

Article

Hospitable Education—Interreligious Education Revisited

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Abstract: In the past, the Netherlands took on the form of a pillarized society, with three ‘pillars’ (Catholic, Protestant and liberal) ‘living apart together’. Each pillar came with its own education system, health care, and newspapers. In the 1980s, a fourth ‘pillar’ was added: the Islamic pillar. During the same period at the end of the 20th century, a model was developed at one of the country’s primary schools—the Juliana van Stolberg school—for the inclusive interreligious education of all pupils, irrespective of the (religious or secular) life orientation of their parents. This innovative educational process became the object of research. Literature reviews on (inter)religious education were complemented by *qualitative interviews* with the school’s principal and supplemented with *historical research* of the school’s filing cabinet kept in the city archives. I conclude that by revisiting the process and the developed model of inclusive interreligious education, its implementation in all schools is possible, provided that the latest insights are taken into account about leadership, biblical and qur’anic hermeneutics and the position of parents in the pedagogic civil society. For such an adapted model, I introduce the concept of *hospitable* education—hospitality as a competence, which connects knowledge, affective attitudes and skills.

Keywords: interreligious education; innovation in education; model of/for (inter)religious education; mutuality of hospitality



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1. Introduction

In the 1950s, at the height of pillarization, the Dutch education system showed itself in three (secularized) religion-related pillars: a Protestant, a Roman Catholic and a secular/liberal pillar. In the 1980s, in a Christian primary school, an innovative model of interreligious education was developed. Various causes put an end to this experiment in 2001. The 20-year process of innovation, the ‘biography’ of a model of and for interreligious education, is the case studied in this qualitative research project, consisting of a literature review, document analysis, participant observation and a semi-structured interview. A sketch of the process of innovation, a historic–pedagogical reflection thereof and mirrored against actual knowledge about leadership, hermeneutics and parental involvement are the subject of this contribution.

To fully be(come) aware of and understand the momentous significance of the experience of the intended innovation, I first contextualise this innovative process in the Dutch pillarized society of the 1980s, with a focus on a ‘disruptive moment’: the arrival of children of guestworkers in Dutch schools and, more specifically, of Muslim children in a single Christian primary school—a moving moment, literally and metaphorically. In the second section, a concrete example of a ‘good practice’ is presented: a lesson of an anonymized teacher who introduces pupils to the narrative of Manna (Exodus 16: 1–36; Surah 20: 80–82). After I have given depth to the concepts of ‘doubt’ (in Section 4) and ‘hospitality’ (in Section 5), I conclude this contribution with a recommendation for an update of interreligious education by introducing the concept of *hospitable* education—hospitality as a competence, which connects the model’s psychological and pedagogical principles of ‘knowing’, ‘exploring’ and ‘dialogizing’.

2. The Netherlands—Disruptive Moments in a Pillarized Society

In the 1950s of the 20th century, the Christian religion dominated the Netherlands, subdivided in faithful Protestants and Roman Catholics. Secularized people proclaimed themselves liberals. The Dutch society took on the form of a pillarized society with three ‘pillars’ (Catholic, Protestant and secularized/liberal) (Ter Avest et al. 2007). Each pillar came with its own education system, health care, and newspapers. Children born in Catholic or Protestant families would go to a Catholic or Protestant school. Families would surely read a suitable newspaper: Catholic (*De Volkskrant*), Protestant (*Trouw*) or liberal (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, *NRC*). Sports clubs had Catholic or Protestant boards. Illnesses were treated in Catholic or Protestant hospitals. Groceries were bought in Catholic or Protestant grocery stores. Each pillar had its own political party, choirs and other organized leisure activities. The year was structured according to Christian principles: Sunday was a day of rest, holidays followed the rhythm of the Christian liturgical year, e.g., Christmas and Easter. People lived in what today would be called their own cultural encapsulation.

In the years following World War II, the experiences of the organized resistance movements with the German occupation—movements organized along the lines of the different (religious) life orientations in the population—played a leading role in the rebuilding of the Netherlands. Compared to the preceding war years, the Dutch experienced the Netherlands as a peaceful society, wherein hard-working men (in factories) and hard-working women (in homes, taking care of children) contributed together to the rebuilding of the Dutch post-war society, notably with the help of so-called ‘guest workers’, migrant workers from countries around the Mediterranean Sea, peacefully cooperating in the workplace while ‘living apart together’ in wider society.

Pillarization continued and even intensified, peaking in the 1950s and 1960s. Leaders at the top of the pillars (mostly men!), including church leaders and leaders of political parties, held discussions on issues of local or national relevance. Men and women in the street, though, lived in the safe space of their own pillar—Protestant, Catholic or liberal. Although pillarization was already under discussion in the 1970s and 1980s, Dutch education remained—and remains—a safe stronghold for this compartmentalized system.

In hindsight, the arrival and continued presence of ‘guestworkers’ can be seen as a disruptive moment in the history of the Dutch pillarized society. In the 1970s, following family reunion processes, the children of the then (still!) so-called ‘guest workers’ were enrolled in both public and Christian (Protestant or Catholic) primary schools. While children from Spain and Italy rather easily found their way in the Dutch pillarized education system, due to the commonality in religious background, welcoming children who had been raised as Muslims in this education system raised serious questions for teachers, school leaders and boards.

As pointed out, these Muslim children were enrolled in both public and Christian primary schools. Muslim parents often prioritized Christian schools because, in the latter schools’ values, regulations and pedagogical practicalities similar to those observed in Islam were expected. Despite the earlier presence of Muslim children from the Moluccan islands—a former Dutch colony—who had come to the Netherlands with their parents because of the Moluccan struggle for independence, Islam had been invisible in the Dutch society—and thus also in schools—up to that point. In response to the new, inevitable presence of children who were socialized in a different religious tradition, a variety of ways of responding were developed by the schools.

Despite an ongoing process of secularization in Dutch society, up to the present, the Catholic, Protestant and liberal/public schools each account for about one third of the total population of primary school children. The way these schools have responded to the new, inevitable presence of children raised in a different religious tradition can be categorized in the following ways. Their responses bear traces of Paul Knitter’s view on pluralism (1986) and Michael Grimmitt’s line of thinking on religious education (RE) as teaching and learning *in, about* and *from* the other (Grimmitt 1987; Grimmitt et al. 1991) (cf. Ter Avest 2003, pp. 77–82; 2009).

In public schools, all children were, as usual, welcomed regardless of their religious background. Public schools in those days were seen as neutral schools that respect all life orientations (religious and/or secular). All children are informed *about* religion in shared classes, in a subject that is compulsory for all children in all public schools. In contrast, RE as teaching *in* religion is optional in public schools and can be arranged at the request of parents (Veugelers and Oostdijk 2013).

The Protestant and Catholic schools, without consulting each other, developed similar models of multi-religious education. Nowadays, schools holding on to their confessional tradition are called 'traditional' or 'monologue' schools. Socialization, and teaching and learning *in* their own specific confessional or religious tradition, is the pedagogical aim of these schools and, specifically, of RE classes. In traditional/monologue schools, all pupils are expected to participate in RE classes, at the very least by adopting a respectful attitude. Among these schools, those that favour encounters with people from other religious traditions are called 'encounter' schools. For these schools, teaching and learning *about* the traditions of others and becoming familiar with the family traditions of one's classmates are the pedagogical aims. Furthermore, 'Walking the way together' is a model of shared RE developed in those schools where the equality/parity of different religious traditions takes centre stage. Knowing *about* the other is paired with the sharing of commonalities between, and the discussing of differences between, religious traditions, symbols and narratives.

In the late 1980s, Muslim parents in the Netherlands, who had gradually become familiar with their host country's constitutional freedom of religion and education (article 23 of the Dutch Constitution) (Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 2018), inquired about the possibility of their children receiving Islamic RE during school hours, similar to how Christian RE was already provided to native children during those school hours. Groups of Islamic parents in Rotterdam and Eindhoven, worrying about the religious education of their children, were confronted with a negative attitude from a principal of a Christian school. This principal was of the opinion that Muslim parents who persisted in their wish for Islamic RE for their children should found their own school (Budak 2021). That is precisely what these Turkish and Moroccan parents ended up doing in both cities, in 1989. In this way, the Netherlands—on its way to becoming a post-pillarized superdiverse society—was enriched with a fourth 'pillar': the Islamic pillar (Meijer 2006; Budak 2021; Taspinar and Bouimj 2023).

At the same time, another group of Muslim parents in Ede, a small town in the Dutch 'Bible Belt'—in a district populated by orthodox Protestant Christians—had a similar concern. Together with the principal of the Protestant Juliana van Stolberg primary school—a small school in a deprived area with 150 pupils in the end of the 1980s, with a decreasing number of students over the years but a growing number of children with a migrant background—Muslim parents in Ede too explored the possibility of Islamic RE classes during school hours. However, this did not go without deep disagreements and different hermeneutic interpretations of the biblical command to love your neighbour. In the next section, the reader is invited to visit such an experimental RE class at the initial stage of the innovative process from Protestant RE to Interreligious RE of the then Protestant Juliana van Stolberg primary school.

3. Interreligious Education

Below, we immerse ourselves in an example of an interreligious education class, an 'example of good practice'—a compilation of observations and teachers' lesson plans: A Monday morning in November. Primary school teacher Hella, who teaches the lower grades, stands at the entrance of her classroom. She welcomes the children with a smile and says something nice to each child; she picks a question or comment specifically for each child. 'Every child matters!' Some of her pupils were baptized in a church, others had the first Surah whispered in their ear at birth, and still others have no family rituals or knowledge of religion. For all of Hella's students, 'being different is just normal'.

Miss Hella can't suppress a smile when she sees Mehmet hopping towards her as usual. She asks Rabia a question—her grandmother passed away a few days ago, and everything is being prepared for the funeral in Morocco. She reminds Vincent of the note for the parents' evening: does he have it with him today?

Once in the classroom, the children—chatting, giggling and playing around—take their chairs and form a circle.

When all the pupils are seated, the buzz turns into silence. The children patiently wait for their teacher to take her place in the circle with her own chair. Miss Hella looks around and opens the group conversation with the question: 'What did you get today as a snack and for lunch, and who took care of it?'

All the pupils pick up their boxes, except Vincent. He did not bring a box with him. The contents of the boxes are placed on a table in the middle of the circle, and make up a wide variety of snacks: gingerbread, bread with cheese, pasta, fruit, a carton of apple juice, a cup of yoghurt. The conversation revolves around such questions as 'What makes a snack a tasty snack, and what makes it a healthy snack?', 'Where does your snack come from, and who prepared it for you to take to school?', and the ultimate question: 'Who takes care of you?'

This last question is the prelude to a story. This time Miss Hella tells a story from the religious traditions. The story of God's care for daily bread: the Manna narrative (Exodus 16: 1–36; Surah 20: 80–82). She ends the story in the following way 'Every day God provided enough food for all the people. In the same way, your father/mother/aunt/... provides enough food for you every day, and we take care of each other when your father/mother/aunt/... hasn't been able to provide anything, like today for Vincent.'

In the middle and upper grades, the day also starts with a group discussion, likewise followed by the Manna story.

While for the youngest pupils the focus rests on 'good caretaking' (by mother/father/aunt/...) and 'caring for each other', in the middle grades the emphasis is on 'ensuring enough food for everyone'. This topic will be explored further in various lessons during the week.

After the group discussion, the pupils of the upper grades read both texts aloud: the Manna narrative as written down in the Bible and the Qur'an. Together, they investigate the differences between the ways in which these narratives have been passed down through the ages, and they end up by discovering similarities. Through dialogue, the pupils explore the meaning(s) of these texts there and then, and here and now. (in: [Ter Avest 2024](#), pp. 8–10)

Is this an example of a teacher's wishful thinking, a commentary on a radicalizing and polarizing Dutch society, an example of a student's thesis on 'My dream school'?

No! This is an example of RE classes in the 1980s, more specifically of RE classes taught in the Juliana van Stolberg Christian primary school, which honoured the slogan 'Every child matters', including the child's family background and religious upbringing. Shared RE classes, the sharing of ordinary daily experiences and their relationship with core concepts of religious traditions addressed the religious traditions *in plural* in the school's diverse pupil population. The development of a model for interreligious education was a work in progress for the teachers of the Juliana van Stolberg primary school. This development was supported by different scholars and by local religious leaders and motivated by the inspiring charismatic leadership of the school's principal, Bart ten Broek.

Characteristic for this model is the choice the principal and the teachers made for a restricted number of overarching themes, with age-related topics in the classroom which were developed at three levels (young children, middle group and oldest students) in line with their psychological and religious development (Figure 1). Following this educational model, every week started with a joint weekly opening. All the children gathered in

the school hall for this. The principal—or one of the teachers—told a story, and a song would be sung, or a poem would be read, as an introduction to the topic of the week, part of a larger theme. Then, in the separate Christian and Islamic RE classes, divided by age groups, this theme was discussed and further developed from the Christian or Islamic tradition, respectively. The elaboration of the theme in topics was adjusted to the psychological–religious development of the respective age groups.

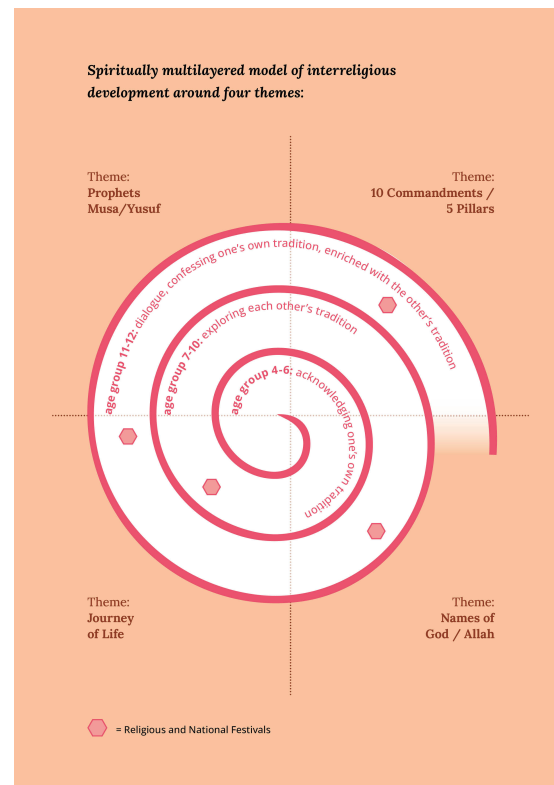


Figure 1. Model of interreligious development around four themes, developed at the Juliana van Stolberg primary school 1980–2001.

The Christian RE classes were provided by each pupil's group class teacher, while one of the Islamic teachers gave Islamic RE lessons in the lower grades, and a Turkish imam and a Moroccan father taught the classes in the upper grades. Narratives from the Bible and the Qur'an were told or read aloud, tailored to the age of the pupils. Reflective stories came from children's literature. These separate RE classes were intended to deepen the socialization process at home. Knowledge transfer was seen as central.

In the so-called encounter/recognition RE classes, the Christian and Islamic pupils were brought together in a single class group again. During these classes, 'disruptive moments' were introduced by articulating the similar and different approaches of the Christian and Islamic traditions, and experiences were exchanged between the pupils, a contribution to their religious literacy and by consequence to their religious development. The aim of these lessons was to arouse curiosity, to encourage question asking and practicing the skills of dialogicality (Jetten 2018). Learning from and with each other characterized the educational process in these lessons. In these 'encounter/recognition' RE classes, the teachers encouraged their pupils to enter into a dialogue. In this way, they fulfilled their pedagogical mission.

At the end of each week, during the joint weekly closing, groups of pupils took turns taking the other pupils through their experiences with that week's theme.

To do justice to the C—the Christian starting position of the Juliana van Stolberg school—in the dialogue between pupils, the teaching materials developed for this then-innovative RE model emphasized, in a first step, knowledge *of* and experience *in* the

tradition handed down from home, in other words, in the first place—the Juliana van Stolberg primary school being a Christian school—learning about one’s own Christian tradition. Due to the empathic understanding of the importance of parents’ religious upbringing at home, Muslim pupils learned *about* the Islamic tradition and its effect-laden experiences.

In a second step, pupils listened to what their classmates said about their tradition and how they experienced it (lessons *about* the other tradition). In a classroom conversation, pupils subsequently explored the other’s otherness together (‘encounter/recognition’ classes); they learned to recognize the fundamental difference of the other. In these so-called ‘encounter/recognition’ RE classes, pupils learned to look at their own tradition with different eyes. This might create a discomforting moment and the beginning of doubt, culminating in confessing one’s own tradition enriched with elements from the other’s tradition. In the next section, a closer look at the concept of doubt is presented to understand the need for the competence of dialogicality in the encounter with different faith commitments.

Discourse analysis was the main qualitative research method used to analyse the data. Among the documents analysed were (a) written observations of classroom conversations, (b) reports of team meetings and meetings of the parents’ council and the board of the school and (c) interviews with the principal at the time. Following a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis (Montesano Montessori et al. 2012), the focus was on a close reading of these documents in terms of power relations. Emotional statements were included in the study, particularly in connection with (shared or contradictory) religious values and rules and the existence of a dialogical space in the school context.

4. In Praise of Doubt

Peter Berger and Anton Zijderfeld embrace doubt as a facilitator to overcome relativism on the one side and fundamentalism on the other (Berger and Zijderfeld 2009). The central stake of doubt is ‘whether something or someone is reliable, trustworthy, and meaningful—that is, whether something or someone is “true”’ (Berger and Zijderfeld 2009, p. 105). Doubt and (the search for) truth are two sides of the same coin. Berger and Zijderfeld’s starting points are the certainties, values and norms taken for granted in cultures and their institutions (like church, school and family), which are transmitted to the new generation in the form of tradition(s). They argue that, in this age of globalization and migration, many people are socialized in more than one culture and influenced by more than one institution, let alone the institutions of ‘family’ and ‘school’. A plurality of truths is a given today, challenging people to make their own choices and construct an unexchangeable unique position amidst a wealth of life orientations, which may result in a hybrid, patchwork (religious) identity. In fact, Berger and Zijderfeld state, ‘the supermarket can be taken as a metaphor of a fully pluralized society’ (ibid., p. 94). Confronted with the ever-increasing supply of religious, secular and gender-related life orientation positionings, some people may incline towards ‘a radical return to premodern certainties’, while others tend towards a ‘radical celebration of allegedly postmodern contingencies, which are propagated as a relativism in which (morally) “anything goes”’ (ibid., p. 94). In the confrontation with such opposites, according to Berger and Zijderfeld, doubt facilitates the exploration of a possible middle position. Preconditional here is the deferment of judgment and prejudice. In a dialogical space, people should feel invited to make a closer investigation and, consequently, must be enabled to distinguish between institutional and personal positionings regarding core and marginal components of involved traditions. For example, fasting is a core (institutional) component of Islam but only a marginal aspect of Christianity. Dialogue participants must be prepared to open themselves up for a modern exegesis of biblical and qur’anic texts.

In ‘The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue’ (Cornille 2008), Catherine Cornille elaborates upon five aspects as a *sine qua non* for dialogue. First of all, people entering the dialogue should be committed to their own (religious or secular) life orientation and, secondly,

be prepared to open up to the other's world view. In the third place, they should be willing to explore shared narratives and rituals. For this "experiment in empathy", as this is called by Peace (2020), next to empathic willingness, in the fourth place, an explorative attitude is needed as well as imagination. Cornille mentions hospitality as the fifth and last but certainly not the least. Beyond doubt as a negative stance towards the 'truth' of one's own tradition, which evokes anxiety and withdrawal in premodern attitudes, there is curiosity and wonderment—embedded in a relationship of brotherhood/sisterhood—which paves the way to reciprocal hospitality. As an accompanying component, curiosity, together with imagination, provides a good beginning for the creation of new knowledge, rooted in one's own tradition and inspired by the other tradition. Cornille concludes her analysis by stating that "rather than a matter of possibility or impossibility [of interreligious dialogue], the capacity for dialogue is thus itself a process, involving, indeed calling for, continuous critical self-examination and a creative retrieval of resources that may open the tradition to the religious other and to growth in truth" (Cornille 2008, p. 216; see also Peace 2020). This brings us to the competence of being a guest and a host—the capacity to be both by taking turns. Hospitality shows itself here as a disruptive moment in one's own faithful positioning, eventually resulting in the competence of *hospitality*. On this learning path, pupils learn *with* and *from* each other and are enabled to confess their own ever-developing beliefs. Let us have a closer look at being or hosting a guest as crucial aspects of living *in* difference (without becoming indifferent).

5. Being or Hosting a Guest—Is That the Question?

In the design of this educational experiment, the stakeholders in the Juliana van Stolberg school at the time, i.e., the school board and the teacher team, relied on one of the core concepts of the Christian tradition for their defence of this innovative project: hospitality. In substantiating their position, this reference to hospitality was unpacked: 'Love the stranger, for remember that you yourself were a stranger in Egypt' (Poorthuis 2007, p. 48; Leviticus 19: 34, in: Bijbelstichting and Bijbelstichting 1975, see also The New English Bible 1970). The school's principal stated¹: 'When the children of migrants/guestworkers enter the school for the first time, the principle of hospitality is honoured'. 'The Christian school in particular can see it as an essential approach to the foreigner, who is entitled to hospitality within our 'gates'. 'In the Christian tradition, the concept of hospitality is associated with being the 'other', the stranger. In the Bible book of Exodus, the book describing the exodus from slavery in Egypt, hospitality sounds like this: "Love the stranger, for you were a stranger in Egypt" (Exodus 23: 9). Here, the motivation for hospitality is rooted in a people's own experience of being the 'other'.

Abraham/Ibrahim, the patriarch of the monotheistic religions, who had to leave his country, also experienced what it was like to be a foreigner. Abraham is presented as an exceptionally hospitable person. The story goes that when he was in prayer, he interrupted his prayer to give food to strangers. He even allows hospitality to interrupt his conversation with God, breaking open that extremely intimate moment to be available for the needs of another.

Being of service to others is seen as a service to God in the monotheistic religions. In the Bible's Book of Matthew (25: 42–44), we read how Jesus reproaches sinners:

'I was hungry and you gave me no food (. . .), I was a stranger and you did not welcome me (. . .)' Then they answered: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger. . . and did not minister to you?'

In this Bible passage it turns out that the righteous, however, took being in service to others for granted; they were not even aware that they were doing it. At the right moment they did the right thing for their fellow humans, and they did it freely.

In Islam, hospitality is praised as a virtue. Hospitality is associated with the call 'Command what is right, reject what is wrong, and believe in God.' Practicing hospitality is equivalent to doing what is right—decent behaviour, as was the custom in the Arab world in which the Qur'an was received. In Surah 4: 36 (Leemhuis 1990), hospitality seems to be identified with being fair in daily life:

And be kind to parents, and also to the relative, the orphan, the needy, the related neighbour, the unrelated neighbour, the unrelated fellow citizen, the one on the way, and the slaves in your possession.

The tradition in the *hadith* states that hospitality and accepting hospitality are one of the obligations that fall under the righteous actions. In the *hadith*, hospitality comes across as a reciprocal concept, offering and accepting hospitality as two sides of the same coin. The *hadith* also indicates the limits of hospitality. The guest may not be a burden to the host(ess).

The complexity of the boundaries of hospitality is expressed in different terms in the two traditions. In the Hasidic tradition, passed on in Christianity, it sounds like this:

Abraham had an old man for dinner and afterwards asked him to bless the Creator. 'You don't have to thank me,' Abraham said piously, 'but you do have to thank the Creator.' But the old man replied: 'I can thank you for what you have done, but what is the Creator to me?' Abraham got angry and asked the man to leave immediately. But that night he heard a voice: 'Abraham, Abraham, I have been working with this man for more than seventy years. Can't you bear him for a day?' (In: Shmoeël Avidor Hacoheh 1979)

In the Islamic tradition, it is narrated in the following way:

A follower of the Zoroastrian religion asked the prophet Ibrahim for hospitality. Ibrahim replied to him, 'I will host you on the condition that you become a Muslim.' The Zoroastrian refused and left. Then God revealed to Ibrahim, 'For fifty years I have provided for him despite his disbelief. Will you not even give him a piece of bread unless he repents?' Ibrahim went after the Zoroastrian and apologized. When the Zoroastrian asked Ibrahim why he had changed his mind, Ibrahim told him what had happened to him. The Zoroastrian then converted to the true faith. (From: Prophet Ibrahim and the Magian)²

Hospitality based on one's own experiences and hospitality that can be learned from examples of hospitality are two sides of the same coin. Hosting a guest and being a guest are two sides of the same medal. It is not a question of either/or; it is a matter of taking turns in being and hosting a guest, in a reciprocal process—a dream too good to be true or to come true? How does this stimulate thinking about a type of education in which 'every child matters' and every child is given the opportunities they need to come 'into the world?' How can hospitable education be facilitated?

In the final section, below, I reflect on this innovative process, this experiment from Christian to Interreligious RE, a process that came to an end in 2001, and come to recommendations regarding the implementation of an adapted version of the developed model of what I coin as hospitable education.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Encountering others with an open mind, even though they are different in a unique and radical way, and their very presence is initially disturbing—the willingness to open the doors of your house and the blinds of your mind for the other, without requiring something in return (Poorthuis 2007, p. 38 ff). Interestingly, extending hospitality to and receiving 'the other' in your house presuppose that you feel at home in your own house. This is why Muslim parents in the 1980s asked about the possibility for their children to receive Islamic RE, so that their children would be made to feel at home in their Islamic tradition, just as Christian children were already made to feel at home in their Christian tradition.

The teachers of the Juliana van Stolberg school—experts in education—hosted the children's parents/caretakers in the world of education, just as they hosted the children in their roles of 'pupils' and 'classmates'. Parents were welcomed as guests in the 'house' of the school and, consequently, felt at home there. The other way around, the parents—experts in the loving caretaking of their children—also hosted the teachers. They did this literally by inviting them for a visit at their homes and metaphorically by telling them stories about their children

in their family roles of ‘sons/daughters of’ and ‘brothers/sisters of’. In this way, the teachers came to feel at home in their pupils’ families.

Hospitality practiced in this way can be described as the unbiased welcoming of the stranger/strangeness into your own unique home, without seeking to assimilate this other to your own values and regulations. On the contrary, it is the act of making space for the other’s non-exchangeable uniqueness (cf. *ibid.*, p. 42). Knowing how to live in your own house, knowing yourself, and, at the same time, recognizing the radical difference between you and the other, are two sides of the coin of hospitality.

Freedom of religion and education, as central to the Dutch Constitution, cannot but open up the space for this kind of reciprocal hospitality: shared education, creating a living for natives and strangers alike. Modelling hospitable education—for teachers and parents alike—creates a space in which all pupils, whatever their cultural, family or religious background, become familiar with being hosts and being guests. They learn how to present themselves as a present, a gift to the other, and how to open themselves for the present, the gift of the other. This is the gift of hospitality. In a dialogical and safe school context, pupils learn about—and experience the ups and downs of—the dynamics of being a host to their classmates with a different (cultural and religious) background, those ‘familiar strangers’, just as they learn about being a guest in a hitherto unfamiliar/relatively unknown context.

In a variety of ways, the conviction can be put into practice that children have a right to the opportunities they need to develop in such a way that they can ‘come into the world’ in their own way, see a task for themselves, and can and want to take responsibility for their task in the world. However, practice at the Juliana van Stolberg school has proven to fall short of its aims. In hindsight and with today’s knowledge, there were quite a few bumps in the road of innovation.

In the principal of the school, Muslim parents met a committed faithful Christian believer, fully aware of the importance of religion in a person’s life and a born charismatic leader. In the pioneering phase of the innovative development, this charismatic leader succeeded to convince all his team members of the urge to open up their minds and welcome ‘the other’. For this, he referred to the familiar biblical narrative, the key story of hospitality summarized in the following:

“The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”. (Lev.19:34)

The search from a Christian perspective for commonalities in biblical and qur’anic stories and their hermeneutics was still in its infancy. Related ideas from an Islamic perspective of Beyza Bilgin (2007), Jeff Astley et al. (2011) and Mualla Selçuk (2012, 2018) were ‘under construction’.

Charismatic leadership was successful in the pioneering phase of interreligious education but insufficient in the implementation of the model in the Dutch education system. Shared leadership and dialogical leadership had yet to be born (Van Loon and Buster 2019). The same holds for the developments regarding (migrant) parents’ participation in education. Not only the poor mastery of the Dutch language of the first-generation Muslim ‘guest workers’ was a hindrance for inclusive staff councils and, even more so, the unfamiliarity from both sides of forming, what these days, is coined as the pedagogic civil society with its slogan ‘it needs a village to raise a child’ (Kesselring 2017; Kesselring et al. 2015). Despite these bumps in the road of innovation, the dreams of the principal and his team were in the making in RE classes from the 1980s onwards.

Notwithstanding this unruliness, a model like the one developed at the Juliana van Stolberg school can facilitate living *in* diversity, provided that this two-sided hospitality is supported by dialogical shared leadership and can be practiced in a professional manner by all team members, well aware of their own positionality regarding (religious and secular) world-view traditions and supported by an open empathic attitude towards the other. Last but not least is the commitment needed of all those involved in the pedagogic civil society—parents in the first place, as well as youth club leaders and sports trainers. The decisive factor is *reciprocal hospitality*, practiced by individual teachers in their classes together with their pupils, so that

all pupils can learn to value the radical difference between themselves and others and that they can contribute to society as hospitable hosts and guests, now and in the future.

Revisiting the experiment of inclusive interreligious education opens a space in plural societies for all people committed to the education and *Bildung* of the new generation. It serves as an encouragement to learn *from* and *with* each other in future processes of the ongoing interreligious adventure to be unfolded in classrooms and pedagogic civil societies, giving rise to shared dialogical hospitable education for all.

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Notes

- ¹ Section 5 is based on the ‘biography’ of the development of the concept of interreligious education at the Juliana van Stolberg primary school, as it took shape in the 1980s (Ter Avest 2024).
- ² https://www.islamicity.org/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=32133&title=prophet-ibrahim-and-the-magian; accessed on 22 July 2024.

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