Coexistence in Divided Societies:

Pedagogies of Difference - (secularized) Christian and Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

Societies with open, pluralistic, liberal democracies aim to promote civilization in which people who follow diverse ideas, religious and cultural paths, can live together and share the same public domain. In those societies religious education might become an auxiliary discipline next to citizenship education by on the one hand articulating differences and at the same time in a dialogical approach serving as a bridge across. Well aware of the intersectionality of a range of aspects, like political ideology, social stratification, and ethnicity, resulting in polarization and radicalization, in this contribution we first present a conceptual analysis of 'education'. After that we focus on processes of polarization and radicalization. We compare Islamic and Christian education and their pedagogical strategies, as well as the way they contribute to prevent radicalization and support learning processes of peacefully living together in societies characterized by plurality. Based on theoretical and empirical research (literature review, and interviews with youngsters respectively) we conclude our contribution with an outline for a dialogical model for the development of mutual understanding in a societies at risk for radicalization.

Key words: (Inter) Religious Education, (secular) Christian Pedagogy, Islamic Pedagogy, plural society

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Introduction

Western Europe is fallen under the spell of the issue of Islam on a so far Christian continent. This is not a new topic, already in the ninety's of the last century, when Christian and (neutral) state schools were confronted with Muslim pupils, the question was raised about the religious identity development of these children. In the Netherlands different pedagogical approaches were developed, varying in the range from exclusion to reluctantly inclusion of Muslim children (Miedema, 2000). Whereas at the beginning 'guest workers' as well as 'host country' were of the opinion that Muslim children would only temporarily be part of the school population, at the end of the day – becoming aware of their permanent stay - exclusion could not be at stake anymore. The permanent presence of Muslim children in the classroom urged for new pedagogical strategies, not at least for the subject of religious education. In this contribution we explore in what way Christian and Islamic pedagogy contribute to religious education in a plural context – a context in which learning to live together is a main goal in education.

We start our contribution in the first paragraph with a conceptual analysis of the concept of education. Then, in the second paragraph, we describe separately Christian and Islamic education and their pedagogical strategies regarding religious identity development and the encounter with the other. With a comparison of both we conclude the second chapter. In the third chapter we develop our ideas on dialogical faith education, based on preliminary results of a pilot study among 21 Muslim youngsters. Their commitment to Islam and the Dutch society urges for a pedagogical strategy, concretised in an outline of a playful way to strengthen religious identity development and open up for 'the other'.

1. The concept of education

Since education is a core concept in pedagogy, in this first part we distinguish a broad and a restricted understanding of this concept. This distinction is based on the conceptual analysis of Steutel & De Ruyter (2019). Let's start with some statements in which the concept 'education' is used, like: "An authoritarian way of education is better than no education", "Education in the Netherlands is pillarized", "He is a product of his orthodox Christian education" and "Both parents are responsible for the education of their children". In these statements 'education' is used as an umbrella concept, covering all activities from early childhood to adolescence aiming at the development of the child to become a responsible adult (Steutel & De Ruyter 2019, p. 56). In some cases these activities are categorized according to their content, like when we speak about an Islamic or a Christian education. In other cases the focus is on the style, for example a friendly, a traditional, an authoritative or an over-concerned style of education. Sometimes these two, the content and the style, are taken together. That is the case when the education is characterized as narrow minded or rigorous. In everyday language Steutel & De Ruyter observe one more way of the use of 'education', as is noticed in the following two examples: "In such a situation there is a need for education" and "Take away his mobile phone – that is what education is". Used in this way education's focus is on an individual action in a particular situation. Education in this kind of

situations refers to "command and forbid, advise and summon, warn and reprimand, stimulate and discourage" (ibid., p. 57). According to Steutel & De Ruyter 'education' can be understood in a broad and in a restricted way. For this broad understanding in English the concept of 'upbringing' seems to be adequate; for the restricted understanding of 'education' the concept of 'discipline' probably comes closest to what is meant.

In the process of *disciplining* it is an adult who is educating and the child who is educated. The aim of the process of disciplining can refer to adequate behavior, like eating with fork and knife, or brushing your teeth before going to bed. The aim can also be to tell the child *not* to do certain things, like eating while smacking one's lips and burking. Conscious behavior of the adult is not an intervention just for that moment, but aims at sustainable behavior of the child, sustainable and whished for by the child her/him self. The aim of 'disciplining' may be (more) knowledge, (improved) competencies and (strengthening of) willpower.

The noun *upbringing* refers to the content of all activities facilitating the development from childhood to adulthood. We speak of a 'humanistic education' and of a 'Christian education' or 'Islamic education'. We only speak of a 'good education'/'good upbringing in case the child was well prepared for the status of adulthood, according to the criteria of the society s/he lives in (ibid., p. 67). The preparation for adulthood is not restricted to concrete behavior, but includes also the cultivation of certain attitudes and convictions, that are at the base of a person's will to behave in an expected way. In their conceptual analysis of education, Steutel & De Ruyter pay attention to life orientation, including moral norms, the acceptance thereof and the willpower to live accordingly (ibid., p. 69). This guidance may be open, supportive, closed, and sometimes compelling in particular when educators expect their child to adhere to the same (religious) life orientation as the one the educators adhere to (ibid., p. 70).

Disciplining and upbringing can only take place when the child understands the educator. In other words, the educator must adapt to the level of understanding of the child. The educator should be aware of her/his own value orientation and ideals that are at the base of the education and that make education a normative process.

1a. Education of the fanatic

John Hull, the British pedagogue of religion, dedicated one of his many articles to the religious education of radical youngsters – named by him as fanatics. Characteristic for fanaticism is that it is othering the other (Hull, 2007, p. 49). Radicals are non-hermeneutical in their approach of religious texts (ibid., p. 50). Following Hull the fanatic believer takes religious scriptures in a literal sense. These scriptures and other founding narratives are understood word-for-word and are practiced accordingly. For a radical person *development* of a religious tradition or of a person is a non-issue. Tradition, given in Holy Scriptures to be understood literally, must be transmitted, accepted and obeyed (ibid., p. 52). Characteristic is the rigidity in mind; a radical person cannot live with any doubt.

What is required to challenge a fanatic way of dealing with religious texts, according to Hull (2007), is a kind of religious education from a historical-contextual perspective, which increases the students' competency for dialogue, stimulating the construction of experiential knowledge of each one's personal religious or secular worldview and life orientation.

Hull describes four characteristics of a kind of religious education that might prevent youngsters from radicalizing. First of all, Hull states, we should not forget that the radical(ising) youngster is a faithful person, not an irreligious person. S/he highly values the religious tradition, so in religious education we should "show respect for the conservation of the traditions of faith" (ibid., p. 52). Religious Education as a subject (RE) should acknowledge and develop the tradition the children are raised in at home. RE should "emphasize the diversity within each major tradition and should focus upon the creative personalities of the tradition, selecting those who are admired but who were inspired by different aspects of the faith" (ibid., p. 53). Hull is well aware of the "considerable demands upon the personality, the belief structure and the spirituality of the teacher" (ibid., p. 54). We will come back to this in the concluding paragraph.

The focus of RE in Hull's view should be on dialogicality and questioning. In the next paragraph we elaborate on the concept of dialogue, and explore the way dialogue is included in Christian and Islamic pedagogy.

2. Pedagogy and Dialogue

A dialogue according to Hubert Hermans & Agnieska Hermans-Konopka

> "(...) refers not only to productive exchanges between the voices of individuals but also between collective voices of the groups, communities, and cultures to which the individual person belongs. (...) It implies a learning process that confirms, innovates, or further develops existing positions on the basis of the preceding exchange. As a learning process it has the capacity to move the self to higher levels of awareness and integration. (...) Dialogue is one of the most precious instruments of the human mind and is valuable enough to be stimulated and developed, particularly in situations where learning is hampered by monological communication" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 6).

With this definition of the concept of dialogue in mind, below the dialogical quality of Christian and Islamic pedagogy is explored. We take our starting point in one of the 'principle pedagogues', Jan Waterink for Christian pedagogy, and the qur'anic pedagogy for the Islamic thoughts on religious education.

2a. Dialogue and Christian Pedagogy

In this section we describe developments in Christian pedagogy. First (in 2a.1) we describe the developments in the protestant tradition of religious education. In the next paragraph (2a.2) the focus is on the developments in the roman catholic tradition of religious education. In both cases

we present the ideas exemplary theologians – Jan Waterink for the protestant tradition and Frans de Hovre for the roman catholic tradition.

2a.1 Christian pedagogy in the protestant tradition

One of the influential theologians who dedicated him self to the field of formal and informal Christian education is Jan Waterink. His pedagogy is rooted in the idea that "God Himself is the great educator, who sets the goals, who gives the means, who clarifies the spirituality of the child and who appoints the persons to concretise his will in education." Waterink was far ahead of his time when he states that every single part of creation is interrelated with other parts since they all belong to the one and only meaningful creation. Waterink illustrates this by a well-known statement: "In nature it is not stamina and not pistils that grow and develop, not petals and sepals: God created flowers (Praamsma, 2004, 102).

For Waterink the child is a creature of God, but also sinful and by consequence should be guided to respond to God's expectations. The aim of education is for the person to become "self-confident and autonomous, God and his word obeying personality, competent and ready to use all the qualities received from God, to His honour en the wellbeing of all creatures, in the relationships s/he is positioned in by God" (Praamsma, 2004, p. 112; Rietveld-van Wingerden et al. 2002, 2013). Doubt in Waterink's view is a positive aspect of religious education, appreciated by him as an invitation to the educators to clarify a new – and probably in a way better adjusted to the child's understanding - their own positionality. Forcing a child to be obedient in the sense of "you *must* belief" or "you *must* put your faith on God" threatens the child's religious development and is a hindrance for the child to become a faithful adult (Praamsma, 2004, p. 109).

Waterink was very influential in particular because of his practical directions for education. His publication *'Aan moeders hand tot Jezus'* (Mother's guidance to Jesus) was his most well known work in the field of Christian pedagogy.

In the 70's the Calvin oriented normative pedagogy is enriched with new pedagogical insights as leading perspectives for the teaching-learning situations in the classroom. General accepted is that religious education is impossible without taking into account the stage of development of the child (Kuindersma & Miedema, 2004, p. 156).

2a.2 Christian pedagogy in the roman catholic tradition

In 1919 – one hundred years ago – the Flemish roman catholic philosopher Frans de Hovre founded the educational journal *Vlaamsch Opvoedkundig Tijdschrift* (Flemish Education Journal) (van Crombrugge, 2004, p. 118). De Hovre was op the opinion that education as a science should explore education practices to arrive at insights into the heart of the matter. De Hovre states that in earlier ages people developed insights that transcend the historical context, insights that are of great value for and important to be integrated in elaborations of later generations. By consequence the very

first ideas about education – for example by the Greek philosophers – were elaborated upon in later ages. For De Hovre the Greek philosophers, the Bible and the church fathers are the foundation for a deductive line of thought on education. It is De Hovre's opinion that all developed educational ideas can be brought together under the umbrella of the comprehensive perspective of a roman catholic pedagogy (ibid., p. 120). In principle roman catholic pedagogy is open minded, favouring a dialogical encounter of theoretical frameworks and strategies.

Roman catholic pedagogy, according to De Hovre, should be rooted in tradition. Education according to De Hovre comprises all activities that enable the child to participate in a given organic order, created by God. Plato's saying *'traditio lampadis'* (tradition is the torch of life) is a beloved saying in roman catholic pedagogy in the first half of the 20th century (ibid., 126).

Also in the second half of the 20th century, in the roman catholic educational elaborations religious education remained of great importance. A deductive approach was characteristic. The belief system of the roman catholic church was presented as a given to be accepted by the child. In the sixties, and related to Vaticanum II, this changed and the focus from then on was on the personal experiences of children. In times of ongoing processes of secularization, for religious education it was thought necessary to adapt its pedagogical strategies to the latest insights from psychology. A subjective personal religious development of the child was at the centre of attention (Hermans 2003, 2007).

2a.3 Christian pedagogy - merging perspectives

Pluralisation of (sub-) cultures resulted in the 80's in a change from mono-religious (=roman catholic) religious education in multi-religious education. This approach is labelled as teaching and learning *about* religions (ibid., p. 138). Despite the difference in both denominations of the Christian tradition, concepts like 'the hermeneutics of experience' and 'interpretive approach' were influential in the discussion on religious education in a plural and secularizing world. The 'hermeneutic-communicative model' for religious education is put forward as an innovative approach. Characteristic for the teacher religious education (teacher RE) in the hermeneutic-communicative model is s/he being a *Getuige*, a *Specialist* and a *Moderator* (GSM; a witness, an expert and a moderator).

At the turn of the century instead of informing about religions the search for meaning becomes centre stage in religious education. The concept of 'religious education' changes in 'world view education'. Recently the concept of 'life orientation' was introduced to replace 'religion' and 'worldview' (Van der Zande 2018). The search for meaning in a plural classroom opens space for diversity and conflict. The pupil is invited to position her/himself amidst the plurality of (religious and secular) life orientations. The concept of teaching and learning *from* religion(s) is used to describe this new situation, both in roman catholic and in protestant reflections on religious education. Recently the concepts of teaching and learning *in the presence of the other* and inclusive education are added to respond to a plural classroom (Roebben, 2012).

Starting point these days in pedagogical strategies is the position of the pupil-in-context – that's where the process of religious education begins. The teacher facilitates the search for new questions that may arise from 'age old answers' as they are given in the tradition "believing in a truth that always is greater than the human answers under construction" (Pollefeyt 2004, p. 145). The pupil nowadays is expected to actively participate in the process of education; they are *partners in dialogue*. Pupils' search and their interpretations of given 'age old answers' from different religious and secular worldview traditions make the curriculum open ended. It is in the process of education that its aim is realised.

In his public lectures Siebren (Miedema, 2003, 2012), concluded that in each and every curriculum at all schools 'life orientation' should be part of the curriculum, with a focus on the development of the competence of dialogicality between adherents of different religious and secular worldviews. Elaborating on his ideas Miedema's plea recently is for 'religious citizenship education' (2013; see also 'normative citizenship education, Ter Avest 2017).

2b. Islamic Pedagogy and dialogue

The present section discusses the concepts of education in Islam supporting learning processes of peacefully living together in societies characterized by plurality.

2b.1 Islamic education

In a description of Islamic religious education the role of the religious community cannot be underestimated. To start with teaching and learning of children took place in the mosque, starting at a very young age, to learn the qur'an by heart. As Ibn Khaldun stated: "The Qur'an became the basis of instruction, the foundation for all later habits and customs. The reason to start at an early age is that what is taught in childhood will be(come) deeply rooted in one's life" (Meijer 2006, p. 73 ff). Thirty years ago Sajidah Abuds Sattar pointed to the importance of Islamic religious education for muslims in diaspora (Sattar 1990). *Tarbiyah (pedagogy), taʾlīm/tadrīs* (teaching), *taʾdīb* (moral disciplining), *talqīn* (instructing), *tazkiyah* (purifying), *iṣlāḥ* (reform) and *sulūk* (psycho-spiritual formation) are the concepts to describe different aspects of the educational process. Among them, the Arabic word *tarbiyah* is the most commonly used concept to express the educational process in Muslim culture. The word also is related to *Ar-Rab*, the creator (Al-Iṣfahānī, 2003; Ibn Manẓūr, 1989). *Tarbiyah* also described as the physical, psychological, spiritual and moral development of an individual according to the will of Allah (Budak, p. 4) and the one's upbringing from birth to all his life physically and spiritually (Sahin, 2013, p. 182).

The Islamic perception of *tarbiyah* reflects strong contextual elements: it responds to the specific needs of their interlocutors such as their social and economic status, gender, ages, environments, intellectual capacities (6:92) and puts forward a gradual and dialogical principle to solve their individual and social problems (2:219). The Qur'an recognizes the change inherent in human life; when necessary and replaces them with a better or more fitting one (2:106; 16:101). The Quran

emphasizes that the aspects of human nature are the developmental processes active in both the physical and spiritual.

The human self (*nafs*) holds the capacity for choosing good and bad even though created in the state of purity (*fiṭrah*). These motivations form the subjectivity and enables an individual for continual growth as well as regression (91:7-11; 95:4-6). Consequently, the human capacity for faith (*īmān*), like human cognitive capacity (*'ilm*), is developmental and dialogical, as it is a part of the human condition (58:11). Self (*nafs*) goes through stages of spiritual and cognitive growth, thus actualising its potentials (*aḥsan al-taqwim*) by experiencing maturity into selfhood and faith (*yaqin, itmi'nān*). However, the *nafs* may experience a regression into the lower levels of being (*asfal al-sāfilīn*) as it has selfish tendencies (12:53). Therefore, care for the self includes nurturing trust and confidence in one's self so that healthy self-criticism facilities maturity and growth into faithfulness (Gürpinar & Kenar, 2016).

The works of Al-Ghazālī' provide a fertile ground for a variety of motivations, cognitive styles and contents of Islamic beliefs and practices, and also form an important example to explain intra-dimensional aspects of Islam as well as premises for the application of a critical and dialogical Islamic pedagogy (Gürlesin, 2018). Characteristic of Al-Ghazālī's work is that he links the details of the Sharīʿa to the insights of the spirituality. One of the prominent feature of Al-Ghazali's thinking is the model of the dialogicality between exoteric (*zāhir)* and esoteric (*bātin)* interpretations of the Qur'ān and of reality in general. These are different cognitive styles that lead to different religious orientations. They are likened to general knowledge of an object vs detailed knowledge of an object, in so far as the latter is gained through 'verification and experience' (*tahqīq wa'l-dhawq*). General knowledge can be likened to acquiring the husk of a grain (*qishr*) while detailed knowledge can be likened to acquiring the germ (*lubāb*), terms found frequently in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (Whittingham, 2007, p. 59).

AI-Ghazali also highlighted few important operations with regards to *tarbiyah*: premise of ability of changing character through self-discipline (*riyāda*), illustration of the ways of moral acquisition, methods of knowing the details of refining morality (*taḥdhīb*), and premises of purification (*mujāhada*) (Ghazālī, 2005, p. 929).

Other conceptions related to *tarbiya* is the classification of *īmān, islām, iḥsān*. *Īmān* and islām literally mean that one submits one's self to the Creator to achieve states of peace, security and harmony in life. *Īmān* is faith as a human act and is subject to the psychosocial cognitive process and Islam is the manifestations of these beliefs in the individual and the societal context. The Arabic term *iḥsān* means spirituality in English (Renard, 2005, p. 226). The root of this term is *ḥ-s-n* which means beauty, to be or to become beautiful (Badawi & Haleem, 2008; Lane, 1863, vol. 2, p. 570). The Prophet is advised to pray to God with the words: "My Lord increase my knowledge (and understanding)" (20:114). Similarly, Muslims are encouraged to grow into their faith at the spiritual level, a new type of experiential spirituality and awareness of God (*taqwā and iḥsān*) (8:2; 45:4; 58:11).

According to Muslim scholars, the process of *tarbiya* needs to combine both individual and social aspects since the individual aspect develops the process of maturity integrally with the relations in the community (Alkouatli, 2018; Halstead, 2004; Waghid, 2014). Until now, spiritual and internal aspect of *tarbiyah* is tried to be introduced. From now on, the study will try to emphasis on social and external aspect of this concept.

In the Quran, differences in the communities are perceived as an opportunity to engage with the dialogic process of 'knowing one another and learning from each other' (*taʾāruf*) (30:19-26; 49:13) in the hope of developing a holistic perspective (*tawḥid*) on life. One of the references in the Quran states that;

> "O humankind! Surely We have created you from a single (pair of) male and female, and made you into tribes and families so that you may know one another…"

The prophet brought new understanding of social relations and showed examples of how to interact with others in his time. In that sense, the core of his prophetic mission is interpreted by many scholars as to be educational "role model"[5] with his behaviour and attitudes in the society. Whenever the prophet witnessed harsh treatment of people, he reminded his Companions that "he was sent as a mercy to humanity" (21:107).

The aim of Islamic education according to Van der Meijl (2012, 2017) cannot be defined in isolation, but has to be contextualized. According to him "Muslim pupils can only become well prepared for their future role in society when modern scientific insights are – in some way or another –brought in accordance with Islamic life orientation" (Van der Meijl 2012, p. 93). A point of severe debates is the theory of evolution, by some Muslim scholars interpreted as conflicting with the religious narrative of creation. As a result of Van der Meijl's research on 'science and religion' in Islamic primary schools, he notices that inclusion of the theory of evolution in RE classes is whished for. However, there is a lack of expertise on this subject among the RE teachers, and to date no adequate teaching material is available. His recommendation therefore is to include the theory of evolution in classes Biology and reflect upon this from an Islamic point of view in RE classes. Preconditional is schooling of RE teachers and development of teaching material (ibid., p. 98-101).

Studies on religiosity demonstrated that considerable amount of young Muslims wanted to learn Islam through mere questioning and exploration. They expressed that the instruction-memorisation- and teach centred Islamic education did not answer their various motivations of religiosity such as verification (*taḥqīq*) of beliefs, which includes doubt (*irtiyāb*) and questioning (*tafakkur*) (Gürlesin, 2019).

This section has discussed internal and external aspects of Islam and its importance for the application of *tarbiyah*. A critical and dialogic Islamic pedagogy that can respond adequately to

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[5] Ibn Saʿd (d.845) (1968, v8, p. 235) narrates that when Āishah, the Prophet's beloved wife, was asked to describe his personality and manners, she replied: "He was the living Qur'an". Thus, the religious authority of the Prophet has strong educational and pedagogic dimensions.

the Islamic educational needs of Muslim young people can provide esoteric religious knowledge which embedded in the exoteric religious knowledge and help youngsters the reflective and dynamic processes of faith development.

2b.2 Islamic pedagogy 'on the move'

Many studies on the religiosity of Muslim young people in both minority and majority Muslim social contexts reveals that young Muslims are considerably diverse in their sense of religious identity (Cesari, 2009, 2015). The popular religiosity characterized by stability of belief, uncritical type of knowledge, undifferentiated mode of religious experience was predominant, and appeared to be informed by complex psycho-social and cultural dynamics (Gürlesin, 2018). The empirical data presented in the many studies illustrate that a considerable number of young people express the need for a dialogical space to explore religious issues for themselves and the desire to acquire adequate knowledge and understanding of their faith. Findings of field researches strongly indicate that existing Islamic cultural and educational institutions need to nurture the spiritual side of religiosity and exploratory mode of Islamic subjectivity so that young people have the chance to construct their sense of religious belonging (Akdağ, Gürlesin, Ter Avest, & Alasağ, 2018).

In the work of Mualla Selcuk (2017) the core aspects of an Islamic pedagogy are further explored. Islamic Pedagogy is characterized by the exploration of the context of the Holy Scriptures, the different interpretations of texts and their meaning for Muslims today. For this also a dialogical attitude is emphasized. An attitude that is inherent in Islam, as Wilna Meyer (2006) convincingly described. The starting point in Islamic pedagogy is a natural familiarity with the Qur'anic texts, and in addition to that an understanding of the difference between what is written and what the meaning thereof is – in those days and in our days (ibid., p. 137).

In order to engage with the above issues, Muslim educationalists suggested to create a dialogical space and to rethink traditional Islamic education, particularly its teacher, text and pedagogic discourse.

2c. Christian and Islamic pedagogy in dialogue

From the descriptions given above we see that in both traditions education and pedagogical strategies take their starting point in their respective Holy Scriptures and the way they understand men's interrelated position in the whole of creation. Christian and Islamic pedagogues from thereon reason in a deductive way formulating their aims and strategies in education. In both tradition we might speak of a paradigmatic turn from a deductive way of reasoning to an inductive way of reasoning, taking actual daily experiences of pupils/students and their psychological stage of development as a starting point. From thereon pedagogues adjust their strategies to reach their aim. To what extent this meets the need of youngsters is a question we try to answer in the next paragraph.

3. Muslim youngsters' religious positionality

How do Muslim youngsters experience their position as a religious citizen in the Netherlands? To answer this question we developed a 'questionnaire' based on the dialogical self theory (DST) (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) and its self-confrontation method (SCM) (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). In this questionnaire youngsters are asked to score on a scale of 0 – 5 (zero – five) their feelings regarding verbal expressions. These expressions, so called 'valuations', are based on three rounds of interviews with Muslim youngsters age 12-29. "I as a Muslim in the Dutch society", "The duty of daily prayers", "I participating in Iftar supper with non-believers", and "New interpretations of the Qur'an" are a few of in total 20 'valuations'. Each of the 16 emotion related feelings has to be connected with each of the 20 'valuations'; with positive as well feelings, like 'joy' and 'commitment', and negative feelings like 'angryness' and 'guilty'.

A first preliminary impression is that this group of young people feels positively connected with the Dutch society. They are not worried, nor about their present position, nor about their future position as Muslims in the Netherlands. Praying is a source of self-awareness, a feeling of being a valuable person. Being obedient to Allah makes them feel connected with the larger Muslim community and causes feelings of inner calm.

Most of this group of 21 persons experiences strong feelings of belonging with Muslims and non-believers, for example during an Iftar supper. The guaranteed freedom of religion in the Netherlands is a source of joy. Being obedient to Allah makes them feel connected with the larger Muslim community and causes feelings of inner calm.

In this group being confronted with friends who do not fulfil their Muslim duties causes feelings of angriness and powerlessness. The same holds for some of these youngsters when they reflect on the imam and his way of responding to their questions. Conversations with friends who don't adhere to Islam causes feelings of sorrow. Being together with a muslim friend who does not pray 5 times a day, makes them feel guilty and powerless, although at the same time they have strong feelings of friendship and connectedness.

From this first impression of preliminiary results of the filling in of the developed SCM-based questionnaire by 21 students, we conclude that it might help youngsters to explore in more detail their negative feelings, like feelings of sorrow, angriness and powerlessness, and assist them in formulating their experiences in questions to be explored together with class mates in formal or informal education.

Taking as a starting point that youngsters like to explore their questions, since this is a characteristic of their age (Bakker & ter Avest, 2008; Marcia, 1980). we developed a game as a space for conversations about these and other existential questions. Below we give a short impression about that game – a playful pedagogical strategy to facilitate youngsters religious development, taking as a start their questions and its relationship with core values of Islam.

4. A dialogical intervention

Based on the interviews with youngsters and the preliminary results of the developed questionnaire, we present an outline for a playful dialogical model for the development of mutual understanding in a divided society.

On the game board of this game squares of virtue are for example: faith, reliability, generosity, knowledge, and asceticism. Squares of vice or evil are for example: disobedience, vanity, theft, lying, rage, greed, pride and lust. The board depicts 'ladders' pointing upwards and 'snakes' pointing downwards. The 'ladders' and the 'snakes' connect two specific squares with their respective virtues or vices. The virtues are understood as stimulating religious development, and pull a person upwards to her/his ultimate communion with the divine, while the vices drag a person down and force her/him to reflect and reconsider her/his behaviour. The words of the virtues and vices on the board are adapted to the contemporary language of young people. Generosity, for example, is reworded as 'returning a favour'; 'asceticism' is reworded as 'opting out.' The discussions taking place during the game result – under the guidance of the teacher – in an awareness among the students of their personal positioning in the field of religious and secular life orientations.

It is our contention that this game – integrating recently developed (secularized) Christian and Islamic pedagogical principles and strategies - responds to the requirements of stimulating an authentic and autonomous religious life orientation, that is "a practice of existential and identity constructing re-orientation" in a plural world that includes an active, dialogical exploration for understanding beyond the boundaries of difference" (Alma 2018, p. 96-97), aiming at a meaningful life nourished and imbued by social/cultural/religious imaginaries of ultimate truth and the good life (ibid., p. 64).

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