



NETHERLANDS-INDONESIA CONSORTIUM
FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

Meaningful Encounters?

Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Education Teachers in Our Time

30 September and 1 October 2024

organized by the Netherlands-Indonesian Consortium for Muslim-Christian Relations
(NICMCR), Pokja Interreligious Education.

S U M M A R Y

Moderators:

Dr. Marianne Vorthoren, 30 September 2024

Dr. Fredrik Doeka, 1 October 2024

30 September 2024

Ms. June Beckx: in her welcoming words, she referred to the words Costly Tolerance, the original name of this Pokja Inclusive Religious Education. Religious tolerance achieved through painful struggle and which is not a tolerance of indifference. Therefore, the focus of our upcoming project is to strengthen the cognitive and practical knowledge of religious teachers, with the exchange of teachers in the Netherlands and Indonesia to learn from and with each other as part of the project.

Prof. Ruard Ganzevoort presented his view on the challenges of our time: climate change, technological developments/AI, transnational geopolitical conflicts and the process of decolonization. He points to the responsibility of men and women for the world and all living creatures, for education and for transnational conflicts and for decolonization. Ganzevoort summarized this in: *rethinking humankind, rethinking human uniqueness, rethinking universality and rethinking relational individuality*. He concluded his presentation with mentioning two challenges: for the Netherlands the hindrances for the ongoing emancipation of religious minorities. For Indonesia, the need for the support of moderate Islam. Summarized for all in the question “How to be(come) humble citizens of the world?”

This session was followed by a short video on the **Perspective Approach (PA)**.

Commenting on PA, **Dr Marcel Elsenaar** argued that Religious Education (RE)/Citizenship Education should not start with teaching about religious and secular worldviews, but with pupils' questions in the classroom; questions about their journey, their pilgrimage in life. From the perspective approach, different pupils use different maps for their pilgrimage. In an RE lesson, teachers should expand pupils' horizons by pointing out and articulating different maps.

Robert van der Sijde (MEd) presented his reflections on the concretisation of this PA in the classroom. As a RE teacher, he began by telling his students about rituals. When he noticed that the students did not really understand the meaning, he created a situation in his classroom where the students could experience a ritual. By darkening the classroom and lighting a candle, he created an inviting atmosphere for each pupil to light a candle for someone who was suffering and to say who they were doing it for.

Another example was about how one could turn a ‘fight’ (by mail) with a parent - in case of a differing opinion - into a promise and thus engage in dialogue.

The school’s responsibility is, according to Van der Sijde, to invite all persons of the school-community to participate in dialogue, to have a real inclusive climate.

A short video impression was shown on **Hospitable Education**.

Following the video came the reaction of **Mr Yunus Meijerink** (read by Dr Duncan Wielzen). Meijerink, who is the headmaster of Al Ummah Islamic Primary School in the eastern part of the Netherlands, explained that the school's aim - as one of the first Islamic primary schools many years ago - was to create a counter-narrative. Why? Because of the isolated position of Islam at that time and the largely wait-and-see attitude of the Dutch towards 'those Muslims'. Today, both teachers and pupils are diverse in terms of ethnicity and religiosity. Islamic education also has a much stronger position in Dutch society. However, the new right-wing government has given new impetus to their fear in society. The fear of having opinions and/or attitudes imposed on them, especially regarding (sexual) relations between men and women. According to Meijerink, the PA helps to structure three aspects of religious education in Islamic schools: 1. Teaching the subject matter, 2. Becoming part of the Islamic tradition and 3. Becoming a participating citizen as a Muslim in Dutch society. Meijerink is in favour of PA because it starts with the pupil and allows him or her to develop a personal perspective - which is in line with the Islamic concept of Al-Fithrah. Meijerink articulated that being a minority in the Netherlands is an advantage, because it challenges reflection on what seems self-evident. The PA, he stated, offers tools for dialogue.

Marianne Vorthoren closed the first day of the conference with a quote from a famous philosopher: “Tell me and I will forget, teach me and I will probably (hopefully?) remember, show me and engage me and it will become rooted in my life.”

1 October 2024

Dr. Fredrik Doeka gave the floor to dr. Duncan Wielzen, to present the summary of the previous day.

Prof. Dr. Tabita Kartika Christiani of UKDW Yogyakarta presented her quantitative research published in a book on religious education in the Global South. Her research question was: What is the impact of what kind of religious education on students' attitudes towards diversity?

Tabita started with an overview of the developments of religious education in Indonesia: from a compulsory subject for all pupils in all schools (public and private/religious schools) in

1946, to the obligation of each and every school to teach pupils in their own religion. This led to tensions, including in Christian schools, which were forced to teach Islam to some of their pupils who were brought up in the Islamic tradition at home. But it would be haram for Muslim parents to send their children to a Christian school. Tolerance was under pressure. A combination of religious and moral education was introduced in the national curriculum (2013).

The analysis of Tabita's research showed that ethical education with a focus on personal formation is preferred by the students. Ethical education shares similarities with identity formation, promoted by the 2013 law.

According to Tabita, interfaith in an open space is needed, to enrich the identity formation by encountering 'the other'.

Conference participants stress the need for tools to create a safe space for teachers. According to Tabita, the Interfidee programme is a good start for that. Although it is a legal requirement to teach both Islam and Christianity, almost all schools have only one religious tradition in religious education. Dialogue is relegated to leisure time!

Dr Pepi Siti Paturohmah, from the Postgraduate UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, spoke about the challenges of using technology in madrassas. She examined how teachers use video, PowerPoint and learning websites, and what hinders or facilitates the use of technology in their RE classes. She found that only a minority of teachers used technology. Those who did found greater engagement of the pupils. There was a better understanding of the material and it brought variety to classroom workshops.

A stable internet connection, adequate teacher training and, last but not least, the support of the school/principal are crucial.

Pepi is interested in the pillarized system in the Netherlands and the role of the government, for example in prescribing teaching materials

Dr. Atik Tapipin is in favor of religious education for all students, including dialogue from different perspectives. In his view the Perspective Approach (PA, presented at the first day of the conference) addresses the challenges, and offers ample opportunities for a well structured and respectful dialogue.

Mr. Alper Alasag presented in a bird's view an impression of what 'the freedom of education' means:

- a. the government/Department of Education gives the criteria and the primary objectives of education.
- b. Schools are free in developing/choosing their own books and teaching methods,
- c. This gives a great influence/power to publishers and organisations offering online teaching material.
- d. All schools, meeting the governmental criteria, are financed by the government.

Alasag also gave a short impression of the ZELVI module/FLOW module, in which teaching in the own religion is combined with intercultural/interreligious/citizenship education. This module is subject of research of a combined group of researchers from Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Alasag further informed about 'Colourful Religions' and the online museum about all religious traditions in the city of Rotterdam. Visits to mosques, churches and other places of worship are stimulated. A movie is 'under construction' on the history of Islam.

Dr Duncan Wielzen spoke about how a Roman Catholic school (where he is a pastor) deals with non-Catholic students: all students are expected to participate respectfully in all rituals. According to Wielzen, technology (a film) can facilitate/provoke dialogue.

In Indonesia, innovative education takes place in a formal framework, which is provided by the government in the presented curriculum (top-down, formal power structure). In the Netherlands, it is the teachers who bring informal innovations to religious education (bottom-up, informal power structure). Doeka concluded that in both countries we need to be aware of the important role of teachers, and of their need for support. They are crucial for the quality of religious education.

In **conclusion**, it can be said that RE is experienced very differently in the Netherlands and Indonesia. That makes RE complicated but also very exciting. Nowadays, the role of religion is very important again. **Dr. Jan Eijken** concluded that in the Netherlands we are dealing with super divided communities, different backgrounds, many nationalities, many worldviews, especially in schools in the big cities, that by result, gives more opportunities for dialogue. In Indonesia, however, it seems that interfaith dialogue is still a struggle that needs to be realized, especially between Muslims and Christians. Only as teacher, who experienced the situation yourself, can you know how difficult it is to create a safe space in the classroom when discussing religion. Therefore, we all should be aware of the crucial role of the teachers and work on the capacity of the teachers among others, by teachers' exchange between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Learning from and with each other is the key to innovation!

May the four points of attention mentioned by Ganzevoort guide us in elaborating on the different aspects that were mentioned these two days – the supporting role of principals, the critical role of parents, the creative role of technology, the structuring role of the government and professional organizations.

Ina ter Avest,
November 11, 2024.