Cooperation of formal public and Christian and informal Islamic education: Hope for future citizens of the plural Dutch society

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Abstract
In metropolitan areas in the Netherlands in informal education, in what they coined as a ‘home of study’, youngsters with an Islamic background are peer-coached in doing their homework. The youngsters learn – assisted by their senior peers, internal and external coaches – to accomplish in a disciplined way their school’s assignments.

We focus on the characteristics of a ‘home of study’ (populated mainly by youngsters with a Turkish background), the pedagogical strategies, and the relationship with the pedagogical civil society.

Our conclusion is that a ‘home of study’ stimulates the hyphenated identity development of the youngsters, and as such can be complementary to ‘citizenship education’ as this is taught in Dutch education. To respond even better to society’s need for participative citizenship we recommend adequate schooling of the volunteers in a ‘home of study’ and a more intensive collaboration with teachers of secondary schools.

Our research question is ‘What are the characteristics and qualities of an intensive way of coaching of students in a ‘home of study’ of a Centre of Education in the Netherlands (CEN), and what is the contribution thereof for the ‘pedagogic civil society’?

To answer our research question regarding the ‘home of study’ we used methods of qualitative research, like document analysis, focus-group interviews with 29 youngsters (7 girls, 22 boys) and 15 coaches (5 women, 10 men). The data from these interviews are complemented with data from observations.

From our data we learn the following.
Either boys or girls live in a ‘home of study’ day and night, except for the weekends. Boys and girls do meet other girls and boys respectively, in school and at leisure activities like visit to the library, sports – training or competitions. Also the external coach can be a person with an other gender identity – different from their own sexual orientation.

“We are Dutchmen with Turkish roots”, the youngsters of the ‘home of study’ state. Both, the youngsters as well as the coaches, have the experience of being excluded, since, one of the youngsters states “In the Netherlands they see us as Turkish people, and in Turkey they say we are Europeans.”

Parents are seen as the first responsible persons. Next to monthly formal meetings, there are informal encounters of coaches and parents on a regular base. Coaches see themselves as mediators between the different layers of Bronfenbrenners ecological and multilayered model of education.

Regularly the relation between youngsters is described as a family-relationship; they name their peers ‘elder brother’ or ‘our sister’. Coaches experience their relationship with the youngsters as a relationship of parental responsibility, a family relationship of brothers/sisters,

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1 This contribution is an adjustment of the research report ‘A bird with two wings; phase 1 of a research project for characteristics and pedagogical qualities of Centres of Education in the Netherlands.

2 A shared responsibility of informal and formal education, that is of parents and teachers, is one of the core aspects of what is coined as the ‘pedagogic civil society’.
a friend, a relationship based on expertise and authority of a pedagogue or a psychologist – all-in-one.

At school the youngsters meet Dutch friends (boys and girls), and next to that during leisure activities, like sports activities. Op school ontmoeten jongeren Nederlandse vriend(inn)en, en daarnaast ook bijvoorbeeld op de sportclub. “Sometimes people look at me in a strange way, just because I wear my headscarf.”

The coaches pay a lot of attention and spend a lot of time on building a personal relation of trust with their group. For the youngsters this attention is concretized in their coaches’ interest in personal and family affairs, their readiness for a meeting whenever needed for certain issues, their experience and expertise in coping and finding solutions for problems, and last but not least in asking after a while ‘how things are’ these days.

Aspects of the Turkish and of the Dutch society are presented to the youngsters by their coaches. As such coaches respond to youngsters’ longing for ‘bonding’ with the Turkish culture as well as a longing for ‘bridging’ to the Dutch culture. In the ‘home of study’ youngsters meet other people and “how they behave according to their own standards, how and what they eat, how they live.” Youngsters learn a respectful attitude towards ‘the other’, since “respect is central in Islam.”

An Islamic perspective (inspired by the Hannafi law school, related to the Suni tradition) is offered to the youngsters in case the topic discussed needs the enrichment of such an Islamic perspective, or in case the news on television or in the newspaper needs the broadening of the youngsters’ religious perspective they are socialized in at home and in their family. Coaches give this extra information to support youngsters in responding in an adequate way to questions from peers at school or wherever they meet ‘others’ outside the ‘home of study’. “We are there to support the youngster, we never stop having faith in the youngster.” According to the coaches “modelling is the best way to invite a youngster to take part in religious activities, at the end of the day religious behaviour will be internalized.”

To come to a conclusion, from our description above we learn that a ‘home of study’ stimulates the hyphenated identity development of the youngsters, and as such can be complementary to ‘citizenship education’ as this is taught in Dutch education. To respond even better to society’s need for participative citizenship we recommend adequate schooling of the volunteers in a ‘home of study’ and a more intensive collaboration with teachers of secondary schools.

In times of an increase of fear for what is ‘different from me’ and of radicalization, we need to explore in what way formal education (school) and informal education (parents and ‘homes of study’) can put flesh on the bones of the ‘pedagogical civic society’, last but not least by way of developing and telling counter narratives.

www.khteravest.nl/video/birdwithtwowings