THREE PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: FOLLOWING BEYZA BILGIN'S LINE OF THOUGHTS IN TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract

This essay presents three essential priorities for the future of Islamic religious education (IRE) inspired by Professor Beyza Bilgin's vision. Professor Beyza Bilgin is the pioneer of the field and the founder of religious education in Turkish academia. In her well-known book Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi (Education Science and Religious Education) Bilgin provides sets of assumptions and assertions to be used in interpreting and explaining the process of teaching and learning religion and helps us think about the nature of religious education in new ways. Bilgin sends an invitation to the educators of Islam to challenge established practices and ways of thinking and to suggest possibilities in an integrative way. Seeking integrity when it comes to teacher training in Bilgin's perspective is a strong process in teacher's own understanding to meet more effectively the needs of the today's and tomorrow's learners. According to Bilgin, the concept of tradition is basic in religious education. Giving meaning to isolated parts of the tradition, putting them in perspective, interpreting them, linking Islamic sciences up human sciences and illuminate the message in a revealing way seem to be her main considerations which indicate the ways to shape religious education as a

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discipline. Following Bilgin's line of thoughts, this essay will try to define what aspects of teacher education accomplish the benefit of integration in constructing an Islamic worldview by naming three priorities in teachers' qualifications as competencies.

Keywords: Religious Education, Beyza Bilgin, Teacher, Tradition, Understanding.

İslam Din Eğitiminin Geleceği İçin Üç Öncelikli Alan: Öğretmenlerin Mesleki Öğrenmelerinde Beyza Bilgin'in Düşünce Çizgisini İzlemek

Öz

Bu yazı Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi Bilimi'nin öncü ismi Prof. Dr. Beyza Bilgin'in düşünce dünyasından yola çıkarak, öğretmen yetiştirmede geleceğin din eğitimi için üç öncelikli yetkinlik alanı önermektedir. Bilgin'in Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi kitabı bir taraftan ilgili disiplinlerle işbirliğini esas alan bütüncül bir din eğitimi yaklaşımı sunarken aynı zamanda bir eğitim teolojisi ihtiyacına işaret eder. Eser, her türlü din eğitimi faaliyeti için alanın özelliklerine uygun davranış geliştirme ve dini hükümleri pratikte değerlendirmenin bir yetkinlik olarak öğrenilmesi ihtiyacını teorik ve pratik açıdan gözler önüne serer. Gelenek kavramı bu nedenle din eğitimini güncel olanla ilişkilendirmek açısından kilit bir öneme sahiptir. Nakil ve ona bağlı bilgileri tanımak, onların gerçekte ne demek istediğini anlamak, Bilgin'e göre din eğitimi faaliyetinin temelidir ve ancak bu sayede vahyin etkili bir biçimde öğretimi mümkündür. Elinizdeki yazı, yazarın düşünce ağına takılan ve Bilgin'in din eğitimi felsefesi içerisinde oluşturduğu özgün fikirleriyle gösterdiği hedefleri anlama ve anlamlandırma denemesidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Beyza Bilgin, Öğretmen, Gelenek, Anlama.

Summary

This essay presents three essential priorities for the future of Islamic religious education (IRE) inspired by Beyza Bilgin's vision. Bilgin is the pioneer of the field and the founder of religious education in Turkish academia. In her well-known book Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi (Education Science and Religious Education) Bilgin provides sets of assumptions and assertions to be used in interpreting and explaining the process of teaching and learning religion and helps us think about the nature of religious education in new

ways. The book is a reference book where she refers to the ideas of theology of education and integrative learning. Integrative learning in Bilgin's view is a disciplined work that seeks interpretation of life and core meaning of Islam, and brings insight to face daily problems. Bilgin sends an invitation to the educators of Islam to challenge established practices and ways of thinking and to suggest possibilities in an integrative way. Seeking integrity when it comes to teacher training in Bilgin's perspective is a continuous evolution in a teacher's own understanding to meet more effectively the needs of the learners of today and the world of tomorrow. Although the theology of education is still in its infancy, Bilgin urges for interdisciplinary works to develop the situation.

Regardless of how one evaluates the book, there is little doubt that the questions and issues raised by Bilgin have permanently reshaped the field and the scholarly output so far is impressive for its wide range of ideas and practical implications. The author of this essay considers her line of thoughts as a central construct, and a source that drives educators' research towards the future of IRE as a scientific subject. The author also considers Bilgin's view of the field as a key point bringing education and religion together. The author argues it will be useful to researchers to think about the priorities in teacher training to make their activities more responsive to the contemporary challenges as Bilgin advocates. Setting priorities among objectives means to make a conscious decision that some objectives need more attention among others. Deciding on priorities might reduce general conclusions, specify the means and the goals and help us identify exactly what we are trying to accomplish in education. In this regard this essay presents three priorities towards the aim of framing a more adequate understanding of educational rationale within a systematic order of ideas. Certainly, there is no end for that kind of work. The author thinks this is a beginning, not an end. The more specific we can be in our teaching and learning activities, the more likely we are to be successful in achieving our aims.

Priority 1 offers a sympathetic but critical appraisal of the current relationship with the Qur'anic text and asks for a competency of communication with the Qur'an in scholarly way to encourage hermeneutical analysis of the Qur'anic Text. Following Bilgin's view, the author resists the current situation which can be defined as merely memorizing and from time to time instrumentalizing the text and seeks out a more responsible and faithful way of communication with the text. Leading question of this part is: What is the textual and what is the contextual in the message of Islam?

Priority 2 examines how to enhance theological thinking of the learners. One of the central assumption of this priority involves an idea that we can't properly grasp the meaning of the message before we have a better understanding of what it means to be human.

Priority 3 explores the tension between teaching the universal values of Islam and the failure experienced in their application to social life. This priority urges for a competency in empowering common good with inclusive language.

The competences of teachers which are proposed through three priorities also present what it is hope learners may gain from religious education. It is hoped that setting priorities would keep on our educational practice grounded in a relevant pedagogy ensuring the interdisciplinary nature of religious education. Furthermore priorities could serve as a transformative step to focus on the applications of the values of Islam to day-to-day life and cope with human problems such as human rights, genetic researches, interfaith marriage, abortion, democracy, gender issues, honor killings, and euthanasia, to name a few.

Bilgin's insights will continue to contribute in significant ways toward shaping future research and academic discussions about teaching and learning Islam and to encourage the scholars to give new forms to teaching and learning activities that shape the education in its time. Such discussions could pave the way for the critical attempts across integrative learning that is needed to create a theology of education also for teacher training. Because teacher training is not simply about acquiring theological knowledge but also maintaining a critical, reflective consciousness. Bilgin's invaluable legacy of the field is awaiting us to use.

Introduction

Professor Beyza Bilgin, the pioneer of the field and the founder of religious education in Turkish academia has provided an excellent vision to religious education as a scientific discipline. In her referance book, Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi (Education Science and Religious Education) she combines analysis in depth with wide perspectives for the task of Religious Education in terms of professional learning. This book is of special intrest because of the way in which education and religion are brought together. Bilgin offers epistemic propositions to enable educators working in a school or in a mosque to understand religious education as a discipline. Instead of limiting

the subject to religious studies or education, Bilgin asks for a theology of education (Bilgin 1995:48).

In this process of creating a theology of education, Bilgin touches on an important matter. Neither methodological knowledge nor transmitting religious content itself woud be sufficient in our teaching and learning practicises of Islam. To restrict teaching and learning into transmission does not result in significant gains. It will not give hope for a better understanding either. What is needed is the scholarship of integration. What she means by scholarship of integration is a disciplined work that seeks interpretation of life under the message of Islam, and furthermore that brings new insight to overcome the problems of daily life. According to Bilgin, the concept of tradition is basic to religious education. Giving meaning to isolated parts of the tradition, putting them in perspective, interpreting them, making connections between Islamic sciences and human sciences and illuminate the message in a revealing way seem to be her main considerations which indicate the ways to shape religious education as a discipline (Bilgin 1995:45-49).

In Bilgin's view, religious education as a scientific subject should make suggestions and provide good practical examples on how to teach the divine message responsibly and apply it effectively to real life situations. Bilgin sends an invitation to the educators of Islam to challenge established practices and ways of thinking and to suggest new and alternative possibilities in an integrative ways. Seeking integrity for teacher training in Bilgin's perspective is a continuous evolution in teacher's own understanding to meet more effectively the needs of the learners of today and the world of tomorrow (Bilgin 1995:47). Her approach has its root in an integrative collaboration between teacher training, text books and curriculum development (Bilgin 1995:8).

Meanwhile, Islamic religious education (IRE) has gone to considerable level to provide good examples of integrity in theory and practice following Bilgin's dispositions explained in her referance book as a direction for the field:

"The need for a more student-centred IRE" (110)

"The need to take seriously the religious and cultural background of the learner" (118)

"The need to teach the Turkish translation of the Qur'an for deep learning and understanding" (111, 161)

"The need to discuss the existing conflict between science and religion on a more solid ground" (111)

> "The need to develop new approaches in teacher training for exploration, reflection and questioning" (9)

> "The need to integrate theory and practices for a more effective relationship between faith and life" (118)

> "The need to take seriously the developmental milestones of a child" (124)

> "The need to underline the purpose of the religion for an education to thrive well within tradition and culture" (7, 8)

In this essay, I will present how I see these dispositions relating together, mostly in teacher training and in the context of generating knowledge and building understanding for the future of IRE. I will indicate problematic areas of the field where issues still are far from being solved and where search for a general consensus has not yet been achieved. I would entitle three of them deduced from my own academic works and personal reflections. The first is from the content knowledge perspective. The second is from the perspective of the learner and the last will come from the society perspective. The approach is, primarily, conceptual clarification of these learning priorities to shed light on Bilgin's argumentations in her mentioned book.

Priorities which I will be arguing are not, ultimately, something which can be considered like a prescription. Instead, I offer these priorities as pointers towards rising the quality of religious education which might be a gateway to a further development and growth to pursue Bilgin's line of thoughts.

Deciding on priorities is an uneasy and a challenging task for several reasons: The nature of religion, the complexity of religious education as a teaching and learning subject, the social and cultural pressures on the educators are some of them. Clarifying learning priorities is probably the least explored question of educational problems in the field. However the importance of actively making choices on priorities needs to be constantly borne in mind when doing religious education. As Brenda Watson argues: "if we don't choose priorities they choose us, and their effects are inescapable" (Watson 1992:1).

Following Bilgin's line of thoughts, this essay will try to define what aspects of teacher education accomplish the benefit of integration in constructing an Islamic worldview by sorting three priorities in teachers qualifications as competencies:

1. Competency in scholary communication with the Qur'an
2. Competency in contributing to personal growth of the learner

3. Competency in creating social harmony through shared values

Analysing the competencies, I will also focus on what it is hope learners may gain from religious education.

Priority 1: Competency in a scholarly way of communication with the Qur'an : Encouraging hermeneutical analysis of the Quranic Text

Believers often derive their worldviews from specific religious texts, e.g. the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an. The task that emerges here for educators is a transformation in the understanding of texts that will enable religious people to responsibly exercise their faith. How school and education contribute to creating or ameliorating this responsibility that for some young people may lead to development of extremist worldviews needs to be carefully investigated. An investigation focused on the educational process in relation with its outcomes in religious education follows the view that these topics have been widely neglected although they are vital for any school subjects (Schweitzer and Boschki 2018).

Muslims feel obligated to pass oral performance by means of recitation of the Qur'aˆn on to young generations. The specific skill of reciting the Qur'aˆn (tilawa) plays a great role in religious education both in schools and in the mosques. The Recitation of the Qur'an, considered to be a universal Islamic religious activity in every Muslim community as a blessing through the human voice as well as individual piety. However, reciting must not remain as a technical skill only. Education must enable students to reflect on the text while mastering their skill of recitation. Reciting and intellectual theological thinking, I propose, should come together to establish a more coherent understanding and a sincere connection with the Qur'anic text which is the first source that comes to mind when one speaks about Islam. That was the aim when Bilgin proposed teaching and learning the Qur'an in Turkish in her works and in her teachings: A deeper understanding.

What is needed is a way of reading which invites Muslims to grow in communication with its universality. Merely memorizing and instrumentalizing the text constitutes an obstacle in understanding so that students are not allowed to think anything other than what they are being told. They consider the Qur'aˆn 'beyond reflection' and this lack of permission to reflect paves the way to repeat the interpretation of historical and cultural authorities. As

a consequence, traditional way of learning for the text lacks depth and does not enable the students to reflect on the aspect of integration of life and faith responsibly.

While teaching and learning process of religious texts are significant means for acting responsibly, this point raises another difficult question for education: How can we understand their meaning better? Working to develop constructive, critical and interfaith understanding of Islamic religious education on national and international level in different socio cultural environments, in my discussions with the teachers, students and religious instructors of various denominations, I particularly focus on the way they relate with religious sources. In regard with the Qur'an, as primary source for Muslims what I observe is the big gap between understanding developed in academia and the common understanding in schools, in mosques and the society. The gap is big and the problem will not have been truly engaged until we ask about a better way of the relationship with the Qur'an. To use an example, consider for instance, the concept of Jihad in Islam. One can present jihad as "the first obligation for Muslims that comes after I˙man Billah (Belief in God)". Another may translate it as "Holy War". Another explanation is that "Jihad is the striving for good and the struggling with evil". Still another states that "Jihad is the name of every attempt to purify one's soul". What response then should education make to those different perceptions and definitions?

In the field of religious education, good teaching depends, first of all on a clear idea of religion (Nichols 1992). Such dissimilar and times outright contradicting discourses are typical in the students surrounding. The fact is, all take their legitimacy in some way from the Qur'anic text. Such examples show that, at least where the educators have to decide issues in this area during the teaching process they urge for ground values on which their decisions should be based to achieve a desired outcome of the education. Plainly, there is a dire need to develop a theological and educational interrelated rationale based on the essence of Islam to overcome the uncertainty (Bilgin 1995:117-118). The first thing to do is to create a space for discussions about their root causes. This is important because problems arise from their root causes. Analyzing root causes requires scientific research and the response will come out of it. The problems otherwise, keep occurring because we do not reach the real causes of why people think or behave in a way they do. When we manage to get to the root causes, we acquire fundamental resources to solve the problems and a ground to shift into a new way of understanding. One way of reaching the real

cause would be to ask this obscure question in education: What is the textual and what is the contextual in the message of Islam?

Religions, including Islam, understandably endorse the basic theological principles and beliefs. However, the believers of any religion also carry a religious culture, which includes social and historical aspects. The biggest problem in understanding the message of the text is the failure of not being able to differentiate between the historical, time bound elements of the text and the universal which is above time and space. Claims over the inflexibility of Islam with regard to its historical and contextual dimensions confront the educators with significant problems in presenting the content knowledge (Selçuk 2012).

The need for a more proffessional learning arises directly to enable reflections on the historical aspect and bring further insight that might be valid beyond time and space to reveal the universality of the message. This would be a shift for Islamic religious education from being determined mainly by the unquestionable conventional patterns of the tradition to being markedly influenced by a new philosophy of education accompanied by social sciences and empirical researches.This pedagogical transformation can occur and for the most part, in Bilgin's view, religious education needs to collaborate with its related disciplines such as History of Religions, Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Phenomology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion and studies of Linguistics and Communications (Bilgin:50-57).

The hermeneutic approach in this transformation would be a historical-critical analysis of the text where to uncover the spirit of the text and discern the messages that are directed to the initial hearers of a specific times and place and those are intended for general audiences of every time and place and have universal ethos. Encouraging Muslims to make the distinction between the historical and the universal and develop contextual thinking is a severe test for their faith. Because Islam is identified to be a "discursive tradition" which has produced historically contingent categorizations of doctrines and practices (Geertz 1993; Lukens-Bull 1999).

The historical-critical analysis brings a broader perspective for the young to think deeply around the dogmatic categorizations. The following questions leads future searches in the field to go deeper: What happened before and during the period of the Prophet? What did the Qur'an bring to the fore? What developed in history? What are the essentials for today? What was the meaning of the text for the first addressee? What were the cultural norms at that time?

What is the nature of the message? Is it a legal, ethical or theological text? Is it universal or particular to a specific situation? How could the message be related to the universal objectives of the Quran? How was the message applied at that time and what were its different applications throughout history? How could we apply it to our contemporary context?

However, dealing with the question of what is textual and what is contextual is only half of the work when religious education is concerned. Once we have a clearer understanding about the distinction, we still want to know how to implement it into education effectively. We desire to know what essences are necessary, what kind of theological and pedagogical framework needed, what arrangements we should make in teaching and learning materials and so forth.

The characteristic of a teacher of religion envisaged for the future of IRE who is to help engaging with the controversial issues of Islam at our time in addition to extraordinary scholarly view of approaching the Qur'an needs spiritual intelligence, and other accurate skills of communication. Seen from Bilgin's view point that there is a need to develop new approaches in teacher training (Bilgin 1995:9). Religious educators of the future with this view and more challenges in mind will take this difficult yet essential task and face the question: Which type of Islamic religious education can meet the learner's mind and heart effectively?

Priority 2: Competency in enhancing theological thinking of the learners: Developing an integrated frame of knowledge and understanding for personal growth

One of the central assumption of this priority involves an idea that we can't properly grasp the meaning of the message before we have a better understanding of what it says about the role of human being in life. Therefore, more focused researches are essential on the questions and the means and the scope of human knowledge (metaphysical and epistemological issues in Islam). The task is to enlighten the meaning of faith to a Muslim, as a human person so that Islamic religious education could be a way of helping each student in forming their own quest for personal meaning (Bilgin 1995:45).

This task will cooperate with personality development theories to enhance the function of education in Islam towards personal growth to enlighten the meaning of being steward on earth or a vice-regent (khalifa), the meaning of

"knowing oneself "(marifat'un nafs) and the relation between social or cultural behaviors and personal choices (al-irada al-cuz'iyye) in our time. These are open to revision in light of the findings of contemporary researches in the field not because they have not been studied in history but because the current IRE does not seem to be catching up with or is suitable for addressing the personal needs of young Muslims. Meanwhile, education is able to face with the task of reducing tension and conflict between the young Muslims and those who have different worldviews. Respect for the different from us and for people unlike us is getting more essential not only for social life but also for personal growth. Here is a living example from one of Bilgin's works indicating why this is so important for children development in multi cultural societies.

The number of children, in Europian countries, who speak in the following manner after returning to their houses from the school is not so little : 'Mum! Hans, my friend, is Christian. So will he go to Hell? But he is a very nice boy. I do not want to see him going to Hell', or `Mehmet is a Muslim, is this a reason why he will go to Hell? But he is a very good person. He should not be punished because of his religion!' (Bilgin 1998:46). Because of this motivated reasoning or confirmation biased people see one another as strangers and they can easily think that those who do not belong to their faith might deserve going to Hell, or they can easily think of cleansing them from the world. What should they do now? Should they stop contacting each other and re-alienate one another? Should they ignore each other? Or should they, rather, realize that they are different people who strive for the same aim but from different ways, and thus, having respect for one another? Religious education has the task to help pupils overcome prejudices and not to condemn and judge each other. If education fails in doing this task, the outcome will be seriously defective.

Examples of some other leading research questions to fulfill the objective would be: Is there any relation between religion and prejudice sometimes just felt internally and sometimes expressed openly? What causes faulty generalizations to certain groups or individuals? What are the reasons of discriminative behaviors as well as thoughts and feelings towards race, gender, disabled, sexual orientations, different faiths and religions? Does contact reduce prejudice or prejudice reduce contact? (Binder et al. 2009; Celeste et al. 2019).

What does all mean for the future of IRE? The answer from Bilgin (1995:50) is clear: Dealing with basic questions, experiences and meaning of

life is to nourish children and young people in their personal growth rather than presenting them religious dogmas and artifacts.

In recent decades, various societies have born witness to hard debates around Islamic religious education in political and academic discourse. These debates derive from two inter-related factors: On the one hand from the literal conception of Islam, as described briefly in the first priority suggested in this essay, on the other hand from the nature of education acknowledging religious plurality. Many countries and education institutions face the challenge of accommodating immigrants from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. As our world becomes more diverse, the ways in which education recognizes and addresses religion will be increasingly important. The fear of becoming relativized i.e placed in comparative relation to other religious traditions, is quite commonly expressed by people from many religious traditions who are coming out of mono-cultural situations into plurality for the first time (Hull 2003). It must be stressed that its complexity, controversial nature and social and cultural power can make religious education a risky subject so that many consider it to keep away from (Robinson 1982). But with the modern cultural and political developments religions do not necessarily decrease in significance. Rather, through media, economic exchange, the transfer of knowledge and technology, migration, political alliances, travel and personal contacts all over the world, the encounter with other cultures, religions become part of everyday life and a subject of education as well.

Religious education and the place of religion in public education is a "crucial topic" and becomes more crucial—even unmanageably risky—where Islam is considered. For example the place of Islam within European public education system continues to spark intense debate (Veinguer et al. 2009; Berglund 2015). In the last decades, the issue has been addressed in three main contexts: 1) Discussions about identity. A hotly debated question is whether Islamic schools promote processes of identity formation within a democratic society or whether they rather lead to disengagement from the wider society. 2) Debates around pedagogical perspectives, which are based on several developmental theories of faith and education (Ucan and Wright 2019). 3) The context of teacher training: these debates focus on religious and non-religious affiliations of teaching staff and the way they are trained (Fuess 2007).

In all of these contexts a peculiar philosophical and theological ground of IRE refering Bilgin's quest – a theology of education is needed to value

both sameness and difference that helps for full development of the person. A pressing question is: Which path should we take in thinking about Islamic education in a democratic and plural context? There seem to be some attempts to bring examples from existing traditions in Islam to the fore (Saada 2018) for the purpose of thought and reflection. However, the major difficulty in Islamic religious education today is the lack of developmental works that would help young Muslims integrate their diverse experiences into a meaningful synthesis promoting respect and enable them to respond to contemporary challenges meaningfully (Wielzen and ter Avest 2017; Sahin 2018).

Anyone familiar with recent developmental attempts in teaching Islam will appropriately point out the fundemental idea that Islamic tradition involves "ijtihad," which may be defined as independent reasoning. However these sorts of intellectual discourses need a theology of education in order to provide a clear argument on how to build the future of Islamic education. To escape from general conclusion again, a scholarly collaborative integration will come to the fore as Bilgin argued ahead of her time.

Back to the point of Ijtihad, one can say Muslims are aware of the fact that Islamic tradition has a notion of "ijtihad" the struggle for truth through encounter, deep learning and independent reasoning. The vital issue here is how to implement this notion into day-to-day life. Because what transforms knowledge into education is its application to real-life situations: the movement "from life to faith and from faith to life," which some scholars have referred to as shared praxis (Groome 2002:73). The current scholarship's preference for staking defensive positions, rather than imagining new conceptions so as to change lived experiences, alienates young Muslims and their parents. My interest here is not to criticize any scholar of the field, but by assesing priorities to begin the work of imagining new perspectives in IRE to meet the needs of the young in their search for meaning and the challenges of life (Bilgin 1995:113,118).

The current scholarship is also reflected under headings such as "Woman in Islam", "Tolerance and Islam" or "Islam and Democracy." This kind of scholarship often tries to take a "commonsensical" approach to Islamic Education, with the result being that it puts forth solutions that, from its own perspective, seem obvious, instead of seeking to put forth a model of transformative education that effectively addresses issues of life. What is common to these attempts is that they bring solutions to problems on a case-by-case basis.

I believe a more comprehensive approach is necessary. The view of education generated by these attempts aims to contribute to an inclusive understanding in the minds of Muslims, which may be considered a positive approach. But many young Muslims and their parents reject this view because they perceive it as positing the modern Western way of life as the only possible alternative. The questions that are missing from these works are fundamental: What makes education Islamic? What reveals the particularity of Islam in the midst of religious plurality? We have to help our children appreciate that it is a plural society that they live in, and living in such a society is no easy task without essential values to embrace. As Bilgin states in many places of her book of *Education Science and Religious Education,* education in religion has two parts, one is the education, and the other is the religious part. Religious education is integration of both. It is not merely a method or a technique. At its core, religious education is based primarily on a philosophical or a theological rationale which provides an understanding of reality, truth and values.

In an attempt to assist theological understanding, religious education should focus attention firmly on the peculiar nature of religious discourse and seeks to find models which "disclosing" insights providing meaning for today (Grimmit 1982). Religious education of the future needs to take the problem of communicating religious concepts as its predominant concern and present them in a way which has meaning for personal growth and understanding.

Priority 3: Competency in empowering common good: Developing an integrated frame of knowledge and understanding in common good through shared values

The third priority engages with a theology which has a public language, a language of persons in their interactions. This will launch a new initiative for IRE. It is to form a new language. An inclusive language which fosters a strong sense of a shared vision of the sacredness of human life. This language will diminish "negative otherising," including the use of negative language towards the other. An inclusive language, created by the educators of the future will profoundly change the way teachers view the other and how they communicate (Bilgin 1995:56-58). The aim is to arrive at a theology of education expressed through a public language, and to develop students' appreciation of and commitment to socially just ways of living through brave encounters. Building a just and, peaceful society is a responsible of all its inhabitants.

Recent researches in religious education show that students wish for peaceful coexistence across differences, and believe this to be possible. Such peaceful coexistence depends on knowledge about each other's faith, religion and worldview and sharing common interests as well. Students who learn more about the value of religious diversity seem to be more willing to have conversations about religions and beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not. Some researchers report that students even show health advantages when they attend schools that emphasize the value of diversity (Levine et al. 2019).

Without delivering static "truths" or determined attitudes, education has the task to investigate how education in Islam can raise the value of diversity with major concern for human dignity of all people to develop a shared common ground for a more humanistic view of human person. At this stage, all this further I want to highlight one important point against traditional education in Islam. We, as religious educators, have no right to keep going on in reducing our education to imposing specific codes of Islam. We must be most concerned in putting forward the evidence for beliefs than transferring the beliefs themselves.

In reality, Islam praises honors faith enquiry (tahqiq fi'l iman). The Qur'an strongly emphasizes the importance of scientific thought and condemns the unquestioning imitation of one's forefathers. Only thus, as religious educators of Islam, we can liberate from our traditional "You sit still and I instill" approach (Selcuk 2013). We can't expect our students to follow the values and beliefs simply because they are told to do so. We can't expect our students to establish meaningful relationship if we do not open a safe or even a "brave" space for questioning, critical examination, personal involvement and independent appropriation. In the interests of scientific enquires, the following questions will lead our works: 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?

It should be underlined that our search for common good will ensure the understanding that the moral quality of knowledge lies on its capacity of how much it can widen awareness and contribute to the common good of the society. We, so that could develop necessary skills in forming and maintaining positive relationship with eachother under the Qur'anic concept: *Amel-i Salih* (righteous deeds). Also, it will expand the understanding of young Muslims

about the meaning of commanding the good and avoiding the evil in a diverse
society. It will consequently, foster a strong sense of a shared vision of
values.

A systematic understanding of the Qur'an and its essential universal
message integrated with fundamental values of Islam, which will promote
open, honest, and meaningful encounters, has yet to be developed. A new
language that outlines necessary changes and required qualifications in
understanding Islam is needed so that teachers can get involved to the public
arena from a sound point of departure. The standpoint would be to bridge
the existing gap between prevailing understanding of Islam and academic
enquiry. Such a bridge will pave the way to our best understanding of what it
means to be a Muslim today in the actualization of Bilgin's view that there is
a need to underline the purpose of the religion for an education to thrive well
within tradition and culture (Bilgin 1995:7,8) and establish a more effective
relationship between faith and life (118).

Concluding Remarks

We have every reason to believe that the works of Beyza Bilgin will
continue to inspire contemporary scholarship, and intrest in her legacy will
expand over the years (see Selçuk et al. 2019). The three priorities discussed in
this essay have two important consequences of Bilgin's educational vision.

First, they will keep our educational practice grounded in a relevant
pedagogy to ensure the interdisciplinary nature of religious education.

Second, they will serve as a transformative step where the values of
Islam can be applied to day-to-daylife and cope with human problems such
as human rights, genetic research, interfaith marriage, abortion, democracy,
gender issues, honor killings, and euthanasia, to name a few.

Deciding on priorities will not only help teachers reflect on life problems
on a sound and solid ground, but will also significantly change attitudes,
feelings, and behaviors towards a scholarly way of integrated learning.

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