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## 14. IN RETROSPECT – CHILDREN’S VOICES ON INTERRELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*‘Slow Research’ on the Reception of InterReligious Education (IRE)*

### INTRODUCTION

Religious and secular traditions contain narratives about existential questions people since ages have tried to respond to, and the core values in their life orientation. In this chapter, we listen to the stories of former pupils to learn about the appropriation of the core values narrated in the Christian and Islamic tradition as they were presented in the first and only interreligious primary school in the Netherlands, the ‘Juliana van Stolbergschool.’ At this school, the educational staff together with experts (theologians, psychologist) developed a model for InterReligious Education (IRE). How do former pupils in retrospect reflect upon this teaching and learning about and from IRE? What lessons can be learned from their memories and how can these shape the future of interfaith education in the Netherlands?

We start with an exploration of children’s rights regarding religious education from the perspective of fundamental human rights. We then proceed with arguing that the right of the child to express its views and to have these respected stands on equal footing with the right to religious education. Inspired by insights from Children’s Theology, a relatively new concept within the field of religious education, we lay a solid foundation for a child-centred approach in an IRE pedagogy. Data from our ‘slow research’ give us a glimpse of former pupils’ views in retrospect on IRE as this was included in the curriculum of the Juliana van Stolbergschool. These data highlight the contribution of IRE to their current positionality in the Dutch plural society. In a concluding paragraph, we draw some preliminary conclusions from our ongoing research, which we expect to be valuable for future developments on IRE and InterFaith Education (IFE) in the Netherlands and beyond.

### CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

#### *Human Rights Perspectives*

Children’s right to education is a fundamental right embedded within the framework of internationally respected Human Rights. It is enshrined in the 1948 *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: “Everyone has the right to education” (Article 26:1). Concomitantly with this right is the right to *religious* education.

Enger (2010, 164) argues that “it is difficult to defend a position where this right to education should exclude the right to education in the field of *religion*.” This basic human right, however, is intrinsically linked to the child’s right to religious freedom (UN, 1989, 14:1).<sup>1</sup> The Declaration of Human Rights goes as far as to argue that parents’ rights can never be upheld at the expense of children’s rights. If parents, for whatever religious conviction choose to withhold their children from schooling, they risk being prosecuted by the state. Moreover, Article 14:2 from the 1989 *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, emphasizes not only the parents’ right but also their moral duty to enable the child to fully exercise this right to religious freedom. By implication one can argue that parents are obliged to have their child(ren) become acquainted with different religious or secular worldviews via, e.g., IRE.

Friedrich Schweitzer (2010) claims that this Convention is not very clear or explicit in support of children’s right to religion and to religious or spiritual education. He deems it less outspoken in this regard, except for the articles 14 and 27.<sup>2</sup> Hence, he seeks to establish such a right not only in legal terms but also on pedagogical grounds. He argues that children have innate religious or spiritual potentials and needs. Therefore, it is necessary for their growing up and making sense of the world to include this dimension in their education.

There are still other claims one can make when referring to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29:1. These claims are discussed below. Article 29:1, in its different subsections, stipulates that the education of the child should be directed to:

... the development of its personality ... to its fullest; development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms ... development of respect for ... his or her own cultural identity ... the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; and the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

This article covers a broad range of principles that promote a positive stance (respect) towards religious and cultural diversity. Against the background of ethnic pluralism, these principles foster a positive attitude of children that suggests a disposition and engagement toward ‘embracing diversity.’ It is our contention that religious education can help children to acquire competencies necessary for active participation in societies characterized by religious and cultural pluralism. However, the type of religious education we envisage therefore goes beyond initiating children into a religion, or a religious way of life. What we envisage rather is religious education as “a means of deepening young people’s understanding of [the meaning of] religion(s), whatever their background ...” (Jackson, 2014, p. 23). That again requires a model for inter-religious education. According to Pollefeyt (2007) scholars developed such a model in the 1990s both as a critique on and an alternative for the model of multi-religious education. Inter-

religious education (IRE) embraces diversity and prepares pupils for active engagements in religious plural contexts. This model “openly approaches the plurality of religions and worldviews as a learning opportunity. Religious education thus becomes a place of encounter and dialogue between different religious convictions” (Pollefeyt, 2007, p. XII). IRE facilitates encounter and dialogue between pupils from diverse religious and secular backgrounds. In the same vein, the German theologian and religious pedagogue H.-G. Ziebertz noted earlier that the interreligious model introduces children into the cognitive and value system of various religions. Hence, they become familiar with these religions which at the same time facilitates the development of their own personal religious identity (Ziebertz, 1993, p. 86). IRE strengthens the development of children’s personality, and teaches them to respect and tolerate values from different cultural and religious traditions other than their own. IRE enables children to fully exercise their civic right to religious freedom.

Far from being exhaustive,<sup>3</sup> this brief account on children’s right to religious education – as we read this in the Declaration of Human Rights – underpins its relevance for contemporary plural societies. Since the 1960s migration patterns have intensified globally, ensuing into increased religious and cultural diversity in European countries and thus in the Netherlands. How can teachers of religious education facilitate the learning process of young people’s respectful attitudes regarding ethnic, religious and cultural diversity? In our view, the voice of the child should be included in the exploration of religious education in diversity. In line with the Golden Rule “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” being heard and respected enables children to listen to others and respect them in a similar way.

*From Right to Respect: A Child-Centred Approach*

The child’s fundamental right to education is well anchored in the United Nations Conventions and Declarations. However, in earlier days, teachers interpreted this right as being mere recipients of the religious knowledge of their teachers’ (experiential) knowledge and life orientation. This concept coined as ‘banking education’ (Freire, 1970) denied children the right to express their own views. The teacher-student relation had a purely *narrative* character, with the former as the ‘narrating subject,’ and the latter as the patiently, listening object. Freire refers to the negative aspects of this pattern in education as “narration sickness” (1970, p. 70). It has at times also characterized RE in Christian denominational schools where the teacher told or read Bible stories to children who often were not allowed to question the content of these stories, let alone voice their views resulting from their reception of the stories told. The primary goal of this form of RE was the religious socialization of the child by means of transferring appropriate knowledge. Becoming a proper Christian was the aim of this type of RE.

Research carried out in England and reported by Iprgrave (2009) points to young children’s desire to learn about other religions so that they can maintain positive relations with people of those other religions later in life. As one child puts it: “I

can learn about all of them [religions] so I know that when I grow up I know about everyone and that their gods – who they are, and I know I won't be racist" (2009, p. 57). Ipgrave concludes that such an "information-based religious education ... has greatly increased young people's knowledge of and respect for the lives and beliefs of others" (2009, p. 68).

The REDCo research (2006-2009)<sup>4</sup> showed that in general, at least for the Netherlands, teachers in secondary schools no longer regard religious socialization as the primary goal for RE. Students find it important that in RE classes they learn *about* various religions in a descriptive, impartial manner. Moreover, based on their personal experiences with religion in school almost 75 percent of these students support the idea of becoming acquainted with various religions through RE. In their view, it is important to learn to understand other religions better, since that can help them to construct their own authentic positionality regarding these religions and learn to respect other people irrespective of their religious or secular backgrounds (Bertram-Troost & Ter Avest, 2008, 2011, p. 4).

Of particular interest is how teachers and students look at the latter's identity development from a RE perspective. Teachers find it important that religious education enhances students' consciousness of their own value orientation and worldview perspective and their developing (religious) identity. When REDCo researchers questioned students about this matter, however, the far majority (80 percent) indicated that religious education does not play a significant role for their identity formation (i.e., learning to know themselves better). Hence, these research findings (should) have implications for the objectives teachers ascribe to their RE lessons. Teachers and others involved with curriculum design cannot ignore the voices of students who are very outspoken on the issue of identity formation as part of the objective of religious education. They must consider this question seriously and respect the children's perspective while at the same time taking their pedagogic responsibility seriously. Schweitzer makes an important observation for that matter when he argues:

The question what children need inevitably becomes an important starting point, and the answer to this question can no longer be given by adults who presuppose that it is they who always know best about the true needs of children. Even if children, at least during their first years of life, cannot speak for themselves, we must be prepared to learn how to carefully observe, and to intensively listen to, what they may tell us in their special ways of communicating. We must be prepared that even young people might have something meaningful to contribute to their own religious development and education. (Schweitzer, 2010, p. 1078)

Thus, teaching RE also requires from teachers an attitude of respect for their pupils' voiced opinions and ideas. Enabling children 'to tell their own stories' creates learning opportunities within RE that are in the children's interest. Due to the limitations of this chapter we cannot develop this element of aligning curriculum design – in terms of its overall objective – with children's perspectives here further.

Above we have underlined the essence of including children's right to express their own opinions as inherent to their fundamental right to religious education and that adults must respect this right. In the following we will adopt a religious pedagogical approach to concretize the child's right to form and express his or her own (religious) worldview. Therefore, we turn to Children's Theology, or the perspective of 'Theologizing with Children' (TWC).

#### CHILDREN'S THEOLOGY FOR A CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH IN RE

##### *What is Children's Theology?*

Children's Theology and its related concept 'Theologizing with Children' (TWC) came up around the beginning of the 21st century as a new concept within the field of religious education. In this chapter, we employ the concepts of 'Children's Theology' and 'Theologizing with Children' interchangeably.<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning, Children's Theology has had advocates in Germany. Religious pedagogues and theologians are the primary scientists among its frontrunners. The central concern for practitioners and researchers in this domain is to maintain respect for children's articulation of theological questions<sup>6</sup> and to regard them as valuable and competent subjects (Dillen & de Kock, 2015; Zimmerman, 2015). Respecting these questions implies trying to find answers and providing a safe and powerful learning environment therefore. This is important because asking questions constitutes an integral part of growing up. And finding – preliminary – answers contributes to the child's development.

To define Children's Theology, Zimmerman (2015) names the following points:

- theology of revelation and answers
- lay theology
- existential and personal theology
- concrete, creative and contextual
- but also, temporary, critical and dialogical theology.

Based on these points we arrive at the following description: 'Children's Theology implies the art of theologizing with children, grounded in theory and practice, and which involves communication of children among themselves and with adults about (possibly) existential questions from children's concrete daily life experiences, and their intertwined relation with narratives, rituals, symbols or metaphors in Holy Scriptures. These questions result from children's personal experiences, views and contextual (social, cultural, religious) backgrounds. Their answers are based on creative insights, possibly facilitated by their teacher's pedagogical interventions. These responses are temporary since they are contingent on change because of growing up.' Igrave demonstrated the critical and dialogical nature of Children's Theology with her research among British schoolchildren living in a religious plural milieu. She points out how Christian and Hindu children negotiate and construct a new understanding of God when confronted with the challenge of contrasting positions on God's unity (Christianity) or plurality (Hinduism). In the end, the children come up with the idea of God in which both

divergent positions are reconciled, i.e., “a god of many colours” (Ipgrave, 2009, p. 65). This finding demonstrates children’s ability to improve their religious literacy regarding complex theological questions. Previous research among pupils from the Juliana van Stolbergschool also yielded the same conclusion regarding children’s potentials (Ter Avest, 2003, 2009).

### *Scope of Children’s Theology*

On a theoretical level, Children’s Theology constitutes a broad range of scientific research and reflection concerning children’s own thoughts and views on theological, religious and spiritual questions. Since the beginning of this century there is a growing corpus of systematic research into children’s way of responding to these questions. These are published in, among others, the thematic *Jahrbücher für Kindertheologie* (Bucher et al., 2002-2009) issued in eight annual bands; in the *Handbuch Theologisieren mit Kindern* (Büttner et al., 2014; see also the literature overview in Kuindersma, 2008; and contributions in Dillen & Pollefeyt, 2010).

Central to Children’s Theology is the process in which educators encourage children’s reflections on, and questions about God, human (relations) and the world, and how these are (inter)related. This process involves interaction and dialogue amongst children and between children and their teachers regarding these theological questions. The underlying thought is that children have a distinct way of coping with ultimate questions on life, death, the hereafter etc. Their questions are not less valuable or less intelligent than those of adults. Their views are valuable contributions for generating and constructing theology which does not differ substantially from ‘adult academic theology,’ but only in gradual terms.

Children’s Theology is not limited to Christian religious education – in families or in schools. It can also be developed in a religious plural context as Ipgrave pointed out. In such a context children’s conceptualization of God is “one of encounter with other faiths.” Her research findings further suggest that “this context of plurality has had a powerful influence on their [the children] understanding and acted as an impetus to their reflective and creative theology” (Ipgrave, 2009, p. 68).

This brief account on Children’s Theology highlights its main features:

- it puts children and their religious tradition at the centre of their learning process
- it perceives of children as valuable and competent subjects
- it respects and encourages children’s perceptions on theological questions
- it accepts these perceptions as authentic and valuable contributions toward generating and constructing theological knowledge through communication and dialogue.

The primary central interest in Children’s Theology is not on transmission; instead, children are regarded as equal partners in conversation. Teachers take pupil’s theological expressions seriously; likewise, pupil’s views on a topic or existential problem (Zimmerman, 2015). We conclude that Children’s Theology offers a solid theoretical framework to promote a child-centred approach in the academic field of the pedagogy of religion.

## CHILDREN'S VOICES ON INTERRELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This said, we can now proceed with our final part. In the following we present data that we have gathered from interviews with former pupils of the Juliana van Stolbergschool in Ede, a middle-large town in the mid-eastern Dutch province of Gelderland. The data reflect the pupils' voices. From their retrospective reflection on the IRE classes at this school we draw some preliminary conclusions and point to possible directions for the future of interfaith education. Below, first, we present a situation in the childhood of the former principal of the Juliana van Stolbergschool, to exemplify the pivotal role of a 'critical incident' in relation to this principal's internal motivation for the development of IRE.

### CHILDREN'S VOICES AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN INTERRELIGIOUS EDUCATION

#### *Childhood Experiences as Disruptive Moments: Keys to Transformative Action*

Generally, there seems to be consensus among psychologists, therapists and behaviour scientists on how childhood experiences impact and influence individuals' choices in later life, especially concerning the pursuit of (non)professional occupations (Breeuwsma, 1993; Marcia, 1980). The individual's motivation for these choices is often linked to experiences encountered during childhood. As 'disruptive moments' (Ter Avest, 2014a) these experiences bear their marks on one's professional identity development. They press one to search for new forms that enables appropriate and acceptable positioning (Ter Avest, 2014b, p. 9). The development of one's professional identity influences one's personal biography, but the same can also be said in reverse order. Thus, this influence is mutual.

In the case of Bart Ten Broek – the former principal of the Juliana van Stolbergschool – a disruptive moment occurred when as a child, he overheard a conversation between his parents and his schoolmaster, Mr. van der Kleij. The latter had visited Ten Broek's parents to plea on his behalf for further studies which could possibly lead to an academic career. But due to a lack of financial resources they could not afford to let Ten Broek pursue the level of education that matched his intellectual abilities. Nevertheless, overhearing his schoolmaster pleading on his behalf impacted him strongly. That, in retrospect, made him become conscious of the essence for a child to be seen and heard. In Ten Broek's own words: "I literally mean that you must see the child-in-context, including its (family-) culture and religion." Ten Broek took this as a pedagogical principle in the development of an IRE-model at the Juliana van Stolbergschool.

#### *The Story of Bart Ten Broek Continues*

In an innovative study on 'normative professional identity development' Ter Avest (2014a) employs the concept of 'disruptive moments' as a key construct towards an individual professional career. In the story of Bart Ten Broek, such a disruptive moment in his childhood is described above. In the case of Ten Broek, there seems

to be a link between this disruptive moment and his personal engagement for the transformation of the Juliana van Stolbergschool from a Protestant-Christian school into the first interreligious school in the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup>

At the Juliana van Stolbergschool Bart Ten Broek challenged the staff to respond to the growing number of Muslim children who attended the school. In the school's education policy, the staff adopted three principles to respond to the emerging religious diversity:

- every child is one that deserves attention, mirrored in the slogan of the school: 'Every Child Matters.' As a result, the curriculum had to be child-centred and in line with the children's family background as this was brought into the school;
- intensive participation of parents in this process of change<sup>8</sup>;
- implementing an intercultural and interreligious model for education.<sup>9</sup> (Ten Broek, 2002, pp. 28-29)

The immediate challenge the school faced was to find an answer to the question of how a Christian school can provide religious education for the Muslim pupils with respect for their religious development. In the efforts to find answers to this question the school developed a program for 'encounter education' which was followed by 'recognition education' with recurring themes like 'encounter' and 'dialogue' at the centre of the school's praxis.

Despite the various adaptations, the school retained her principles. The first principle – 'Every Child Matters' – remained the primary pedagogical principle and therefore had the highest priority. This is illustrated by changes in the school's praxis inspired by the experiences of Muslim pupils. For example, the hitherto dominant practice of praying with eyes closed, as was common within the Protestant-Christian tradition of the school, became less strictly observed when one child responded to a question by saying: "I can pray with my eyes open" (Ten Broek, 2002, p. 29).

Another example of the implementation of this pedagogical principle regards the way Bart Ten Broek explains the different manners in which people experience the Divine and the different ways they articulate that, which is also reflected in the Torah, Qur'an and Bible. For that, he cites the theological view of a child who had spontaneously argued: "The Bible and Qur'an? They are the same, only written in a different way" (Ten Broek, 2002, p. 34). Already then, the school under Ten Broek's leadership had committed itself to respect children's voices and views. The title of his article referred to in this paragraph reflects this principled stance: *A pre-mature education model?*

#### *The Voice of Former Pupils*

Already during the process of developing IRE at the Juliana van Stolbergschool, a research project was initiated to follow the pupils' religious development during this process of IRE-under-construction. To start with, pupils were interviewed at different moments at the age of 10, 11 and 12, and again at the age of 14 and 17.<sup>10</sup>



The second phase of this research project started in 2015 ('slow research'). From 2015 onwards former pupils, now adolescents some of them married and having children, are interviewed. The leading questions of the interview are: 'What do you remember of IRE at the Juliana van Stolbergschool, how do you evaluate IRE and what is the relation of this IRE with your actual (religious) positionality? So far five former pupils were interviewed.<sup>11</sup>

Preliminary findings show that all five of the interviewed former pupils mention 'space' as an important aspect of their memories of the Juliana van Stolbergschool. Space in the sense that they were approached in a respectful way and that their 'different' background was regarded as an inseparable part of their (Muslim) identity. Once a year teachers visited the child's family at home to get familiar with his or her background. These annual visits by teachers are concrete examples of what the children experienced as "receiving space to be who you are." As Abdul, one of the respondents – who refers to his identity as Moroccan-Dutch – says: "I knew that I was different, but it was normal to be different." For this former pupil, the awareness of being different is related to film crews interviewing the mother of a boy next door about her view on the plural pupil population of the Juliana van Stolbergschool. In that interview, this mother spoke about "a coloured boy coming to play with her son," and then Abdul realised that he was that 'coloured boy.' But at the Juliana van Stolbergschool he never had the experience of being 'coloured' and by consequence seen as an outsider. The IRE classes were perceived by him as a 'normal' way to teach and learn about and from religion(s). Abdul, in retrospect, is appreciative for having received IRE, because, as he says: "Now I can speak with Muslims, with Christians about their faith, because I know about both traditions. When somebody refers to a story from the Bible, I can say: 'In the Qur'an we have a similar narrative.'" Abdul gives his two children an Islamic upbringing. Therefore, he celebrates the Islamic religious feasts and tells them the stories related to the rituals on those specific days. Abdul did not choose to send his children to the Islamic primary school nearby, but he decided, rather to send them to a public school, a Montessori school, where "every child matters, just as at the Juliana van Stolbergschool." He proudly recounts a conversation with his nine-year-old son about the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels (2015/2016), and the subsequent processes of radicalization and blaming Muslims. When asked what he thinks of this 'bashing Muslims,' his son replied: "Muslims cannot be bad people, because I am a Muslim."

Another respondent, Amina, a former pupil with a Turkish background, mentions as her first memory of the Juliana van Stolbergschool that she felt welcome. She relates this welcoming feeling to the celebrations of Christian and Islamic feasts during school hours. "I felt acknowledged in what was important for me due to my upbringing," Amina recounts. "The Turkish children's feast, the 23rd of April was celebrated," which she remembered was very important for her as a child. "The teachers were really interested in our family culture and in our religion, in particular the commonalities with the Christian tradition." When a Christian religious feast was celebrated in the church, for example at Christmas time, Amina remembered that the teachers never forced them to do as the Christian children,

“but we were told to be respectful – which we did.” The same holds for the prayer at the start of the day: “We were never pushed to fold our hands. ‘Just be silent and respectful,’ that’s what the teacher told us. We were accepted including our Islamic identity.” When Amina was in her final year of the primary school, a school camp was organised. However, for her father it was out of question that she could participate and stay overnight. She vividly remembered the ensuing discussions between the teacher and her father, which eventually led to the teacher promising to take her home from camp every evening, so that she could still participate in the daytime activities. ‘Critical incidents’ for this former pupil, now a mother of adolescent boys, opened the space for the development of an own Islamic identity. “That’s what I learned at the Juliana van Stolbergschool: being accepted and respected.”

Another former pupil named Rabia, with Moroccan roots, talking about her years at the Juliana van Stolbergschool, remembered that “values and regulations did not differ from what I was told at home.” “I read the Bible, and discovered that some of these narratives were not conflicting with the narratives I knew.” Due to the IRE at school she can be touched by texts from the Bible and the Qur’an alike. When talking about Mariska, a Christian friend she regularly visited at home, she states: “I liked that things were more or less the same there as well. What was really different was the way she spent her Sundays: not allowed to do anything.” “That made me curious about other life orientations,” she explains, “a curiosity that was stimulated at school.” There she experienced an open attitude regarding the cultural rules and regulations that were taught to her at home. She remembered one particular teacher who had invited her parents to discuss the girls’ dress code, especially for the gymnastic class. From what she could remember, Rabia was perceived as being different when continued further education in secondary school, in contrast to what she had experienced at the Juliana van Stolbergschool. In her experience, she felt completely different from Christian peers in secondary school. There it seemed as if nobody was familiar with the fasting period of Ramadan, and as if nobody was interested either. “That was really different from what I remember of my primary school,” she states. “At the Juliana van Stolbergschool being different was a regular aspect of school life.”

Louisa, another young lady with Moroccan roots, compared her experiences at the school she first visited with that of the Juliana van Stolbergschool where she received IRE. It was at the latter school that she started to wear a headscarf. “I don’t know why exactly ... I just became interested in Islam. I had tapes to listen to ... I read translated Arabic booklets ... I still cannot read Arabic, which I regret.” Louisa became interested in Islam whilst attending the Juliana van Stolbergschool. “I was curious about the reasons why Allah wanted us to behave in a certain way, and my mother then answered, ‘That’s why,’ which made me even more curious.” She enjoyed the Bible story telling at school and had a keen interest in learning about other religions. “I was like a sponge, sucking all the narratives.” She remembered one teacher who did not like her wearing the headscarf. If she could not retell the narrative that he had told, he would say: “You better take of your headscarf to be able to actually hear what I’m telling!” Louisa still remembers the

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occasion whereby she approached the principal with another friend for his help to organise an activity. "I don't know any more what kind of activity it was," but somehow, he took their request seriously. "He was a warm, welcoming, interesting man, listening to the voice of us, little children," she adds smilingly. "I would have liked to send my children to such a school, with such an open atmosphere. At the time my children had that age there was not such a school," she concludes the interview.

The same holds for Tikri, also a former pupil of the Juliana van Stolbergschool. This young mother, decided to send her children to an Islamic primary school, where she currently works as a teacher. She regrets that her two sons now only learn about Islam, without also getting acquainted with other life orientations. With her eldest son, she discusses the different ways people live their religion. Tikri explains to him that some women decide not to wear a headscarf, but that it is not the dress that makes them a true believer. She describes herself as a faithful Muslim, with a Moroccan background, socializing her children in Islam in a down to earth way and taking daily experiences of her children as a start for reflection from an Islamic point of view. She remembers that she always liked the school meetings at the start and at the end of the week. "I liked to play part in it, and participate at the end of the week in the presentation of what we learned in the Islamic classes." Remembering particularly the religious education classes at the Juliana van Stolbergschool she tells about the moment that she and other Muslim children attended to Islamic classes whereas her Christian classmates attended Christian classes. "Then I was just wondering why? Now I'm wondering 'Why did they not bring these classes together?'" However, she admits in retrospect, "I learned that each one can hold on to the own religion; that it's no problem to be different." That being different might be a problem, in her view explains why so many white children were taken out of school by their parents, by the time Tikri had reached grade eight. This mass withdrawal of white children by their parents – nowadays coined as 'the white flight' – contributed to a certain degree to the closure of the first and only interreligious (Christian-Islamic) primary school in the Netherlands. The foundations it laid for its pupils, in terms of the development of their moral and religious identity, however, still carry their marks into the 21st century. Moreover, the IRE model that was developed at this school has generated several adapted versions in both public governmental and confessional primary schools in the Netherlands.

#### CONCLUSION

Above we described that from a human rights perspective children do have the right to IRE as a form of religious education. It is the moral duty of their parents to make it possible for them to fully enjoy this right. Therefore, parents and other educators like teachers, must create space for children to learn about and from their own and others' religious or secular life orientations. Educators in schools must respect and encourage children's views on spiritual and religious matters. Research

from Children's Theology shows that children are capable to form and express their own religious views.

Our ongoing 'slow research' not only highlights the theoretical stance of Children's Theology, but also shows the importance of allowing for 'space' to children in their learning environments. Therefore, developing models for IRE/IFE should be based on a child-centred pedagogical approach in which the child is seen in context, including its (family-) cultural and religious background. For the child to be seen, heard and understood this implies respect for and acceptance of its cultural socialization in the family and their way of religious upbringing. By consequence, a pedagogy for 'every child matters' cannot be put into practice without intensifying parents' involvement. Teachers and parents, as partners in education, together are the creators of a safe space for the development of a proper life orientation that enables children to live in diversity. Cooperation between educators of the first and second pedagogical sphere is essential, because every child matters!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Article 14:1 reads:

States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

<sup>2</sup> Article 27:1 reads:

States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

<sup>3</sup> See also Ter Avest (2017) focussing on Children's Rights for RE.

<sup>4</sup> REDCo (Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries) is an international research project carried out in eight European countries. In this project researchers addressed the question of how religions and values contribute to dialogue or tension in Europe. See further Weisse (2010, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, we employ the concept of Children's Theology in inclusion of the concept of Theologizing with Children.

<sup>6</sup> Some examples of 'theological questions' by children are found in Spadaro (2016). In the book entitled *Dear Pope Francis* the Pope answers to questions posted by children from around the world. We think it suffices to give four examples of theological questions by children.

Dear Pope Francis. Can our deceased family members see us from heaven? Emil (9 years, Dominican Republic, p. 10)

"Dear pope Francis. It's an honour to ask you my question. My question is wat did God do before the world was made? Sincerely, Ryan (8 years, Canada, p. 12)

Dear Pope Francis. If God love us so much and does not like us to suffer, why then he didn't defeat the Devil? Alejandra (9 years, Peru, p. 22)

Dear Pope Francis. Will the world ever become again as it was before? Sincerely, Mohammed (10 years, Syria, p. 32)

<sup>7</sup> This transformation process is documented in various publications (Andree et al., 1993; Griffioen, 2001; Ten Broek, 2002).

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- <sup>8</sup> The change concerned the special task given by the Ministry of Education to make visible how to integrate children from what was then termed 'cultural minorities' into the new form of primary education that was about to start from 1985 onwards (Ten Broek, 2002, p. 28).
- <sup>9</sup> The staff received support from a team consisting of theologians from both Christian and Islamic tradition, a religious psychologist and various parents of Christian and Muslim pupils. This team was active in the steering process of implementing intercultural education and served as an advisory board.
- <sup>10</sup> See Ter Avest (2003, 2009) for an extensive description of the research project and its findings.
- <sup>11</sup> For privacy reasons the names of the former pupils of the Juliana van Stolbergschool are fictitious.

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