

STUDIES IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE



PEETERS

29 / 2019 / 1

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Studies in Interreligious Dialogue is an academic peer-reviewed journal. It welcomes scholarly works on encounters between believers of different religions and worldviews from a practice-theory point of view. It invites discussion of practical issues concerning interreligious relations, such as interreligious learning, worship, marriage, welfare. The journal publishes articles by adherents of various religious traditions and academic disciplines. In particular, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* aims to enhance practical religious studies as a new field in the academic study of religion.

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© Studies in Interreligious Dialogue – Peeters Publishers and Booksellers, Bondgenotenlaan 153, B-3000 Louvain, Belgium; ISSN 0926-2326

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL, 60606.
E-mail: atla@atla.com; Website: <http://www.atla.com>

SPECIAL ISSUE

INCLUSIVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:
DUTCH AND INDONESIAN EXPERIENCES

Zainal ABIDIN BAGIR, Gerdien BERTRAM-TROOST & Gregory VANDERBILT,
guest editors

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia and the Netherlands both are experiencing tensions related to the fact of religious diversity in their countries. Although both have a long tradition of accommodating pluralism (albeit in different ways), both are today also confronted with increasingly vocal forms of intolerance. Responses to that challenge have taken many forms, from advocacy to legal-structural changes to attempts to raise awareness of pluralism among the people. The central topic in this edition, inclusive religious education, is one such response, which has developed well enough in both countries in the past few years.

This special issue of *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* started from conversations among Indonesian and Dutch academics, religious scholars and education practitioners since 2016. The conversations were initiated by The Netherlands-Indonesia Consortium of Muslim-Christian Relations (NICMCR) which has acknowledged the importance of this topic and the need to address it properly in order to sustain viable ways of coexistence in our pluralist societies.

In 2016, NICMCR held the first conference on inclusive religious education in Ambon. The event was not only a mere academic conference; while there were presentations based on research in the respective countries, there was also room for sharing of experiences among education practitioners—both in relation to formal education, informal and also non-formal types of education. The conference was also a cultural event as it became a forum of forging the *pela* (“brotherhood”) relations between the two co-organizers, the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Ambon (IAIN) and the Christian Indonesian University of Maluku (UKIM). (“Educational *pela*”, a new, post-conflict trend, is discussed in one of the articles in this journal).

The idea to publish this special edition came after the conference. An expert meeting on November 2017, co-sponsored by the Vrije Universiteit, was held in Amsterdam to discuss the authors’ abstracts. In May 2018 another meeting was held in Yogyakarta, co-sponsored by the Duta Wacana Christian University and the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

We received 15 abstracts in 2017. Seven of them, four on the Netherlands and three on Indonesia, are included in this journal.

The variety of the articles gives a broad view about what inclusive religious education could mean. While the Dutch and Indonesian contexts are clearly very different, it is interesting to note similar challenges as well as solutions to undertake inclusive religious education. An inclusive religious education may be attempted in schools with a particular religious affiliation (see Hasselaar and Bertram-Troost in the case of the Netherlands, and Razi in the case of Indonesia, both in this edition) as well as public, non-religious, schools. The case brought up by Razi on an Islamic boarding school in West Java shows how such an education may be attempted through creative, “non-religious” means, such as through ecological-agricultural education. Myrthe de Vlieger shows how students of indigenous religion may be denied state-mandated religious education because of a restricted understanding of what “religion” is. This prompts us to a deeper reflection: the need for a broader, more inclusive understanding of “religion”.

Inclusive religious education may also be part of informal education (such as the European Project of Interreligious Learning, discussed by Van de Wetering and Horreh in this edition). It may be undertaken not only as a course or set of courses, but in terms of extra-curricular activities which help students from a particular religious background meet students from other schools with different religious background (see Iwamony, Gasperz and Souisa on schools in post-conflict Molucca). It may also be done playfully using, for example, the instrument of board games (see Akdag, Alasag, Gürlesin and Ter Avest in this edition, which parallels the work of Irfan Amalee of the PeaceGen in Indonesia). It may start as an academic enterprise but developed to fulfill academic needs as well as the public need for a better information about religion (Boender on Leiden Islam Academy).

The editors’ hope is that these articles could stimulate deeper reflection of the conceptual foundations of inclusive religious education (to the extent of revisiting the definition of religion to make it more inclusive), and different means and strategies that may be attempted. Contexts surely would also determine how to best run an inclusive religious education. In this way, the different Dutch and Indonesian contexts hopefully would help this reflection as well as help identify where we may learn from each other.

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