

Teaching Islam within a Diverse Society (Taaruf)

Mualla SELÇUK



Prof. Dr. Mualla SELÇUK

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(TAARUF)**

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To my students ...

About the Book...

"Teaching Islam within a Diverse Society' offers a view on Mualla Selçuk's line of thought on Islamic Religious Education (IRE) over the past 20 years. Theoretical concepts are unlocked by Selçuk and brought under the umbrella of the Conceptual Clarity model. This publication stimulates teachers' professional development and laymen's enthusiasm for interreligious encounter. A must for all longing for peacefully living together— Muslims and non-Muslims, in Turkey and abroad."

**K.H. (Ina) ter Avest,
Prof. Philosophy of Life, and Independent Researcher , Netherlands**

"In this collection of essays, we encounter a constellation of lived theory—praxiologically tested discourse—proffering theological, theoretical, pedagogical, humanistic, imagistic and imaginative roots that would firmly ground a progressive vision for the teaching of Islam, and, by implicit invitation, for any approach to religious and interreligious education. Infused through the pages are ideas, memories, metaphors, imageries, and lessons reflecting influences of one scholar-educator's life encounters through one-and-a-half decades. Behind these pages is a genuine human being—a soulful, humble, resilient ruminator who deeply believes that transformative religious education facilitates profound encounters between self, the other, and dynamic scripturalized traditions. Her organizing concept of ta'aruf is more than an enlightened celebration of difference; rather, it is a fierce exposition of how divinely created difference presents an irresistible force that draws humans together for mutual knowing, understanding, and caring. And good religious education animates such spiritual magnetism. Dr. Mualla Selçuk has presented a call to higher theo-ethico-pedagogical vision for religious scholars, educators, and communities seeking to advance dialogic coexistence and principled solidarity amid plurality."

**Mai-Anh Le Tran,
Vice President for Academic Affairs & Academic Dean
Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, USA**

"Learning in encounter' is the basic principle for every form of education, according to Mualla SELÇUK. Especially in the field of religious and non-religious worldview education this should be the case. Children and young people should be offered the opportunity to think about existential questions, based on their own assumptions and those of others. In this book the author re-considers the educational aims, concepts and methods for these kind of learning processes from her own religious background and engages in an interesting conversation with her students, colleagues, fellow researchers and the readers of this book, to which no one of them can remain uninvolved."

Bert Roebben,
Professor of Religious Education at Bonn University (Germany) and
Former President of the Religious Education Association.

"This unusual book is at the same time inspiring and uncomfortable, accessible and challenging, practical and deeply intellectual. The language at times verges on poetry; storytelling and metaphor live here. The insights offered can cause a reader to stop in his or her tracks to say, "Oh, yes!" The practical wisdom offered for teachers and teacher educators is rich, deep and, well, practical. Dr. Selçuk, a major figure in religious and interfaith education, has achieved something remarkable. She has written a book about Islamic education in Turkey that is universal in its language, implications and applications. Her commitment to interfaith learning and connection is embedded in every chapter. In fact, this is a guide to how we can, through religious education, both enter into our own faith traditions and learn how to live together with all our brothers and sisters in this troubled world. Coming from the Jewish tradition, I could take every chapter of this many layered book and, with minor changes in content, adapt it as a book for Jewish educators and those who teach them. I learned from every chapter, and I have little doubt that our Christian colleagues, and those from other faiths, will feel the same. Basing examples in Qur'anic concepts, Dr. Selçuk reaches out to every religious educator interested in deepening students' connection to their own faiths and enhancing understanding of the universal connections between all of God's children."

Deborah Court,
Associate Professor, School of Education, Bar-Ilan University,
Israel

FOREWORD

Teaching religion is quite challenging in diverse societies. Every nation prefers different models to deal with religious education at schools. This book provides a unique style of teaching Islam, which reflects the author's rich and comprehensive experience from different positions during her career such as Member of High Commission in Department of Religious Affairs, the Head of General Directorate of Religious Education, The Dean of The Divinity School, the first Muslim President of the Religious Education Association (REA), and many other national and international positions. It contains the original articles dealing with such current topics as diversity, prejudice, fundamentalism, and xenophobia in the twenty first century and seeks solutions to them through the lens of the proper religious education in order to promote "the culture of living together in peace." As a religious educator, I have encouraged my students to read these studies in my lectures to broaden their worldview of inclusive religious education; feedbacks and reflections from local and foreign students are quite valuable.

The key concept of the book is "encounter" (*ta'āruf* in Arabic) in the author's own term. She borrows this term from the verse of the Quran (49:13) and asks the fundamental question: How does Islam see others? She gives the answer by referencing the Quran itself: God created us to know each other and learn from one another, and thus diversity is God's intention and a gift from Him. With this perspective, the book reminds us that every individual is both "self" and "other" at the same time, and encourages us to meet both aspects. While reading this book, you will see that you have a deep and deliberate dialog with yourself and the people around you. It will also help you understand your theological perspectives against "other" and establish an appropriate relationship with your religion and that of "other".

Respect is another main concept in this book. Placing the respect at the center of the term encounter, the book engages in the question of how one may show respect to herself or himself and others around the concepts of freedom, culture and cultural heritage, and morality. It also offers explanations to the role of schools and religious education in "living together in peace" with respect.

The book gives the idea that how Religious Education can contribute to the democratic culture. In this context, it examines the role of the Islamic pedagogy and the basic message of Islam to each individual. It proposes the significance of theological and educational foundation for developing interfaith aspects in Religious education. On the other hand, it warns us about the challenges and difficulties of religious education for everyone in a diverse society.

The author uses a metaphorical language to deal with the topics related to Religious education. Through the author's insight and experiences, readers are guided to communicate with their theological foundations and cultural heritage. The book defines *jihād* (holy war) with theological references and asks this crucial

question: how could a religion of peace become associated with violence? In this context, it invites readers to think about the meaning of Islam as peace and to practice religious education from this perspective.

This book is not only for Religious educators, academics of religious studies or teachers, but also for those who seek for methods which address the problem of how Islam and other religions can be taught in the modern times. It is not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslims to learn about Islamic Pedagogy from Turkish experience and knowledge.

I strongly recommend this book due to its original ideas about current challenges in Islamic education in present-day Turkey, and its quality stemming from the deep knowledge, insight, and experience of the author who is a distinguished scholar in Islamic theology and religious education.

Yıldız KIZILABDULLAH, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Religious Education,
Divinity School, Ankara University, Turkey

PREFACE

When interreligious education works well, it touches the heart and the mind of the individuals to understand the ways in which our faith relates to life and creates meaning. Recognizing diversity as a part of our everyday reality, interreligious education starts with the premise that diversity is richness and contributes to the process of becoming fully human as well. Interreligious education can contribute also to an understanding that a peaceful co-existing is only possible if we treat each other humanly. In the process of achieving such an education differences in religion race, gender and in ways of life are not reasons for exclusion but they are means to a meaningful understanding of self and others.

Of course, interreligious education is an academic discipline with its own theories, methodologies and approaches. Be mono-religious or interreligious the aspect of religious education itself has always been an interdisciplinary enterprise situated both on religion and education. Much important work is already being carried in the field today. These works allow discussions of various issues that rise in a diverse society and provide insight for inclusion and harmony. In these scholarly works interreligious education is accompanied by some other neighboring concepts such as inter-faith, multi-religious, multi-cultural, or intercultural education. Which concepts are used; we generally see six strategies in action in terms of why people want to know about other religions? (Court and Seymour, 2015).

1. Learning for purposes of contrast: Learning about another religious tradition to distinguish ourselves or for apologetic purposes.
2. Learning about: Learning about another religious tradition for purposes of understanding and interacting because we live in a shared world together.
3. Learning from: Learning from another tradition about the ways all of us as religious people share procedures, understandings and even histories.
4. Learning with: Learning about another's tradition and commitments so we can work in partnership on common projects for the common good.
5. Learning to deepen my own faith: Learning from another tradition with the purpose of deepening my own connection to God, to religious identity, to faithfulness.
6. Learning for spiritual growth: Moving from personal spiritual growth to seeking and recognizing shared connection and insights about creation, community and future.

While these categories show different reasons for learning about other religions, they at the same time represent different kind of learning about our own religion and faith. Some ways of learning seem more restrictive and some are more open. Behind all these there is a picture of human being in encounter. Encounter is about exchange, interaction, and confrontation that makes people feel challenged in their religion or unreligious faith. It is a great challenge because entering into an interaction or being in an encounter is to run the risk of being transformed. Interreligious education means precisely transformation firstly of the person and through the person of the society. Because it is no longer sufficient for religious education to teach about the history of religions or the doctrines rather the importance of religious education nowadays is recognized as a matter of personal development and social concern.

When Professor Beyza Bilgin, the founder of Religious Education as a scientific discipline in Turkey urged the scholars for interreligious education in academia in the mid of the 80s, it was primarily her students of religious education who took the message to the heart and went to work in the field. For instance the first PhD was on the theme of multicultural education and an application to curriculum (Altaş, 2001). Later we see in the field two significant works: The first one was edited by Yılmaz (2005) on the relation between religion and cultural diversity, and the other was a research on religious educational models in multicultural societies by Kızılabdullah (2014). All works are in Turkish and offer the reader a valuable insight into the meaning of intercultural education with its challenges and contribution to human development and religious education.

In teaching Islam today, we as Muslim educators embrace our religious sources, primarily the Qur'an and the Sunnah and recall the admonition of our inspirational thinkers who teach us that Islam is a religion of peace and mercy. It is evident in the very sacred formula that starts every chapter in the Holy Qur'an save one, and that begins every single legitimate act of any Muslim's entire life- *Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim, In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*. Now, I add to that sacred call to arm that there is nothing as valuable as theologically inspired practical application. Furthermore, there is a need to embrace all of these theological discourses also from a pedagogical perspective. Those are valuable ideas that construct our beliefs and our teachings. They lead us towards a better life of what we know to solving social and personal problems facing our culture and the world.

How to use the book with your students and what you will find in it?

Despite the existing range of theological ideas, we have from Islamic sources, one would agree on that we need way of learnings to put them into practice. We need basic “lessons” of a wholistic education that emerge from a variety of sources including our deep devotion to our Holy Book Al-Qur’an al-Kareem and the Sayings of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). Faith is embedded in all dimensions of our experiences . Therefore, it requires multiple perspectives to understand its impact on us as faithful people. It is the task of education to build the gap between the ideal values and praxis. To open the knowledge not only from theological perspective but also from the humankind with the question in mind: “How am I responsible in front of God to myself and to my society and to the universe and the whole creation?”

The process of understanding this responsibility has a personal dimension; what does it mean to me? Yet it has also a communal character: How can I contribute to the society? These two dimensions help to reflect on personal and social life as we try to answer the questions: what shall I do and what shall we do? And there comes the time to decide for education what would be the best approach for that. There is no doubt our religious texts and our rich historical and cultural heritage are the best sources in this exploration.

The teacher will find in the book the priority of reflective thinking in terms of a responsive person. A reflection of a Muslim who searches for meaning to understand the mode of existence and that of encountering self and other. To be a responsive being in a society with other people is to have some “center of value”. The chapters in this book make a claim about what it means to live in a diverse society and how-to response fittingly within this plurality through our values with the centrality of human dignity. You may find some kind of repetition from chapter to chapter. This aims for a deep analysis of encounter in different educational settings and life situations. I believe that such kind of approach in education needs different contextual testing rather than just by “ I- told-you-so”.

Before presenting a brief view of the nature of the chapters in the book a few words on reflective thinking: Recently, reflective thinking became a very popular expression among religious education teachers, and it is highly underlined in almost every subjects of the curriculum in teaching religion. Here we need to remind ourselves that reflection is not an intellectual act only. The Qur’an values reflective thinking and presents it as a psychological process and also as an action-oriented and historically embedded act.

Five lessons can be identified in the chapters of the book which I hope bringing practical works for reflections on the basic needs of the students, on the content of religious education, and on the environment in which religious education should occur. The “how of” the teaching and learning will emphasize five principles to a more systematic way of learning which I name as Conceptual Clarity Model. Prin-

principles of Conceptual Clarity Model (CCM) are: Reflections on the current situation; Exploring of text and context relationship; Reflections on personal development; Reflections for common good and Integration of content with effective pedagogy.

I call attention to these principles briefly:

Learning Principles 1: Reflections on the current situation.

The first principle invites the learners to express or collect examples from their own education, society or culture on the issue to be studied. They uncover much of the pre knowledge they have in stock from Islamic sources, bring their living experiences, their common codes of conduct, reflect on their feelings and actions. They explain common understanding and practices around the issue. To lead a discussion of ongoing argumentations around the issue, teachers could ask such questions: What is happening? What do people think and say? How do they behave? What do they believe and what do they value? What are the sources of their belief?

Shortly, this is a phase of collecting ready-made answers from existing success to provide foods for thoughts and pushing the learners to move from their comfort zone.

Learning Principle 2: Exploring of text and context relationship.

Second principle encourages a historical- critical analysis where the spirit of the holy text is uncovered. Thus, teachers develop the ability of discerning messages that are directed to the original hearers of a specific time and place and those that are intended for general audiences of every time and place. It is crucial for teachers to develop contextual thinking in a discursive tradition which has produced historically contingent categorizations of doctrines and practices such as Islam. The historical-critical study takes place around the questions of what happened before and during the time of the Prophet? What did the Qur'an bring to the fore? What developed in history? What are the essentials for today? To name a few.

The objectives in terms of skill development are:

- *Experiencing that the context is the background and the horizon at the same time.*
- *Gaining a broader perspective on the ethos of the knowledge in the Qur'an as well as its moral and intellectual grounding.*
- *Being aware of the link between past, present and future while communicating with the text.*

Learning Principle 3: Reflections on personal development.

This is where a significant question is being raised: What does all mean to me as a person and as a Muslim? You have the chance to develop teaching and learning skills to broaden your students' knowledge and understanding about: Ways to enhance the role of religion in personal development; the meaning of being steward (khalifa) on earth; the meaning of "knowing oneself"; the relation between socially or culturally behaviors and personal choices. In your guidance the students will be concerned about the human tendency that resides in mind and heart to reveal the role of feelings, deliberations, values, and commitments such as our tendency to perceive ourselves favorably and ignore the situations of others. In other words, we, as human being, judge ourselves according to our ideals and judge others according to their wrong actions!

Some reflective questions to raise awareness in this key learning could be:

Is there any relation between religion and prejudice? What are the experiences that may shape prejudice? What are the negative feelings that are felt internally and sometimes are expressed openly towards the others? What are the examples of faulty generalizations to certain groups or individuals? What are the discriminative behaviors as well as thoughts and feelings towards race, gender, disabled, sexual orientations, faiths and religions? I believe you could produce more to reflect on.

Learning Principle 4: Reflections for common good.

A search for a theology which has a public language and develop students' appreciation of and commitment to socially just ways of living will provide a fresh lens on social issues. Skills in forming and maintaining positive relationship towards other need to be improved.

Without delivering static "truths" or determined attitudes I invite you to encourage your students through raising concern for the welfare, rights and dignity of all people and how equity is affected by cultural norms and social practices.

Some leading reflective questions and themes could be: As people of faith how can we contribute to the common good and become caring members of the society? What are the means? What are the characteristics of a relation involving intimacy, commitment and permanency? Does social distance affect our acceptance of the different?

In this regard, examples of narratives, tales and symbols from the history of religions that were meant to shape social structures could be displayed. Class activities could cover examining carefully and critically social practices in order to identify the causes and the possible results of promoting oppressions of other groups and viewing the other as a threat. Analyzing the harmful consequences of

seeing the world literally in black and white and classifying people as those who are acceptable and those who are not could be another example to work on.

Learning Principle 5: Integration of content with effective pedagogy.

Transformative and productive pedagogies will be linked to the content for the purpose of maintaining integrity between faith and life. You make sure that accurate picture is being gained for understanding the uniqueness of each person and show that people are more than a single story. Furthermore, you may enrich the experiences of what it means to be fully human.

Dear Teachers of Islam, paying attention to Conceptual Clarity model embedded in the chapters you could take these relatively five modest stages as a kind of exercises to enhance your educational practices.

But these exercises are not merely the stuff of the book, they should be stuffing of your teachings and approaches while investigating them throughout the chapters.

Each of five principles of the model is important in its own right. They may not be used in proper order. You may use one principle or a combination of several or use the model as a whole depending on your aim and objectives. You will help your students realize that religious education is not merely about dictating certain ideas and thoughts. It is about to face challenges of our present World with intention to see the present situation as it is, with all its problems of war, death, injustice, poverty and inhumanity. Your knowledge about Islam needs to be contextualized for transformation and change to liberate from biases and misconceptions and the inadequate patterns that dominate the ways of education.

As the title suggests, this book is about teaching Islam in diverse societies. It is a collection of my works in the context of plurality. The chapters are appeared before in the journal of Religious Education and in different publications. All are cited in the *acknowledgements* if you may wish to reach their original forms. This collection of the articles include material taken from my almost fifteen years of theological and pedagogical work. However, I presented them here in a more teachable format than they used to be. They are designed as chapters. Each chapter represents the spirit of encounter (ta'aruf) theologically and the model of Conceptual Clarity pedagogically. All chapters are meant to contribute to Islamic religious education in general and to the concept of diversity in particular. My aim in this book is to present Islamic religious education in a voice that both solidly educational, warmly human and theologically reflective. To achieve this aim I added an entry point in the context of **Praxis of Hospitality** to the top of each chapter to provide an insight about the content and create a dialogic encounter with the reader as an authentic partner. Thus, I presume the praxis of hospitality will invite

students with varying backgrounds and experiences to engage actively and think about the content in novel ways.

Throughout the chapters I hope to reveal interreligious education as an investigative field, by providing issues of important educational subjects, by showing how Islamic religious education explains such subjects, by exploring text-context relationship and by reflecting on personal development and common good. So far as I can say about the format, the students are provided with some reflective questions for each chapter under the heading of **Brain Engage**. Tackling these questions will offer a safe or even a brave space of reflections and may motivate the students to encounter the ideas presented in each chapter with their own world and ways of thinking. I hope the questions encourage the students to reflect on what it means to be a Muslim in history and today under the message of existential wisdom of Islam and allow them to engage in constructive encounters where diverse and divergent voices can be heard. You will also find at the end of each chapter examples of **a verse or verses to ponder** to assist your students activate their knowledge and understanding of the message and develop their communication skills in relating effectively with the text. The students are also invited to explore more verses from the Qur'an to making room for a deep personal discovery.

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