

28th July 2020

(HPPD7003) Project in Interfaith Studies

How can Muslim faith schools and public schools with Muslim students incorporate interfaith education with religious education?

The theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical approaches of interfaith education in schools teaching Islamic religious education.

Introduction:

Muslims assign a central position to the Quran and strive to live by its teachings. Learning the scripture and its interpretations are a fundamental part of Islamic religious education. Various state educational institutions with a majority of Muslim students include religious education along with secular education in their schools. Interfaith education is not commonly taught as part of Islamic religious education. However, two verses (3:3 and 49:12) as given below can be interpreted to emphasize this practice:

“Step by Step, He has sent the scripture down to you (Prophet) with the truth confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel.” (Al- Quran, 3:3-4)¹

“O Mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.” (Al- Quran, 49:12)²

Verse 3:3-4 suggests that God sent two more scriptures; The Torah and the Gospel before he sent the Quran. The second verse 49:12 suggests that human beings have been created unique with the objective that they know each other and in other words, so that they may learn from each other. Thus, it can be derived that efforts should be made communities to reach out and learn religious knowledge from each other, and interfaith education should be made an integral part of Islamic religious education. For this, modern Muslim scholars argue that educators need to outline strategies that promote respect for individuals of other faiths, at the same time acknowledging each believer’s own right to be different. History has proved that whenever religion has adopted an inclusivist attitude, it has been able to contribute to civilizational development and human flourishing, but when it has become closed in its approach to other communities, it has resulted in a dogmatic and closed outlook resulting in widespread destruction leading to social, political and civilizational downfall. One of the ways that Muslims can learn from the past is to learn to constantly educate its community and young people according to the time and to re-negotiate its theological, philosophical and pedagogical perspectives and align it to contemporary times. This essay is an attempt to understand the theological and philosophical perspectives of Islamic religious education, to find out ways to initiate interfaith education as part of religious education in its educational institutions and to comprehend the educational components and competencies that need to be developed to facilitate interfaith education in its academic institutions.

Thus, the essay shall first discuss the theoretical and philosophical foundations of Islamic education. Further, the essay discusses ways in which Islamic religious education can incorporate teaching about the ‘other’ through introducing affective components of Islamic religious education. It will then discuss the need and significance of developing ‘critical openness’ as a competency where the ‘other’ is acknowledged and accommodated in an inclusive sense of society. Religious education is taught through either confessional faith

¹ Haleem, A. quran.com/3

² Pickthall. <https://quran.com/49>

schools or public schools. Many Islamic faith schools subscribe to different doctrinal perspectives ranging from exclusivist to liberal positions. Through Paul Knitter Four-point model the essay will discuss potential ways in which Islamic religious institutions can adopt interfaith education while adhering to its doctrinal perspective. Finally, the essay will conclude with an exemplar of pedagogical strategies of interfaith education imparted in one of SIMON schools in the Netherlands.

Overall, the essay concludes emphasizing the need to include components like; Search, knowledge, value, and wisdom in its religious teaching which will allow for new meaning-making and re-appropriation of its scriptures and traditions according to the modern period. It suggests that Islamic religious education needs to develop the attribute of critical openness as it supports students to make sense of the differences and a multiplicity of religions and cultures which are a part of their lives. Critical openness also allows individuals to rethink and recontextualize their faith according to the present context thus overcoming rigidity and extremism. The theological perspective of the institution affects its relation and network with other religious communities around it. Through Paul Knitter's four-point model, the essay suggests the potential for including interfaith education regardless of the doctrinal perspectives adopted by the institution. The essay finally concludes with an impactful exemplar of pedagogical strategies of interfaith education implemented through SIMON schools which facilitate students of different faiths to genuinely engage and learn from each other in a meaningful way.

Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Education:

To authentically understand Islamic education, it is essential to take a step away from the perceived secular outlook and understand Islam from a believer's perspective. Islam is revealed and conceived as a 'way of life' by its adherents. There is a close connection between the Muslims and Islamic education such that, all deliberation in the human enterprise has God as their reference point (Merry, 2006).³ Therefore, Islamic education becomes a matter a wider theology where secular reality, scientific authority, and an independent human do not hold significance. For an in-depth understanding, one must make sense of the relationship between culture and education and the distinction in Islamic and non-Islamic notions of education. Both western and Islamic scholars affirm that education is an instrument to train and develop an individual to live according to the society he/she belongs to (Hansen, 2001).⁴ The distinction they propound is in what is considered as an appropriate method for the education of an individual and what it should entail.⁵

It is significant to acknowledge the expansive difference between western and Islamic education system. Historically, western civilization is known to have originated in Hellenistic Greece where Plato is acknowledged to have initiated the western education theory. This theory was based on the faculty of human reason. However, since its conception, education theories in Islamic civilization proposed a binary existence of a human being; the spiritual and the

³ Merry S. Michael. 2006. 'Islamic Philosophy of Education and Western Islamic Schools', in Salili, F., and Hoosain Rumjahn (eds.) *Religion in Multicultural Education* (USA: IAP), pp. 42

⁴ Hanson, H. Y. (2001). *Lambs to the slaughter*. California: Ihya Production. In (Hussain 2010)

⁵ Hussain, A. 2010. 'Islamic Education in the West: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implications', in Engebretson, K., M. de Souza, G. Durka, and L. Gearon (eds.) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. Part One*. (London NewYork: Springer)p. 236.

corporeal (Hanson, 2001).⁶ This necessitated that the theories in Muslim education gave significance to human intellect as well as divine revelation and it is through the interpretation of the divine revelation that Muslim scholars have framed the theoretical objectives of education in Muslim societies.⁷

Three Arabic terms designate the Islamic meaning of education. They are; ‘*tarbyah*’, from the root word *raba* which interprets as “to increase and grow” This term is derived from the Quranic verse (17:24), “And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy and say: my Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did nurture me when I was little”. Thus, with reference to this verse, the term means to care and nurture the child. The second term for education is *ta’lim*, derived from the root word *alama* which means ‘to know.’ (Nghah, 1996).⁸ The word *ta’lim* is procured from the Quranic verse (96:4-5); “He who taught you the use of the pen, taught man which he knew not”. This term particularly signifies that the objective of Islamic education is to impart knowledge. The Quran is not the only prime source of Islamic education. The words (*hadith*) and actions (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet too are considered significant in understanding the importance of education. (Nasr 1987).⁹ Sayings in the *hadith* literature mention prophetic verses like; “My Lord educated me and, and so made my education most excellent (Al-Attas, 1979).¹⁰ The word for education here is ‘*ta’dib*’ which means, disciplining of the mind, body, and soul”. The term *ta’dib* expresses the three faculty of human existence that Islam and Islamic education upholds; the mind, body, and soul.¹¹

The Philosophy of Islamic Education:

The Islamic theology derives its monolithic shape from the concept of ‘*tawhid*’ which translates as unity or oneness and it is among the most essential part of the Islamic theology. Islam does not differentiate between the sacred and the profane, thus ‘*tawhid*’ or unity is accepted to permeate all aspects of physical and spiritual life (Merry, 2006).¹² Therefore, in Islamic theology, worship is equivalent to seeking knowledge as it brings the seeker closer to the Lord. Thus, throughout history, Islamic educators have tried to define and understand how Islamic education should be and how it could be imparted such that it brings the learner closer to the creator.¹³

Another method of understanding the philosophy of Islamic education by many Muslim educators is through the heart. According to al- Gazali, a Muslim theologian, (d. 1111) the heart is considered as the seat of the soul and can recognize the ultimate Reality; God (Sharifi 1979).¹⁴ Thus, Islamic education is geared towards shaping an individual to knowing God. While the philosophy of Islamic education strives to achieve inner perfection (meta-physical

⁶ Hanson, H. Y. (2001). *Lambs to the slaughter*. California: Ihya Production. In (Hussain 2010)

⁷ Ibid, p. 237.

⁸ Nghah, Z. (1996). *The practice of the prophet Muhammad in Tarbyah: Its significance for the formation of the first Muslim community*. M-Phil: University of Birmingham. In.(Hussain 2010p. 236.)

⁹ Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. London: KPI. In. (Hussain 2010) p. 237.

¹⁰ Al-Attas, S.M. N. (1979). *The concept of education in Islam: A framework for an Islamic philosophy of education*. Jeddah: Hodder & Stoughton. In. (Hussain 2010)p. 237.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 237

¹² Merry, M.S. (2006). Islamic philosophy of education and Western Islamic schools: Points of tension. In. (Hussain 2010)

¹³ Ibid, p. 238.

¹⁴ Sharifi, H. (1979). *The Islamic as opposed to the modern philosophy of education: Aims and objectives of Islamic education*. Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton. In. (Hussain 2010 p. 238.) p. 238.

level), it also ascribes significance to worldly knowledge by attaching its importance to deeper meta-knowledge. It is accepted by Muslim educators that divine revelation guides man in his spiritual path, while the intellect interacts with the universe physically through observation, experimentation, meditation, and application.¹⁵

Scatolini an Islamic scholar differentiates between Islamic religious education imparted in schools and religious education taught in Mosques or Quran schools (Madrasas). According to him, both institutions exist for different purposes. Mosques and its connecting madrasas are meant for devotional purposes, but the schools belong and function according to the education system of the country. Islamic religious education in schools is not made to prepare future Imams and missionaries, rather the school is responsible for the holistic development of the student and thus engages a students' cognitive, experiential and affective dimension in its education system. Thus, the role of Islamic religious education in schools should, "enable each pupil to discover the individual whom God intended him or her to become" (Selcuk, 2013).¹⁶ Education should nurture student's "minds and hearts in God's wisdom; so they can grow in what Islamic education system calls the *musalama* (i.e. in peaceful relationship with God, with oneself, with others, and the creation." Selcuk further explains that Islamic religious education as a part of the general education system should attempt to support learners in the construction of their own identities which affirms respect to oneself as free human beings, and of others as fellow human beings. (Selcuk, 2013).¹⁷ This is also well explained by Roebben's quote, " Young people do not need 'more' identity, they need 'better' identity, one that is fitting into their narration and the larger context of a culture of recognition, of persons recognizing each other in their otherness." (Roebben)¹⁸. Scatolini further suggests that Islamic religious education should motivate all students and especially Muslim students to embark on seeking "knowledge and wisdom with an emphasis on realization of values." ¹⁹

Scatolini further outlines schematic outlook of the components of education;

Search:

According to him, 'search' is an important element not only from the faith perspective but also from the disposition of 21st-century education. Muslims ascribe anthropomorphic attributes like the 'unfathomable one' and 'the wholly-Other' to Allah. He states that Islamic education must strive to go beyond our current understanding of the concepts. "We must respect God's otherness from our linguistic and thought categories." He explains that the Islamic education programs should support students in the realization that until we accept Allah as truly different from our human conceptions, of our practices of Islam and even our interpretations of the verses of Quran, we might be in a risk of practicing idol worship, an idol which is a projection of our emotions like anger, fear, frustration, etc. God is not like any other human leader and does not behave in any way comparable to them. For example, God cannot be self-preoccupied,

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 238.

¹⁶ Selcuk, M. (2013). Academic expertise, public knowledge, and the identity of Islamic Religious Education. *Religious Education*, 108 (3), 255-258. DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2013.783313. In. (Scatolini 2017 p. 57.)

¹⁷ Ibid, pg 57.

¹⁸ Roebben, B. (forthcoming). *Theology made in dignity. On the precarious role of theology in religious education*. Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 44. Leuven: Peeters. In (Scatolini 2017)

¹⁹ Scatolini, S.S. 2017. '*Recalibrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Muslim -Minority Communities*', in Weitzen R, D., and T.I. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)p. 56-57.

despotic, etc like some of the human leaders.²⁰ This kind of education will restrict us from being rigid on interpretations and allow students to explore new facets of God and his creation's attributes.

Knowledge:

Knowledge about the important beliefs and practices form the key element of Islamic religious education. Knowledge of these should be given in a true-life perspective by showing its development across time and space. A large part of the Muslim community lacks historical consciousness and lives by an anachronistic view of the faith. It is imperative for them to know that the Quran as scripture can be considered as timeless, however, the historical traditions and practices are not.²¹

Wisdom:

Muslim students with a beginner's knowledge should be encouraged to seek wisdom. Knowledge acquired is not always existentially appropriated. It does not always lead to the enhancement of the individual's lived experience. However, wisdom does. Wisdom embodies the social and practical outlooks and epitomizes collective experience. When one focusses on wisdom, it would enable the individual to provide an antidote to all the malady like fundamentalism, chauvinism, ritualism, and cultural bigotry. A Muslim student may not agree with the religious worldview and traditions of other faiths, but the wisdom of any faith can still be valuable to imbibe. This kind of mindset will help build solidarity in multicultural societies.²²

Values:

Traditional norms and rituals are practiced so that adherents may discover the value in them. Young Muslims can be motivated to realize that values are not unique to Muslims alone, they can be taught to share and learn values other faiths teach, which can be crystallized in ways acceptable to both Muslim and non- Muslim communities.²³

In brief, Islamic religious education should not only teach Islamic religious education, but it must be atelier, a never-ending workshop on facilitating thought processes or how one can think in an Islamic way through constantly searching, analyzing, learning and reflecting in the companionship and partnership with others who are non-Muslims.²⁴

Educators need to outline strategies that educate individuals to accept others having a different belief system and to be able to follow their own conception of the good.²⁵ Religious education should be "learning in the presence of the other" which includes the learning of, about, from and in the religion, but in addition to that it should include the acknowledgment of the

²⁰ Ibid, p. 58.

²¹ Ibid, p. 58.

²² Ibid, p. 58.

²³ Ibid, p.58.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 58-59.

²⁵ Barnes, L.P. 2010. 'Enlightenment's Wake: Religion and Education at the Close of the Modern Age', in Engebretson, K., M. de Souza, G. Durka, and L. Gearon (eds.) *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. (Part 1)* (Dordrecht: Springer)p. 25-40

“irreducible presence of the other and their right to be different from us.” (Roebben)²⁶. He further outlines the distinct elements:

Learning about religion	Learning from religion	Learning through religion
Representation	Presentation	Presence
Understanding the representation of the other	Respecting the presentation of the other.	Re-defining and re-dignifying my own presence in the light of the other
Information	Communication	Appropriation
The teacher provides knowledge and overview as an expert	The teacher manages the communication in the classroom as a moderator	The teacher confronts the students authentically with lived religion as a witness.

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As can be observed from the table, When religion is learned in the presence of the other, the students do not only receive information but with the presence of the ‘other’ individual, the students learn to communicate his thoughts and it allows the other an opportunity to also discuss his interpretations, perspectives, and world views. The process of meaning-making is open and mutually takes place in light of the other’s interpretations.

Thus, the learning that would come through recognizing the others' presence and acknowledging their religious rights will eliminate coercion and violence. However, to embrace such a faith pedagogy with sincerity, many parts of the Quran and traditions of the faith will need to be revisited and re-appropriated. These are the verses of the Quran which are predominantly interpreted with an us-versus-them attitude and verses which can be interpreted in sync with religious arguments to legitimize physical warfare and killing of the other. Consequently, Islamic religious education must also support Muslim students to renegotiate the appropriations of their various Islamic traditions.²⁸ Appropriations require critical openness on part of the believers and religious leaders who allow, guide, and facilitate changes in the community. The essay will further discuss the concept of critical openness and Islamic education.

Critical Openness and Interfaith Education:

We exist in a world distinguished by religious and cultural differentiation and in the present times, we serve as a witness to the rise of religion as a dynamic influence in the democratic secular societies of the West. Different contexts existing in historical and cultural spaces bring

²⁶ Roebben, B. (forthcoming). *Theology made in dignity. On the precarious role of theology in religious education*. Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 44. Leuven: Peeters. In. (Scatolini 2017). p. 59-60.

²⁷ Scatolini, S.S. 2017. 'Recalibrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Muslim -Minority Communities', in Weitzen R, D., and T.I. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)p. 59-60.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 60.

forth diverse narratives and varied meanings forming distinct value systems which in contemporary times are living next to each other. Dialogue and cultural exchange have played a significant role in human history, however only when we dive deep within our identities, we would understand that, that which differentiates us as unique, also surfaces the self-understanding of the 'other'. Globalization and technological innovations not only support creative encounters and cross-pollination of ideas in this diversity but also allows the historical prejudices and semi-conscious and deep-rooted fears of the 'other' to be recollected. Without having the tools and understanding to engage with diversity, it may lead some to withdraw into their comfort zones projecting their insecurities and fear into an 'imagined other'.²⁹

A significant challenge that the world is experiencing today is, how can we make sense of the differences and the plurality of religions and cultures characterizing our lives. The West, particularly the secular world is apprehensive of religion considering it as an incoherent revolutionary force sustaining orthodoxy, fundamentalism and conflict, intolerant to diversity, and an impediment to peace and harmony. (Dawkins, 2006)³⁰ In this light, it is significant to explore how our different faith traditions comprehend and appreciate difference and its multiplicity of cultures.³¹

After the disastrous events like 9/11, Muslims are yet striving to integrate their religion with the larger democratic values of secular societies. To support this, we need to construct inclusive social and political frameworks where the existence of the 'other' is not only permitted but embraced and accommodated in the shared social space. This needs the engagements of new communities in establishing contextual articulations of their identities and the accommodation of the wider society in accepting, acknowledging, and encouraging these encounters to emerge and contribute to the inclusive sense of society. Additionally, with an active recognition of rights and responsibilities, immediate attention is required to call for a new sense of social ethics which will help revive the feelings of trust among the varied religious communities of the larger society.³²

Faith tradition by incorporating fundamental moral values such as promoting social justice and upholding human dignity, can in a large way commit to the evolution and development of a mutual sense of social ethics, which plays a dominant role in relating to each other in a meaningful way and stimulating a joint sense of belonging. But this is contingent upon displaying awareness and conciliating with the history of mistrust, strife and warfare which reignites and threatens our faith-related memories. We cannot be pretentious or naïve in our comprehension of the devastating consequences of our deep-rooted imperial religious doctrines which play a role in shaping our shared identities. More significantly, we should be ready to *rethink* and be willing to contextualize our faith tradition by the present times. The action of rethinking is an essential part of being competent to 'revitalize' (i.e. contextualize) our uniqueness, our identities so that we can recognize and openly engage with each other. We

²⁹ Sahin, A. 2017. 'Religious Literacy, Interfaith Learning and Civic Education in Pluralistic Societies', in Wielzen Duncan, and A. Avest Ter (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)P. 45.

³⁰ Dawkins. R. (2006). *The God delusion*. London: Bantam Press. In (Sahin 2017)p. 45.

³¹ Sahin, A. 2017. 'Religious Literacy, Interfaith Learning and Civic Education in Pluralistic Societies', in Wielzen Duncan, and A. Avest Ter (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)p.46.

³² Ibid, p. 48.

particularly need to display our ability for ‘critical openness’ so that we can learn from one another by being reflective of our cultural heritage and identities. For facilitation of social coherence and a sense of unity and harmony, ‘critical openness’ is the most significant competence which needs subsistence in a multicultural social community. If we are not able to contextualize our perspectives, we expose ourselves to the challenge of reducing and incorporating the ‘other’ to narratives of self-understanding. It is important to stress that faith, beyond all things, symbolizes human call and capability for self-relativity and transcendence: i.e. awareness of our limited selves motivates us to strive to surpass ourselves and be open towards the environment surrounding us and the divine reality which is beyond our comprehension.³³

Finally, a reflective and critical culture will enable civic competence to be nurtured in young Muslims, faith leaders, and Islamic societies. A reflective and critical attitude is also required to develop ‘critical openness’ which would promote interfaith and intercultural learning in Muslim societies and the larger global society. In contemporary multicultural societies, critical openness is the key to engage diverse societies in meaningful dialogue and constructive ways of relating to each other. Through dialogue and critical and open thinking are largely accepted as traits of modern society, it is essential to know that faith traditions have also advocated human openness towards the ultimate reality. In fact, by sustaining appropriateness for transcendence, one requires to restrict one’s selfish instincts in his consciousness and reach out and approach one another with an open attitude. This critical openness needs to be reclaimed by religious and cultural Muslim institutions. It also necessitates the larger community to create spaces that will enable a critical attitude in a caring environment. In pragmatic terms, this means that Muslim communities need to facilitate and be given support to develop educational competence like professional training for academic educators, developing resources for academic purposes, remodeling the structure and academic teaching and learning in community-based religious educational institutions like the *madrassahs* and *darululooms*; also known as Islamic seminaries.³⁴

An important question that Muslim educators need to ask themselves in the present times is, how can we enable our young Muslims to draw on their faith legacy as an academic resource to overcome challenges posed by religious and cultural diversity? This transformational model is a program to overcome challenges of religious rigidity by enabling critical thought and reflective pedagogies. It positively influences young Muslim students to reflect, enquire, and develop ethical responsibility. It encourages them to articulate their faith, self-understandings, and peacefully channel their critiques and dissatisfactions. It facilitates Muslim leaders, faith academicians, academic institutions, and policymakers to supervise young Muslims’ religiosity without detaching and disconnecting them. This intervention approach is based on the belief that *tarbiyah* or education in faith, is a process of ‘compassionate transformation’ which can continue for a lifetime. Its ultimate objective is facilitating human flourishing. This transformative pedagogy under the Islamic educational process can enable values of ‘critical openness’ which facilitates learning from one another (*taaruf*) ‘active citizenship’ and ‘civic engagement’. The objective is to support them to incorporate the divergent forms of their

³³ Ibid, p. 48

³⁴ Ibid, p. 50-51.

experiences into a meaningful construction of respecting each other and developing together as a community.³⁵

A critical, reflective, and open attitude is facilitated through educational and religious institutions. Confessional religious schools adhering to the religious education of Muslim students are usually established and run by different traditions of Muslim communities. These traditions may range from an extremist to a liberal attitude towards the teaching of religion and teaching and engaging with other religious traditions. The attitude of the school determines the kind and extent of interreligious education imparted to its pupils, and its relationship with the other religious communities and schools in its vicinity. Through examples from the Dutch education system in the Netherlands, the essay appropriates Paul Knitter's Four-point model to describe the different types of Islamic schools and the possibilities/ impossibilities of their interreligious encounters.

Interfaith Education and Character of Interfaith Encounters

Meij quotes Paul F. Knitter's four-point model to explain Islamic education and the character of interfaith encounters. He expounds four theological viewpoints that can be applied to explain religious attitude or perspective. They are exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and acceptance. The model described by Knitter stems from its understanding from the different religious outlooks of Christianity, however, as these perspectives are universal and thus can be appropriated to apply to monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam as well. In Islamic education, the theological outlook of an Islamic school and its outlook towards the appreciation of another religion impacts the wherewithal of interreligious networks between varied schools. In the Netherlands, it is possible to differentiate and categorize different kinds of Dutch Islamic schools. Liberal Islamic schools are very few as compared to the ones with an orthodox perspective. Also, the intensity of orthodoxy ranges from the spectrum of moderate to strict Islamic Salafism. The character of the Islamic school determines the character of the encounter. The doctrinal vision of the Islamic school on the differing institution is significant in determining the type of encounter that could occur. Also, it is of significance to understand the theological appreciation accorded by the Islamic school to a public or Christian school. Meaningful and friendly encounters bring about mutual respect and acceptance initiating deeper fraternization and religious flourishing of both participants' identity.³⁶

Exclusivism:

Knitter described exclusivism as the first religious perspective. Known as the Replacement model, it displays an exclusive attribute in his book *Theologies of religions* (Knitter, 2009).³⁷ He states that exclusivity refers to the understanding that one religion perceives an exclusive character in itself which allows it to regard itself superior to all other religions. Usually, this perspective can be found in more orthodox variants of religions and Islamic schools subscribing to it. This perspective proves a hurdle in interreligious encounters as the characteristic of equality is absent in its encounters. Schools where superiority prevents interreligious encounters are termed as 'religiously closed school'. However, according to Van Der Meij, this

³⁵ Ibid, p. 51-52.

³⁶ Meij Van Der, W. Leendert. 2017. 'Interfaith Education and Dutch Islamic Schools', in Wielzen, D., and I.T. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers) p. 123, 128, 132.

³⁷ Knitter, P. (2009). *Theologies of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. In. (Meij Van Der, W. Leendert 2017). p. 128).

should not stop interreligious encounters. Various measures can be practiced enhancing network with at least religions of ‘people of the book’; Judaism and Christianity. While teaching religion, active citizenship can be taught where the philosophy of other religions can also be considered. Pedagogically, discussions can be initiated on doctrinal differences, shared values, beliefs, and practices. Thus, despite the superiority approach adopted by the school, this method will allow students to inculcate religious consciousness. Thus, if the schools would adopt this approach, they could be termed as ‘religiously conscious schools’, instead of ‘religiously closed schools.’ For example, every year, the religious education teacher at the Islamic school Rotterdam discusses with her students the significance of religious festivals and celebrations and what it means to the other religions, i.e. why are Christmas and Easter celebrated by the Christians and the Islamic perspective of these festivals. This brings about dialogue, comprehension, and respect for both faith traditions.³⁸

Inclusivism:

Inclusivism is the perspective distinguished by Knitter as the ‘Fulfilment model’. This approach gravitates to a more inclusive and less superior outlook, though the inclination can be seen towards superiority. According to this model, one religion perceives itself to be completing or complementing other religions. Thus, this approach does not abolish or negate the presence of other religions but perceives itself as one completing the other religions’ flaws or imperfections. It is also observed as a characteristic of Islamic tradition as Islam perceives itself as completing the other two monotheistic faiths; Christianity and Judaism. However, this attitude also suggests that the other two faiths are appreciated by Islam. Schools subscribing to this model are often observed to display an open attitude. Religious encounters and interreligious dialogue assume significance as a genuine interest is portrayed by the institutions in understanding other religions as it makes an effort for a heart to heart encounter. Genuine meaning-making and efforts to understanding one’s faith through discovering evidence in the other may be observed. Schools subscribing to this model may be referred to as ‘religiously open schools’. These schools enrich their own identity by meeting other religious traditions. An example of this type of school can be witnessed in primary Dutch Islamic school *Ababil* in the province of Schiedam. The school coordinator of ‘Active Citizenship and Culture’ arranged to meet other religions in a practical exercise. Collaborating with another public school, she with fellow teachers organized a market. The intended activity was to support the refugees who were to be housed at Schiedam. The coordinator also arranges an annual visit to a Christian Church in close vicinity of the school. After the educational trip, students are encouraged to illustrate through drawings, the similarities, and differences between the church and the mosque. When students are exposed to these types of cultural and religious experiences, they do not hold insecurities or fear of the other, rather growing up learning about the other makes them comfortable to initiate friendship towards understanding their shared religious narrative.³⁹

Pluralism:

The third model is based on the principle of equality. This is Knitter’s Mutuality model which is based on the principle that though religions differ in doctrines and rituals, the final goal of

³⁸ Meij Van Der, W. Leendert. 2017. ‘*Interfaith Education and Dutch Islamic Schools*’, in Wielzen, D., and I.T. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)p. 128-129.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 129-130.

all religions is the same. The model suggests that God of all religions is the same who has revealed himself in different contexts; historical times, places, and cultures. This has led to different interpretations and understandings and thus different religions. Knitter (1985) states that an attitude of equality between religions is achieved when an interreligious encounter occurs through this model. Schools adopting this model are termed as 'religiously open schools.' An example of a pedagogy adopted in these schools includes a series of *Samenleesverhalen* 'Read together stories', published by a Dutch publisher Kwintessens to stimulate interreligious and multicultural dialogue among young learners of both the religions. He has published picture books on prophets common to all three religious traditions. It can be read in two ways, on one side the story is illustrated from the Judeo-Christian tradition whilst, the same can be read from the Muslim traditional narration on the other side of the book. This pedagogy plays an exceptional role in fostering interreligious dialogue and leads to shared understanding and acceptance.⁴⁰

Acceptance:

This is the final perspective on religious views offered by Knitter. This view allows for an exclusivist attitude like the Fulfilment and the Replacement model, but also gives space for the pluralist view. Differences in religions are accepted but there can exist a specific religious preference. It allows the schools to preserve their character and identity at the same time it accepts religious differences. Religions are conserved and prevented from acquiring a superior attitude with the understanding that every religion has developed in its own time in history and thus religions are an interpretation of actions of God. This is considered to be an optimal condition for an interreligious encounter. Encounters occurring through the acceptance model enriches the identities of all engaging participants.⁴¹

In conclusion, Paul Knitters Four-point model suggests that interreligious encounters can be carried out with other religious schools in all the four doctrinal characters adopted by the school. Pedagogically, it can include joint sports activities, projects based on art, nature, and culture or religious themes common to all religions like prayer, charity, fasting, or pilgrimage. Opportunities also exist in cross faith visits to places of worship like the church, mosque, or synagogue. Recognition can be evidenced in traditions shared by religions which may lead to enrichments of the participants' identity. Schools engaging in interreligious encounters can overcome the challenges of divisiveness in societies and combat religious intolerance which is the essence of terrorism. When there is success experienced in meeting the other with religious recognition of each other's faith and acceptance of each other's religious differences, it becomes possible to genuinely meet and sincerely love each other.⁴²

An Example of Interfaith Education:

One exemplar of such a genuine encounter can be explored through the case study of SIMON schools. SIMON schools are an association of Islamic schools in the Netherlands where religion and education are interwoven in their pedagogical strategies. The essay shall now discuss the various few pedagogical strategies adopted SIMON school, Muslim confessional

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 130-131.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 131.

⁴² Ibid, p. 132-133.

faith schools towards interfaith education as part of their objective of imparting impactful Islamic religious education.

The pedagogical strategies of SIMON schools are stimulated by psychological theories of child development, namely; Piaget's cognitive development theory and Ericson's theory of psychosocial stages of development. The pedagogical strategies of the school reflect the concept of *Bildung* and promote the development of the student's nature. The development of nature or *fitrah* is an Islamic concept of education wherein the student's growth is facilitated according to the nature accorded to him by God. He/she is encouraged to becoming who he/she is supposed to be by God's intentions. Educating the student according to the philosophy of *Bildung* and *fitrah* means educating the, (1) 'head' which means cognition development. (2) Educating the 'heart' which is the affective domain and (3) educating the 'hands' which translates as training the behavior of the individual. The pedagogical aims of the schools are concretized using value education and character education. (Sanderse, 2012).⁴³ The school believes in the development of students' insight as opposed to only the transfer of knowledge, thus the student is taught to critically analyze information and what he or she learned as core values of Islam. Emotional commitment is also developed as part of encouraging the implementation of Islamic values in practical lives.⁴⁴

The pedagogical strategies of SIMON schools are based on 'seven core values' also known as 'seven pearls of living together' which apply to the school environment as well as the Dutch plural society. These are 1. *Tawheed* which is awareness of the unity of God, 2. Tolerance for diversity, 3. Justice, 4. Autonomy, 5. The human quality to make efforts to do the right thing, 6. Responsibility and transparency, and finally 7. Community.⁴⁵

Citizenship Education:

The multicultural context of Dutch society is considered an important context for a student's education. The SIMON schools include education on Islamic values as characterized by the seven pearls with foundational values of Dutch society as part of citizenship education. As the pedagogical method of SIMON schools is based on the psychological development of the child through the theories of Piaget and Ericson, the methodology is combined to coin the term as 'developmental citizenship.' It is taught through the following developmental stages of the child; For the young, aged (4-5) years, the goal is social learning which includes, imitating, copying, and training for discipline. The development is then elevated to raising the student's awareness level and internalization. When the child is 11-12 years of age, they are motivated to reflect on values. The classroom is treated as a mini-society where students internalize values and display an open attitude, a spirit of participation and contribution to Dutch multicultural society as a Muslim, due to which this approach ultimately develops critical- democratic citizenship in the child. Due to the close connection in Dutch society and the education system, it also leads to autonomy as well as social commitment. Citizenship education also involves interaction and engagement with students of neighboring schools, participation in district school activities and taking an active initiative in a 'Brede School' which comprises of

⁴³ Sanderse, W. (2012). *Character education. A neo-Aristotelian approach to the philosophy, psychology and education of virtue*. Nijmegen: Radboud University. PhD. In (Taspinar and Avest 2017), p. 140.

⁴⁴ Taspinar, I., and T.I. Avest. 2017. 'Diversity is the Key to Practice', in Wielzen, D., and T.I. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers) p. 140.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 141.

‘inclusive school activities’ instituted in cooperation with other Christian and public schools (cf. Ter Avest & Meidema, 2011).⁴⁶ Communication skills allow students to clearly articulate their opinion and thoughts. Thus, students’ *dialogicality* is also consciously developed to improve their communication skills to overcome conflicts arising from diversity. *Dialogicality* is considered as one of the most essential values and skills of critical- democratic citizenship. This critical skill is taught in a play-way method during activities involving interactions and exchanges of pupils of other schools and religious identities.⁴⁷

SIMON schools constantly strive to advance communication and consultation on universal values with other religious traditions to maintain interreligious dialogue and exchanges. These initiatives are not only motivated to defend Islamic truth but are an effort to understand the holy scriptures through its various religious narratives. The staff gathered as teachers also play a distinctive role in realizing the dream of SIMON school. Though the teachers belong to different religious backgrounds, they are mindful of the universal values that are the core foundations of all the traditions and accept the responsibility for the religious development of the students, regardless of the religious tradition of the students and their parents. The teacher’s manner and style of teaching are also given significance. Manner includes the intellectual qualities and morality which includes values like honesty, courage, care, and justice, while style refers to the teacher’s personality. For example, the teacher’s approach towards teaching is observed to determine his/her personality. For example; a humorous approach to resolving conflicts or a punitive approach. The school considers manner or the method to be a transferable skill, however ‘style’ which influences the personality of the teacher to be untransferable which impacts the professional character of the teachers. The schools exemplify its practices through a narrative that asserts the school’s commitment to merging cognitive knowledge and emotive engagement; A Roman Catholic school teacher every morning recites the verses of the Quran, ‘*El Fatiha*’ in Arabic with her students. She recites the scripture in Arabic as she is familiar with the meaning of the verse. She believes that the meaning of the verse she recites is identical to the prayer she learned as a child and stresses the potential power of the scripture and other prayers for personal religious development. SIMON school underlines this as a utopian method of overcoming the difference. Thus, regardless of the religion, scripture, and language, a dream of all people coming together as one community is realized through the educational practices of SIMON schools.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Education is close to worship in Islam. As theoretical and philosophical concepts of education are derived from the religious scripture, many scholars thus attempt to determine the most appropriate method to education and its contents. According to Islamic academicians, the objective of Islamic religious education is to facilitate humans to become who they are or what they are meant to be according to the intentions of the creator. Thus, this entails educating not only the cognitive domain which includes mind and hand (knowledge and skill development) but also includes educating the emotive (affective domain) as well as the heart. The heart is

⁴⁶ Ter Avest, I., & Miedema, S. (2011). *The plural of togetherness is future*. Paper presented at the conference Practical Theology, VU University, Amsterdam. In (Taspinar and Avest 2017 p. 140.)p. 141-142.

⁴⁷ Taspinar, I., and T.I. Avest. 2017. ‘*Diversity is the Key to Practice*’, in Wielzen, D., and T.I. Avest (eds.) *Interfaith Education for All; Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers)p. 142.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 143-144.

considered the seat of the soul which recognizes God; thus, education is not only to live life in this world but is also meant to prepare for the hereafter. In this large mandate, Islamic religious education at times faces the challenge of delineating itself from other religious traditions to impart the 'right' kind of education. After 9/11, Muslims have been defined as 'other' in many cultures and traditions. It is thus an urgent need to educate the young Muslims in a way that facilitates their own identity to be recognized and understood in the context they belong to, and also educate them to recognize others in their 'otherness' and in their right to be different. Scatolini provides the components of education comprising of elements like 'Search, 'knowledge', 'wisdom' and 'values' to train the young Muslims to be educated in an inclusive environment in the presence of the other. It allows Islamic education to overcome an anachronistic view of religion and educate students in historical consciousness which will overcome fundamentalism, chauvinism and assign a new positive way of approaching and appropriating sacred literature according to the present times. It will allow young Muslim students to a process of meaning-making and appropriation of scripture and traditions in a modern context which they can make sense of and implement in their contemporary context to lead a positive fulfilling life.

Globalization and technological development have facilitated encounters with the 'other' who come from different geographical contexts and historical narratives and diverse value systems. These encounters are a part of our everyday lives involving someone across the world or a neighbor across the street. One of the challenges facing the current world is that we live with deeply embedded memories of fear, prejudices, and a semi-conscious understanding of the 'other'. If left unattended, it may dive deeper to make up an imagined 'other' which becomes intolerant to diversity and leads to conflict. To overcome this challenge, we need to train our young students in critical openness which will help them make sense of the differences and the multiplicity of religions and cultures which are an integral part of their lives. Historical evidence asserts that when faith communities have adopted an inclusive attitude, they have been able to be civilizing forces of the world. Critical openness requires an inclusive social and political basis where the 'other' is not only allowed but acknowledged and accommodated in an inclusive sense of society. It is also by upholding the practice of social justice and fundamental moral values in the society that paves the path for a shared sense of social justice and relating to each other in a meaningful way. More important is to be able to rethink and recontextualize our faith according to the present context thus overcoming rigidity and extremism which arises from rigid faith interpretation. Thus, the attribute of critical openness encourages us to openly engage with each other, to respect and learn from one another and grow together as a community.

Critical openness is an attribute developed through a conscious effort by academic institutions catering to the religious development of young Muslim students. The doctrinal vision of the Islamic school determines the character of its encounter with other differing institutions. Knitter's four-point model explains the four theological perspectives exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and acceptance. The model determines the type of encounter that can occur based on the theological perspective of the Islamic school with the differing institutions. It also determines the doctrinal appreciation rendered by the Islamic school to other institutions it is engaged in the encounter. It suggests that there is a potential for encouraging interfaith education in all the four theological positions adopted by an institution. It may range from teaching active citizenship as part of religious education, educational trips to religious

institutions of other religions, or engaging in a shared exercise of understanding prophetic stories from scriptures of different faiths through ‘Read together books.’

Finally, the essay gives a practical example of interfaith education through the pedagogical strategies implemented at SIMON school in the Netherlands. SIMON schools’ pedagogical strategies are based on the educational theories of Piaget and Ericson. The school has developed its teaching philosophy from the seven core values based on Islamic values and principles and combined it with citizenship education coined as ‘developmental citizenship’ which imparts education according to the student's cognitive and psychological level. A combined form of education imparting Islamic and civic education in combination with communication skills and inclusive inter-school activities enhances students' critical, autonomous thinking and social commitment towards Dutch society. The staff employed at SIMON school are mindful of the core universal values as the essence of all religious faiths and committed towards the religious development of the pupil. Finally, as a point of departure, a possibility of combining Islamic religious education with interfaith education can be affirmed which when adopted by Islamic religious educational institutions can contribute to a sense of balance, peace, brotherhood, and pluralism in society.

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