, he indicates, influence society’s institutions, and not least its educational institutions, whether religious or secular/public.

According to Valk, both religious and secular/public schools have an obligation to educate students about various worldview perspectives. This becomes important not only in assisting them to become effective citizens, but also in assisting them in developing their own worldview perspective, whatever that might be. Valk hopes that both religious and secular students become critically aware of their own and other worldview perspectives.

Students steeped in a secular worldview may view their religious classmates as ‘backward’ in their development, but in Valk’s view this is often held as a result of ignorance, both of their own worldview perspective and those of others.

Valk indicates that experiencing differences as problematic often reveals an inability to translate terms or concepts across worldviews. These issues and questions, according to Valk, need to be faced and explored in interfaith education, or worldview education and in contexts beyond the interfaith education classroom.

Ryan Gardner points to the need for reflection on religious and secular worldview(s) in teacher education programs. He describes a model which is theoretically based on the work of, amongst others, Argyris & Schön, and Korthagen. He distinguishes between four different levels of reflection, all of them important, but it is only in combination that these levels effectively contribute to the development of competences of interfaith education teachers. Technical reflection, according to Gardner, is decision making about immediate behaviours or skills. Descriptive reflection focuses on attempts to provide justification for events or actions. Dialogic reflection refers to the weighing of competing viewpoints and the exploration of alternative solutions. In critical reflection, ethical and moral aspects of the teaching profession are taken into account. The distinctive foci in these types of reflection are illustrated with some clear examples taken from real-life narratives that teachers provided. Gardner is aware of the fact that these reflections may be insightful, but practicing the new insights is an altogether different matter! Argyris & Schön already pointed out this pivotal difference, by means of their distinction between espoused theory and theory-in-use. According to Gardner, his model of reflection – when practiced by all stakeholders involved – will increase the impact of interfaith education.

In the final chapter Ursula Günther summarizes and comments on the contributions of the authors of Parts One and Two, thereby visualizing her analysis by way of graphs. In her view, all these authors embrace a shared and just future from their own perspective and in their own way. That is what connects them.

Contrary to what was expected and expressed in the secularization thesis, religion is still a hot topic these days. Countless individuals are searching for an own religious stance, and more and more people pursue encounter with other persons' religious expressions in the public domain, or are at least open to such a possibility. The challenge, according to Günther, however, is to counteract the general speechlessness and the lack of religious literacy by developing a common language.

The conceptual clarity offered in Part One is helpful for the reader to understand the examples of good practice of Part Two. The diversity in theoretical approaches and real-life case studies gives a broad view of the interfaith landscape in different parts of the world. The examples of Islamic RE and its relation to interfaith education contribute to a more differentiated perception of Islam, according to Günther. These and other examples indicate a willingness from the part of schools and educators to change the direction toward further mutual understanding. That this will be realized in different ways related to diversity in contexts goes without saying, according to Günther.

Translating findings from theoretical research and from 'examples of good practice' into school practice takes time, and probably that is what is most needed: time for reflection and motivation to proceed. To go on, Günther points to five preconditions to be fulfilled, culminating in the question: Who has the final say? Is it the academic theology, or the pupils? Günther favours a paradigm shift towards a child-centred approach, exemplified by what she coins as a context related rhizomatic approach dissolute from any hierarchy. That will take us further to a new episode in the pedagogy of interfaith education for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the United Religions Initiative (URI), both the Global Office (San Francisco) and URI-Europe for the remarkable inspiration that has led to the publication of this book on Interfaith Education. This book captures the spirit of URI.

We also thank Stijn Van Tongerloo and Julie Wedam for their professional cooperation with proofreading many chapters of this book. Their kindness and constructive approach brought ease to this journey.

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