

# 11 Islamic Religious Education in the Netherlands

*Ina ter Avest, Cok Bakker and Leni Franken*

## **Introduction: State–Church Relations and the Muslim Communities in the Netherlands**

### *The Muslim Communities in the Netherlands*

At the end of 2020, for the first time non-Christians were the majority in the Netherlands: 51% of the population denotes themselves as not religious (not belonging to any church community), 24% is Catholic, 16% belongs to a Protestant denomination, and 5% of the population is Muslim (Schmeets, 2016). Dutch society is characterised by increasing religious pluralism, and with an estimated 4.9% (CBS, 2015) to 7.1% (PEW Research Center, 2017), Muslims are the third largest religious group in the Netherlands. Due to the Dutch colonisation of Indonesia (1816–1949),<sup>1</sup> a substantial part of the Muslim community has Indonesian roots.

The first Islamic community was founded in 1947<sup>2</sup> by families of students from Indonesia who came to the Netherlands for their education. However, until the arrival of so-called guest workers from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s, for most Dutch people Islam was not part of daily life. As a result of subsequent family reunification policies, guest workers' families became increasingly visible in the streets, in shops, and in schools. From 2000 onward, the number of Muslims increased due to the arrival of Muslim refugees from Middle Eastern countries, but the integration of these people was not without controversy. In particular, the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, as well as the murder of Pim Fortuyn (2002)<sup>3</sup> and Theo van Gogh (2004),<sup>4</sup> changed public opinion regarding Muslims; since that time they have increasingly been seen as a source of criminality, fundamentalism, and other societal problems, neglecting all other aspects of their hyphenated and multivoiced identity.

### *State and Church in the Netherlands*

The principle of separation of church and state was legally enshrined in 1798. This separation gave equal rights to different Christian churches

and contributed to social cohesion in a society that was imbued with Christianity (Van Sasse van Ysselt, 2013). In 1814, the government's right to supervise religious affairs for the benefit of the state was legalised and established in Article 139 of the Constitution. From 1815 onwards, all churches as well as the education of clergymen were financially supported by the state. This financial support went hand in hand with state interference in the churches' internal affairs. From 1848 onwards, the separation of church and state was brought to completion.

Since the end of the 20th century, the state has been considered to be a "neutral organiser"; church and state gear their activities to one another and as such practice "inclusive neutrality" (Van Sasse van Ysselt, 2013, 69). Hence Dutch society is characterised by "pillarisation": the vertical division of society along class and ideological or religious lines, with each pillar having its own social institutions, such as newspapers, broadcasting organisations, political parties, schools, and sport clubs. Today, in many ways this division has almost disappeared, but in education it is still remarkably strong, mainly due to the coverage of this division by Article 23 of the Constitution (cf. Franken and Vermeer, 2018).

Notwithstanding an official hands-off approach to religion, financial support for the social activities of religious organisations (e.g., in the domains of education and health care) is a generally accepted good, and likewise the state financially supports up to 60% of the costs for maintenance and restoration of monumental church buildings (Van Sasse van Ysselt, 2013). However, since migrant churches and Islamic religious communities are not owners of monumental buildings, they suffer greatly from this regulation. Financial support from Arab countries for mosques and their educational and religious activities is the government's constant and fiercely debated concern because of the potential negative influence on Muslims' participation in Dutch society.

## **Religion and Education in the Netherlands: The Dutch "Pillarised" School System**

In order to understand the Dutch educational system, we have to go back to the revision of the Dutch Constitution in 1848, wherein the freedom of education was recognised. Establishing schools was no longer considered to be the sole prerogative of the state, and religious groups were granted the right to establish their own schools (Akkermans, 1997, 59). This resulted in a *dual* or *pillarised* school system, containing governmental schools (*openbare scholen*) and non-governmental schools (*bijzondere scholen*). However, freedom of education was still curtailed because state funding was only granted for governmental schools. This situation led to the so-called school funding controversy (*schoolstrijd*) in the 19th century, wherein confessional groups strove for equal funding of governmental and non-governmental (faith-based) schools. After several decades of struggle, an historic agreement between Christian political parties and

the liberals and socialists, known as the *Pacification*, was reached. In 1917 this agreement was settled in Article 23, §7, of the Dutch Constitution:

Private primary schools that satisfy the conditions laid down by Act of Parliament shall be financed from public funds according to the same standards as public-authority schools. The conditions under which private secondary education and pre-university education shall receive contributions from public funds shall be laid down by Act of Parliament.

Soon after the *Pacification*, the number of private schools steadily increased. Today there are three dominant pillars in the Dutch education system, each containing about 30% of the school population: a Protestant Christian, a Roman Catholic, and a “secular” pillar (governmental schools).<sup>5</sup> The remaining 10% are mainly schools with a pedagogy-related identity (e.g., Montessori, Jenaplan, and Waldorf), or a Jewish, Hindu, or Islamic identity.<sup>6</sup> In 2018, there were 52 Islamic primary schools and two Islamic secondary schools (the Avicenna College in Rotterdam and the Cornelius Haga Lyceum in Amsterdam)<sup>7</sup> – a number that has increased substantially over the past decades. Notwithstanding this increase, only a small percentage of Muslim children is enrolled in Islamic schools because the number of these schools is lower than the number of children with a Muslim background, and many Muslim parents do not prefer an Islamic (primary) school for their children (ter Avest et al., 2013; ter Avest et al. 2015; Beemsterboer, 2018) (Tables 11.1 and 11.2).

Table 11.1 Schools and pupils according to primary schools’ identity (2018)<sup>8</sup>

<i>Identity of schools</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>
<b>All schools</b>	6,203	1,405,527	100
<b>Protestant</b>	1,846	389,058	28.0
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	1,890	462,520	31.0
<b>State</b>	1,972	422,795	33.0
<b>Islamic</b>	52		< 1.0
<b>Remaining</b>	495	131,454	0.9

Table 11.2 Schools and pupils according to secondary schools’ identity (2018)<sup>9</sup>

<i>Identity of schools</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>
<b>All schools</b>	649	968.197	100
<b>Protestant</b>	133	208.052	21,0
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	146	233.044	24,0
<b>State</b>	187	263.638	27,0
<b>Islamic</b>	2	882	< 1,0
<b>Remaining</b>	183	263.503	27,0

Governmental and non-governmental schools differ from one another with respect to three basic liberties: freedom of establishment/foundation, freedom of religious conviction/orientation, and freedom of organisation (cf. Akkermans, 1997, 44; Franken and Vermeer, 2018; Budak, Bakker and ter Avest, 2018, 80).

The *freedom of establishment/foundation* gives (religious) organised groups the right to establish a school and apply for state funding, provided these groups represent “one of the philosophies of life as represented in the Netherlands and is effected in other domains in society” (Mentink, Vermeulen and Zoontjes, no date). It is, for instance, possible to establish Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Dutch Reformed, Islamic, or Hindu schools as well as anthroposophical and humanistic schools.<sup>10</sup> However, in 2010, an application for funding a Buddhist school was refused because the impact of Buddhism on Dutch society was considered to be too marginal (Onderwijsraad, 2012).<sup>11</sup> In order to establish a school, the number of pupils whose parents sign for their child’s enrolment in the school must be at least 200 within five years after its founding.

The *freedom of religious conviction/orientation* gives non-governmental schools the right to express their religious conviction or ideology in school, whereas governmental schools have to be “neutral”. Historically the concept of “orientation” was mainly related to a denominational Christian school ethos and guaranteed the freedom of Christian denominational schools “to express their fundamental orientation [in life] derived from a well-known religious conviction or worldview” (Mentink, Vermeulen and Zoontjes, no date). The freedom of orientation is mainly implemented in the choice of didactics and teaching material, the appointment of teachers, student enrolment policy, and the organisation of religious education (RE) and/or (daily) acts of worship. Non-governmental schools have to comply with the common educational standards and requirements set by the Dutch government and are, accordingly, inspected by the Educational Inspectorate. In order to maintain the separation of church and state, however, the Dutch state does not supervise the way non-governmental schools express their religious identity, e.g., in RE classes.

Finally, the *freedom of organisation* gives non-governmental schools the right to organise themselves according to their own principles and ideas, which means that they can, for instance, make their own rules and regulations regarding daily school life, or choose their own legal organisational form as an association or foundation. It is to this freedom the Islamic communities (Turkish and Moroccan) referred in the 1980s when they established their first two Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands (Budak, Bakker and ter Avest, 2018).

## Religious Education (RE) and Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in the Netherlands: The Current Situation

Notwithstanding the secularisation of Dutch society (and in particular of the younger generations (cf. De Hart, 2014, 45–68; Bernts and Berghuijs, 2016, 23–24), Protestant Christian and Catholic faith-based schools dominate the educational scene in the Netherlands to the present day, but this is basically a numerical dominance. The autonomy of state-funded, faith-based schools is mainly restricted to the way they express their religious conviction or ideology in school, which results, among other things, in far-reaching independence regarding RE. In this chapter, we will have a closer look at different forms of (I)RE in the different school types: education about Islam (1) in the school subject Spiritual Movements (*Geestelijke Stromingen*) and (2) in the school subject Citizenship Education (*Burgerschapsvorming*); (3) IRE in governmental schools; (4) IRE in Catholic and Protestant Christian (Protestant and Dutch Reformed) schools; and (5) IRE in non-governmental Islamic schools.

### *Spiritual Movements*

In 1985, the subject *Geestelijke Stromingen* (Spiritual Movements) was introduced as a mandatory subject in all primary schools in order to inform all the pupils about different religious and secular worldviews and in order to prepare them for a future life in the Dutch multi-religious society. The subject aims to open the world of “the other” and to contribute to the development of a life orientation, a moral identity, and active citizenship. In the core aims of primary education (Tule, nr. 38), *Geestelijke Stromingen* is described as follows: “Pupils learn main issues about spiritual movements which play an important role in the Dutch multicultural society, and they learn to deal with peoples’ different convictions in a respectful way.”<sup>12</sup>

The subject content is based on the “world religions” approach and focuses on “the big five” world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) as well as on secular humanism. Accordingly, Islam is described according to its foundational sources, ideology, and practices (cf. Berglund, 2014; see also Berglund’s contribution on Sweden in this volume). The content of the subject is fine-tuned to the psychological development of the children, based on the stage theories of Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development) and James Fowler (faith development).

In line with freedom of education, schools can autonomously decide how to organise *Geestelijke Stromingen*. In most primary schools, religious topics are only marginally discussed as part of other school subjects like History or Geography, and only a minority of schools organise *Geestelijke*

*Stromingen* as a separate school subject. As far as secondary education is concerned, all schools (governmental and non-governmental) are also required to teach about different religions, but this rarely happens in practice (cf. Beemsterboer, 2011).<sup>13</sup> In addition, and in line with the school's (religious) identity, it is possible to organise education *into religion* in governmental as well as in non-governmental schools (cf. *infra*).

### ***Citizenship Education***

One of the aims of the school subject *Geestelijke Stromingen* was the cultivation of “citizenship” in the Dutch multi-religious society. This focus on citizenship education as an integrated part of *Geestelijke Stromingen* in later years shifted to a subject in itself, emphasising adaptation, individualisation, critical thinking (Veugelers, 2015), and intercultural and inclusive democracy (cf. Veugelers, 2019). Since 2006, Citizenship Education has been a mandatory subject in all primary and secondary schools and is controlled by the Schools Inspectorate. The subject aims “to convey respect for and knowledge of the basic values of a democratic constitutional state, as these are enshrined in the Constitution, and the universal and fundamental rights and freedoms of mankind.” In addition, it aims at “the development of social and societal competencies enabling pupils/students to participate in and contribute to the Dutch democratic society” (Onderwijsraad, 2018; cf. the concept of “normative citizenship” in ter Avest, 2018). At present there is no clear description of the content of the subject, let alone the number of hours to be spent on citizenship education.

### ***(I)RE in Governmental Schools***

Following the requirement of neutrality, education into a particular religion or worldview is not on the compulsory curriculum in governmental schools. Nonetheless, in addition to the school subject *Geestelijke Stromingen*, governmental schools are legally required to organise optional “confessional and denominational” RE at parental request.<sup>14</sup> In primary schools, this kind of RE is organised for at most 120 hours a year. Different from *Geestelijke Stromingen*, RE is not organised and controlled by the state (Ministry of Education), but by the respective religious and humanist communities<sup>15</sup> which, since 2019, have been paid by the government. In secondary schools, there is a similar regulation:<sup>16</sup> at parental request, religious groups and denominations can organise RE classes, but the maximum number of teaching hours is not legally fixed, and the state is not obliged to pay RE teachers (although a state subsidy is possible). At present, the following classes of “recognised” religions/worldviews can be organised in governmental schools (primary and secondary): Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Humanism.

Notwithstanding the possibility of having RE in governmental schools, the number of pupils enrolled in these classes, including IRE (*Islamitisch*

*Godsdienstig Vormings Onderwijs* or *IGVO*), is rather low and is in secondary schools almost absent. Since 2009, the Contact Organisation Muslims and Government (*Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid* or *CMO*) has been the official national body for IGVO. The Islamic organisation SPIOR (*Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rijnmond*; Foundation of Islamic Organisations in the “Rijnmond” district) is responsible for the practical implementation (teacher training and appointment, inspection, and subject content) of the subject in governmental schools.

One of the main aims of IRE in governmental schools is to “inform pupils about the foundational principles of Islam and important religious festivals. Pupils learn to think critically, to be open minded and to respect people who adhere to different religious traditions.”<sup>17</sup> The subject focuses on Islamic doctrine (*aqieda*), practice (*ibada*) and ethics (*achlaaq*), with an emphasis on eight basic values: helpfulness, hospitality, individual responsibility, humility, inquisitiveness, respect, forgiveness, and keeping promises. The aim of the subject is to contribute to religious identity development and to an open attitude towards people who adhere to different religious or secular traditions. In order to do so, a connection is made between theory and the everyday practice of living in a plural society.<sup>18</sup>

In governmental primary schools, IRE is taken by less than 1% of the pupils and mainly by children in stages 7 and 8 (11–12 years old).<sup>19</sup> In the school year 2013–2014, 63 governmental schools organised IRE classes in 18 municipalities, and 2,350 pupils participated in these classes. IRE is thus not included in the curriculum in all governmental schools (see also Beemsterboer, 2018, 78), and several schools fail to offer IRE as an elective subject.

### ***(I)RE in Protestant Christian and Catholic Schools***

In faith-based schools, RE is one of the means to express the school’s religious conviction or ideology. However, given the increasing secularisation, the influence of religion has significantly declined in most Catholic and mainstream Protestant schools. If RE is still organised, non-governmental schools are free to choose what kind of RE they organise, how many teaching hours they will dedicate to RE, which teachers they hire, and how they name the school subject. Today, the focus of RE is on identity formation, worldview education, religious education, and inter-religious dialogue, and the school subject can have different names, such as “worldview education”, “religion/worldviews”, or “religion”. In addition, some faith-based schools (e.g., conservative Protestant schools) more or less oppose secular culture and re-emphasise their religious identity, thereby recruiting conservative segments of the Dutch population.

These different ways of organising RE in Christian faith-based schools have consequences for Muslim students, who are, due to the high number

of Christian schools, often enrolled in these schools. In recent decades, different approaches to “the other” were developed in this new and so far unknown situation. Conservative Protestant Christian schools approach Muslim pupils from the point of view of “not yet” knowing about salvation by Christ, and pupils are obliged to participate in confessional, Christian RE classes, named *Godsdienstles* (“Religious Education”). Other (mainstream) Christian schools are of the opinion that Islam is “just another way to God” and have an open approach to Muslim pupils. When Islam is discussed, pupils are taught *about* Islam, but from a Christian perspective. At present, an increasing number of mainstream Christian schools focuses on identity formation rather than on Protestant/Catholic RE. In this approach, Islam is seen as one of the many identity markers among students, and teachers do not take a particular religious stance when teaching (about) religion (Miedema and ter Avest and Miedema, 2010).

### ***(I)RE in Non-Governmental Islamic Schools***

In the 1980s, the first Islamic primary schools were established, and ever since, the number of state-funded Islamic schools has increased significantly. Like other state-funded non-governmental schools, Islamic schools follow the regular curriculum and are inspected by the national Inspectorate. Otherwise, they are free to express their religious conviction or ideology in school (*freedom of religious conviction/orientation*).

Consistent with the diversity within Islam, Dutch Islamic schools can be very different from each other (e.g., representing Sunni, Sufi, or Salafi traditions; being closed/conservative versus open/liberal), which results in “major differences between Islamic primary schools” (Beemsterboer, 2018, 322). Notwithstanding these differences, most if not all Islamic schools aim at being a safe space for Muslim pupils. Hence the accommodation of Islamic religious dresses and practices, and the organisation of IRE or IRI, which is in most Islamic schools organised for three hours a week. In the following paragraphs, we will focus in more detail on this school subject.

## **IRE in Islamic Schools: Curricula, Textbooks, Teacher Training, and Inspection**

### ***Inspection***

All state-funded Islamic schools are, like other state-funded schools, controlled by the Schools Inspectorate on a yearly basis, but the subject of IRE is excluded from this state control. As a result of terrorist attacks in the first decades of the second millennium, attitudes about the position of Islam in Dutch society changed significantly. Out of fear of (more) Islamic radicalisation, the Schools Inspectorate keeps a



conscientious eye on the content and the role of Islam in governmental and non-governmental (Islamic) schools. A particular concern is the possibility of anti-liberal or even radicalising tendencies which might thwart the development of active citizenship – an aim connected to the subject of Citizenship Education introduced in 2006. In particular, Salafi-oriented tendencies are considered to be a potential threat to pupils' development of participative democratic citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

With regard to IRE, there is no national “Islamic” inspection. Yet the ISBO has formulated competencies for IRE teachers in Islamic schools and advises teacher training institutes to bear these in mind in their training and coaching.

### ***Teacher Training***

In order to teach regular subjects in Islamic schools, teachers must have a teacher-training degree for primary education, obtained at a university college for teacher training. For IRE teachers, schools can require extra degrees or certificates, but there is no general obligation for schools to do so. The Inholland University of Applied Sciences organises, in cooperation with ISBO, optional courses in Islam for students who want to obtain a degree in Islamic primary education (*Diploma Islamitisch Basis Onderwijs/DIBO*). At the Teacher Training Institute of the IPabo in Amsterdam (*Interreligieuze Pedagogische Academie voor Basis Onderwijs*; Interreligious Pedagogical Academy for Primary Education) students in their third year can specialise in Christianity, Islam, or Religious Diversity. In the specialisation Islam,<sup>21</sup> ISBO competencies are included.

In the academic year 2018–2019, a new four-year bachelor's degree course Teacher Training IRE was established at the Islamic Faculty of Theology in Amsterdam (*Islamitische Theologische Faculteit*; IUA), funded and founded by the Turkish *Milli Görüş* movement. The institute aims to qualify students for IRE in primary and secondary schools. The IUA is not (yet) recognised by the Dutch government, nor accredited by the NVAO (*Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie*; Dutch Flemish Organisation of Accreditations), and in consequence the diplomas are not yet officially recognised.

### ***Curricula and Textbooks***

For IRE, like for all other school subjects, schools are free to choose their own teaching methods and materials, which can be very different in different schools. For a first impression of the current field, we will have a closer look at three IRE textbooks: *Groei en Bloei*, published under the auspices of the ISBO; *Al Amana*, developed by a team of teachers of the Al Amana primary school; and *Worden wie je bent*, developed (but not

yet in use) by the School board of Islamic primary schools in the Middle and Eastern part of the Netherlands (SIMON).

**Groei en Bloei** – In this IRE teaching method, developed by Bahaeddin Budak for the age group 8–10, the experiences in daily life of two children, Fatima and Ali, are the starting point in each lesson. From their experiences, a relation is established with the life of the Prophet, the *Hadith*, or a *Sura* in the *Qur'an*. Some aspects are also linked with other religions. For example, when referring to the *hadj*, holy places of other religions are referred to. The method is illustrated by a rose: While its thorns contain (moral) statements (e.g., “Others do similar things”), the leaves invite children to reflect and ask questions such as, “What can I do for others?”. The heart of the rose points at two core questions: “What does Allah expect me to do?” and “What can I ask Allah to do for me?”. The pupils are informed about Islam (which is seen as the “true” religion) and learn how to behave as a “good Muslim”.

**Al Amana** – According to the principal of the Al Amana primary school, “knowledge, capabilities, an attractive lay-out, well developed learning paths, exams and love for Islam are the ingredients for our method RE ‘Al Amana’”. In every lesson, attention is given to the *Suras*, which pupils are encouraged to learn by heart in Arabic but also in Dutch. Tasks are given to check the understanding of presented texts and to stimulate pupils’ activity and creativity. Each lesson ends with “points to be remembered”. For the older pupils (age 11), sometimes additional references are made to biblical fragments.

In both methods (*Groei en Bloei* and *Al Amana*), IRE can be understood in two ways: Islamic religious education (IRE) and initiative-response-evaluation (I-R-E). Questions stimulating pupils to give the right answers are dominant in both methods, and pupils’ active involvement is stimulated by taking the starting point in Muslim children’s everyday experiences (*Groei en Bloei*) as well as by role playing, categorising, and writing (*Al Amana*).

**Worden wie je bent** – A slightly different approach can be found in the framework for a policy on identity of the SIMON<sup>22</sup> Islamic primary schools, *Worden wie je bent (Becoming Who You Are)*, where the starting points are the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. From these holy sources, teaching and learning are developed in a deductive way (Aktaran, no date, 30). The method mentions “*zeven parels van uitmuntendheid*” (“seven pearls of excellence”), which are derived from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* and adjusted to the Dutch context: awareness of God, tolerance, justice, autonomy, quality, transparency, and cooperation (Aktaran, no date, 37). The focus is on stimulation of development from “discipline” (youngest pupils) to “value orientation” and “reflection”. The method, which so far has not yet systematically been concretised in curriculum and lesson plans, favours pupils’ exchange with schools in the same district, participation in activities in the neighbourhood, and cooperation in community

schools (*Brede School*; Aktaran, no date, 39). Currently, a revised edition of the material for sex and gender education is in preparation.

## **“IRE on the Move”: Initiatives, Improvements, and Future Prospects**

### *Pedagogical Trends in RE*

In the Netherlands, the first Islamic schools as well as the first IRE classes started in the 1980s at a primary school in the so-called Bible Belt.<sup>23,24</sup> The arrival of Muslim “guest workers” and their families was a stimulus for teachers of the Christian (Protestant) primary school Juliana van Stolberg to develop a curriculum for interreligious education (InterREd) (El Bouayadi-van de Wetering and Miedema, 2012; ter Avest, 2009; Franken & Vermeer, 2018). The curriculum combines Christian and Islamic classes and “classes of recognition” for both groups, stimulating dialogue on the issues discussed in the separate classes. This dialogical interreligious education has also inspired several other schools with a mixed religious pupil population, for example in Amsterdam in the cooperation of a governmental, a secular Christian, and an Islamic primary school (ter Avest and Bakker, 2017a) and in Rotterdam at Christian primary schools with a majority of Muslim pupils (ter Avest and Bakker, 2017b, c; Schwarzenau and Kirste, 1995).

These days, the focus in RE is increasingly on “togetherness”, “citizenship”, and “social cohesion”, which is often at the expense of knowledge of one’s own religious tradition. In line with this shift, there is also a general shift from confessional RE to non-confessional RE. This is also expected for IRE: a shift from confessional IRE towards the development of religious literate citizens who act in a dialogical way, understand the essence of democratic values and the practices thereof, and are fully aware of their Islamic life orientation and the place of Islam in liberal-democratic societies (cf. El Bouayadi-van de Wetering & Miedema, 2012).<sup>25</sup>

### *IRE Controversies*

Given the separation of church and state, it is not up to the state to interfere with the content of IRE, as long as the subject does not infringe upon human rights. In this regard, there was some commotion in 2019 about a teaching method for sexual education (*Help! Ik word volwassen*) wherein homophobic passages of the *Qu’ran* were cited without contextual clarification. Although the national educational inspection did not see any conflicts with the basic values of democratic society, the ISBO, which used the textbook in 44 of its schools, immediately took responsibility and developed an extra manual for teachers, wherein violence against homosexual people is explicitly condemned.

In another case in 2019, the Cornelius Haga Lyceum, located in Amsterdam, was accused of Salafism and anti-democratic tendencies. The school was therefore (re)inspected. Although the report of the Inspectorate was very critical, there was no evidence of Salafist and anti-democratic education. The Minister of Education required a new school board, but the Council of State considered this to be an unconstitutional decision. At present, the Minister's appeal is still pending.

More problematic than the abovementioned cases, however, are *non-recognised* Islamic schools in (close relation with) mosques, where in some cases Salafism is preached and where sometimes children learn to “abstain” from Dutch society and its values (Hamdi, Pels and el Jaouhari, 2017). Since these schools are not recognised and subsidised by the state, they cannot be inspected by the Schools Inspectorate. In the debate on Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution, this might be an argument to include IRE (as well as other forms of confessional RE) in regular schools.

### **Improving IRE: Recent Trends and Initiatives**

The number of Dutch Islamic schools, where IRE or IRI is organised, has grown in recent decades. In addition, governmental schools evolved from a “neutral” to an “active plural” approach and pay more attention now to the organisation of IRE. IRE classes can be very open and liberal, but they can also be organised in a conservative and/or Salafist way. All primary school students must learn about different religious traditions as well as secular humanism in the subject *Geestelijke Stromingen*, but in practice, many Dutch students are religiously illiterate. Accordingly, the image of Islam developed by Muslim as well as non-Muslim students can vary substantially.

Knowledge about Islam is, however, seen as very important in the present multi-religious context (Skeie, 2009; Bertram-Troost and ter Avest, 2007). In this regard, we warmly welcome the initiative to develop a core curriculum on religion and worldviews, wherein Islam is represented in a correct and nuanced way. However, a problem in developing such a curriculum is the possible essentialisation or even “Christianisation” of Islam. Lessons could be learned here from nations like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, where the representation of Islam in an integrative, non-confessional school subject is often “marinated in Lutheranism” (see Berglund's chapter in this volume; see also the chapters on Denmark and Norway).

In addition to adequate knowledge *about* different religions and worldviews (including Islam), some parents and their students also wish to educate children *in* a particular religious tradition. Hence the establishment of Islamic schools and the organisation of optional IRE classes in governmental schools. However, in order to guarantee that these classes are of good quality, more competent IRE teachers are needed.

Qualified teacher training programs must be developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and “official” Islamic partners (e.g., ISBO and SPIOR).

With regard to teaching materials, a well-thought-out theoretical framework is lacking. What seems to be missing is a pedagogy of religion in Islam or a common educational theoretical framework for IRE, which can be translated into curricula and concrete methods and workshops for classroom practices (cf. Ucan, 2020). At this point, we see an opportunity at the IPabo in Amsterdam, where an inclusive pedagogical approach, combined with earlier developed student materials, seem very promising. The ISBO as well as the recently started IUA and its teacher training department might be included in such a project, once they are accredited by the NVAO (expected in 2022 at the earliest).

Last but not least, there has been, for several years, a fierce debate about Article 23 of the Constitution and its pillarised education system. It would not be opportune to change this plural system, which seems to work quite well and takes into account the existence of different religious and non-religious convictions in society, as well as their internal diversity. However, in order to prepare all pupils for a future life in Dutch society and in order to make them religiously literate, education *about* as well as *into* Islam (for those students who so choose) needs further improvement. Special attention should be given to the construction and deconstruction of prejudice, in combination with the development of dialogical skills to respond to dilemmas resulting from seemingly unbridgeable gaps.

## Endnotes

1. The Dutch colonisation started in the 17th century. In 1816, Indonesia was officially included in the Dutch Kingdom and named as *Nederlands-Indië* (Dutch Indië). In 1949, the period of colonisation ended with the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia.
2. Due to problems with the *Welstandscommissie* (building inspectorate to enforce the regulations regarding the external appearance of buildings) in the Hague, the mosque opened its doors only in 1955, even though the planning and the building process began in 1950.
3. In 2002, nine days before the Dutch general election, the very popular right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated in Hilversum, North Holland, by a Dutch environmental and animal rights activist. At his trial, his assassin said he murdered Fortuyn to stop him from exploiting Muslims as “scapegoats” and targeting “the weak members of society” in seeking political power.
4. For more information, see introduction, page xxx
5. In the heyday of this system – the 1950s and 1960s – not only education was divided into pillars, but also health care, sporting clubs, and the editing boards of newspapers as well as their subscribers (ter Avest et al. 2007; Franken and Vermeer, 2018).

6. Due to a decrease of the number of pupils in urban areas (so-called shrinking areas), some of the denominationally oriented schools these days cooperate with governmental schools in so-called schools of cooperation (*samenwerkingscholen*) (Onderwijsraad, 2015). Thus far, there are no Islamic schools involved in this type of cooperation.
7. In 2018, 706 pupils attended the Avicenna College and 176 the Cornelius Haga Lyceum. Available from: [www.Scholenopdekaart.nl](http://www.Scholenopdekaart.nl); [www.Avicenna-college.com](http://www.Avicenna-college.com); [corneliushagalyceum.nl](http://corneliushagalyceum.nl) [Accessed 14 August 2019].
8. Available from: <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/03753/table?ts=1589787589945> [Accessed 27 October 2020].
9. Available from: <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/03753/table?ts=1589787589945> [Accessed 27 October 2020].
10. Pedagogical orientations as a basis for founding a school are also very popular in the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad, 2012).
11. Due to the varieties of religious and secular worldviews and life orientations, the requirement regarding philosophies of life is under pressure these days. A recommendation of the *Onderwijsraad* (Education Council) is to replace the concept of “orientation of schools” with a concept that gives priority to the number of future pupils, but this recommendation has been fiercely debated.
12. Available from: <http://tule.slo.nl/OrientatieOpJezelfEnWereld/F-KD-OrientatieJezelfEnWereld.html> [Accessed 19 May 2020].
13. According to core aim (*kerndoel*) 43 of Dutch secondary schools, students have to learn, among others, “about similarities, differences and changes in culture and worldviews in the Netherlands” (<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/besluiten/2010/09/17/kerndoelen-onderbouw-voortgezet-onderwijs> [accessed 18 January 2021]). In practice, however, the attention for learning about religions/worldviews is rather low in secondary schools (Beemsterboer, 2011). In order to improve this situation, several scholars from religious studies departments in the Netherlands made a public appeal in 2016 to introduce Religious Studies as a secular subject in governmental as well as non-governmental schools in the Netherlands. Their appeal, which was based on the idea that a minimal form of religious literacy is required in the Dutch multi-religious society, received attention in Dutch media and was, at the beginning of 2017, followed by the publication of a proposal for a core curriculum for RE in all recognised schools (Davidsen et al., 2017, Davidsen, 2020. See also Visser, 2017; Visser et al., 2018). In order to design this draft curriculum, which is still under construction, different religious and non-religious stakeholders, teachers, teacher trainers and academics with diverse fields of expertise (mainly theology and religious studies) cooperate.
14. Wet op primair onderwijs, Art. 50–51.
15. Website: <https://www.vormingsonderwijs.nl> [Accessed 19 May 2020].
16. Wet op secundair onderwijs, Art. 46–47.
17. Available from: <https://www.vormingsonderwijs.nl/partner/islamitisch-godsdienstig-vormingsonderwijs/> [Accessed 19 May 2020].
18. See [www.spior.nl](http://www.spior.nl) [Accessed 19 May 2020].
19. Cf. Veugelers and Oostdijk, 2013.
20. Available from: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2019/09/11/feiten-over-het-toezicht-op-burgerschapsonderwijs-en-bijbehorende-methoden> [Accessed 19 May 2020].
21. In this specialisation, students do not learn *Suras* by heart, but they become familiar with Qur’anic texts and different interpretations thereof.

- In order to become an RE teacher in an Islamic school, a degree in theology is required.
22. The name of the foundation, SIMON, refers to School board of Islamic Schools in the Middle and Eastern part of the Netherlands.
  23. The Bible Belt is a region in the Netherlands where the greater part of the people belongs to conservative Christian communities.
  24. The first Islamic primary schools were established in 1988 in the city of Rotterdam and in Eindhoven (Budak et al., 2018). In 1993, *Ontmoeting-sonderwijs* (Education in Encounter) was initiated in pilot projects of Protestant Christian and Roman Catholic educational organisations in the Netherlands. This resulted in one of the schools participating in classes on interreligious education (Christian and Islamic RE lessons fused in classes of interreligious dialogue) (ter Avest, 2003, 2009).
  25. Personal confidential communication with Ismael Taspinar, former member of the board of SIMON schools.

## References

- Akkermans, P. (1997) De juridische vormgeving van de onderwijsverzuijing. In: Dijkstra, A.B., Dronkers, J. and Hofman, R.H. (eds.). *Verzuijing in Het Onderwijs: Actuele Verklaringen En Analyse*. Groningen, Wolters-Noordhoff, pp. 57–83.
- Aktaran, E. (no date) *Worden wie je bent. Kaders voor het identiteitsbeleid op de SIMON scholen*. Leusden, SIMON scholen.
- Beemsterboer, M. (2011) Geloven in Onderwijs. Het kennisgebied geestelijke stromingen in het Nederlands basisonderwijs. *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 2 (3), 17–30.
- Beemsterboer, M. (2018) *Islamitisch Basisonderwijs in Nederland*. PhD study Leiden University. Almere, Parthenon.
- Berglund, J. (2014) An Ethnographic Eye on religion in Everyday life. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 36 (1), 39–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2013.820167>
- Bernts, T. and Berghuijs, J. (2016) *God in Nederland 1966–2015*. Utrecht, Ten Have.
- Bertram-Troost, G.D. and ter Avest, I. (2007) Als Je Engels Geeft, Hoef Je Toch Ook Niet Engels Te Zijn?’ Havo-4 Leerlingen Aan Het Woord Over Godsdienst Op School. *Narthex*, 7 (5), 21–29.
- Budak, B., Bakker, C. and ter Avest, I. (2018) Identity Development of the Two First Islamic Primary Schools in the Netherlands. In: Berglund, J. (ed.). *European Perspectives on Islamic Education and Public Schooling*. Sheffield/Bristol, Equinox, pp. 78–104.
- CBS (2015) *Religieuze betrokkenheid; persoonskenmerken*. Available from: <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/82904NED/table?ts=1574859418114> [Accessed 15 April 2020].
- Davidson, M.A., den Ouden, J., Visser, T. and Lammers, M. (2017) Religie En Levensbeschouwing: Rationale Voor Een Kerncurriculum Vo. *Narthex*, 17 (1), 17–26. DOI:.
- Davidson, M.A. (2020) Voorstel basiscurriculum Levensbeschouwing en Religie. *Narthex* (december 2020), 15–26.

- De Hart, J. (2014) *Geloven Binnen En Buiten Verband. Godsdienstige Ontwikkelingen in Nederland*. Den Haag, SCP.
- El Bouayadi-van de Wetering, S. and Miedema, S. (eds.) (2012) *Reaching for the Sky. Religious Education from Christian and Islamic Perspectives*. Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi.
- Franken, L. and Vermeer, P. (2018). Deconfessionalising RE in Pillarized Education System: a Case Study of Belgium and the Netherlands. *British Journal of Religious Education* 41 (3), 272–285. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2017.1405792>
- Hamdi, A., Pels, T. and el, S. (2017) *Informeel Islamitisch Onderwijs in Amsterdam-West*. Utrecht, Verwey-Jonker Instituut.
- Mentink, D., Vermeulen, D.P. and Zootjes, P.J.J. (no date) *Wetenschappelijk commentaarop artikel 23*. Available from: <https://www.nederlandrechtsstaat.nl/module/nlrs/script/viewer.asp?soort=commentaar&artikel=23> [Accessed 15 April 2020].
- Onderwijsraad (2012) *Artikel 23 Grondwet in maatschappelijk perspectief. Nieuwe richtingen aan de vrijheid van onderwijs. Advies*. Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.
- Onderwijsraad (2015) *Wetsvoorstel Samenwerkingsscholen*. Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.
- Onderwijsraad (2018) *Curriculumontwikkeling. Advies*. Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.
- Pew Research Center (2017) *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*. Available from: <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/> [Accessed 15 April 2020].
- Schmeets, H. (2016) *De Religieuze Kaart Van Nederland*. Den Haag, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.
- Schwarzenau, P. and Kirste, R. (1995) *Interreligieuze Schule – Ein Vorbild Aus Den Niederlanden*. Iserlohn, Iserlohner Con-Texte Nr. 1 (IC 13).
- Skeie, G. (2009) Power to the People! Dialogue and Conflict in the Light of Classroom Interaction Studies. In: ter Avest, I., Jozsa, D.-P., Knauth, Th., Roson, J. and Skeie, G. (eds.). *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion. Studies of Classroom Interaction in European Countries*. Münster, Waxmann, pp. 249–275.
- ter Avest, I. (2003) *Kinderen En God, Verteld in Verhalen*. PhD Study, Utrecht University. Zoetermeer, Boekencentrum.
- ter Avest, I. (2009) Dutch Children and Their ‘God’: the Development of the ‘God’ Concept Among Indigenous and Immigrant Children in the Netherlands. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 31 (3), 251–262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200903112425>
- ter Avest, I. (2018) *Faith Traditions in Interreligious Education – Normative Citizenship Education Avant La Lettre*. Contribution to Conference ‘Migration, Integration and Early Childhood Education’, Zagreb, November 23–25.
- ter Avest, I. and Bakker, C. (2017a) RE Rooted in Principal’s Biography. *Religion and Education*, 44 (1), 5–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2016.1267542>
- ter Avest, I. and Bakker, C. (2017b) “Komt een moslima bij de directeur ....” – Omgaan met ‘de ander’ in christelijk basisonderwijs ‘Op Zuid’. In: van den Berg, B. and Mulder, A. (eds.). *Leren Van Betekenis – Dialogisch Levensbeschouwelijk Onderwijs Op Negen Basisscholen*. Utrecht, Marnix Academie, pp. 132–148.
- ter Avest, I., Bakker, C., Bertram-Troost, G.D. and Miedema, S. (2007) Religion and Education in the Dutch Pillarized and Post-Pillarized Educational System: Historical Background and Current Debates. In: Jackson, R., Miedema, S., Weisse, W. and Willaime, J.-P. (eds.). *Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts and Debates*. Münster, Waxmann, pp. 203–220.



- ter Avest, I., Bertram-Troost, G.D. and Miedema, S. (2013). Parents Coming Out Religiously. Secular and Religious Reasons for Their Choice of a Primary School. In: Huffaker, L. (ed.). *Coming Out Religiously! Religion, the Public Sphere and Religious Identity Formation. 2013 Proceedings of REA/APPRRE* (pp. 1–6). REA/APPRRE, Boston.
- ter Avest, I., Bertram-Troost, G.D. and Miedema, S. (2015) “If It Feels Good...”: Research on School Selection Process Motives Among Parents of Young Children. *Religion & Education*, 42 (3), 357–367. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2015.1041357>
- ter Avest, I. and Bakker, C. (2017c) Religious Education in the Netherlands. *RE Today*, 34 (2), 56–59.
- ter Avest, I. and Miedema, S. (2010) Noodzaak tot re-contextualisering van onderwijsvrijheid vanuit (godsdienst-)pedagogisch perspectief. *Tijdschrift voor onderwijsrecht en onderwijsbeleid* 22 (1–2), 77–88.
- Ucan, A.D. (2020) *Improving the Pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in Secondary Schools. The Role of Critical Religious Education and Variation Theory*. PhD Study. New York, Routledge.
- Van Sasse van Ysselt, P. (2013) Financiële Verhoudingen Tussen Overheid, Kerk En Religieuze Organisaties. *Tijdschrift voor Recht, Religie en Beleid*, 1, 65–86.
- Veugelers (2015) *Burgerschapsvorming in Het Nederlands Onderwijs*. Enschede, SLO.
- Veugelers, W. (2019) Education for Democratic Inclusive Citizenship (EDIC). In: Veugelers, W. (ed.). *Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship*. Leiden/Boston, Brill Sense, pp. 1–13.
- Veugelers, W. and Oostdijk, E. (2013) Humanistische Levensbeschouwelijke Vorming. Levensbeschouwelijke Vorming in Het Nederlands Openbaar Onderwijs, in Het Bijzonder HVO. *Pedagogiek*, 33 (2), 136–152. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5117/PED2013.2.VEUG>
- Visser, T. (2017) Op Weg Naar Een Kennisbasis Van Lerarenopleiders Godsdienst-Levensbeschouwing. *Narhex*, 17 (1), 47–62.
- Visser, T., Praamsma, J. M., van Dijk-Groeneboer, M., Davidsen, M. and de Beer, T. (2018) Het Expertisecentrum Levensbeschouwing En Religie in Het Voortgezet Onderwijs. *Narhex*, 18 (4), 24–37.