

Article

The Contribution of the Non-Muslim Teacher to the Ideal Identity of the Islamic Primary School

Bahaeddin Budak 

Islamic Faculty, IUA-Amsterdam, 1097 DZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands; b.budak@i-ua.nl

Abstract: In 2021, more than one million Muslims lived in the Netherlands, corresponding to approximately 5% of the total population. From the start of the first Islamic schools in the Netherlands in 1988, Islamic schools employed mostly non-Muslim teachers. How the identity of an Islamic school should be put into practice in the plural Dutch context is a regularly recurring topic of discussion. Many researchers and board members assume that the ideal identity of the Islamic school cannot be formed with non-Muslim teachers. They suppose that the ideal identity can only be shaped with Muslim staff. This article describes, on the basis of qualitative research among three non-Muslim teachers, how they can contribute to the development of the ideal identity of Islamic primary schools. This research shows that the contribution that non-Muslim teachers make to the ideal identity of the Islamic school can be very important. The presence of the non-Muslim teacher gives the pupils the opportunity to learn about religious diversity. The school becomes a training ground for dialogue and respectful interaction with each other. The results of this research are not only relevant for Islamic schools, but also, schools of other denominations can revise their view of the ideal identity and staff with a different worldview than the board of the school.

Keywords: Islam; Islamic education; identity; philosophy of life; worldview



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1. Introduction

Muslims in the Netherlands, similar to other religious groups, have the opportunity to found their own schools. The two first Islamic primary schools opened their doors to education in 1988. These schools were started because the existing schools did not want to meet the request of some Muslim parents in relation to identity-related needs (Budak 2021). In 2021, there were 55 Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands (Deisbo 2021). This was possible thanks to the so-called pillarised education system of the Netherlands. This means that there are two types of schools, the so-called public (*openbare*) schools and the denominational (*bijzondere*) schools (Bronneman-Helmerts 2011).

Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution guarantees the freedom of ‘conviction’, ‘establishment’ and ‘organisation’. The following is part of Article 23:

5. The standards required of schools shall be such that the standards both of denominational schools fully financed from public funds shall be regulated by Act of Parliament, with due regard, in the case of denominational schools, to the freedom to provide education according to religious or other belief.

6. The requirements for primary education shall be such that the standards both of denominational schools fully financed from public funds and of public-authority schools are fully guaranteed. The relevant provisions shall respect in particular the freedom of denominational schools to choose their teaching aids and to appoint teachers as they see fit.

7. Denominational primary schools that satisfy the conditions laid down by Act of Parliament shall be financed from public funds according to the same standards as public-authority schools. The conditions under which denominational secondary

education and pre-university education shall receive contributions from public funds shall be laid down by Act of Parliament ([Grondwet 2022](#)).

According to this law, citizens are free to establish their own schools, which are fully funded by the government, in which they are free to appoint their own teachers, choose their own methods and provide education from their own (religious or secular) life orientation. This freedom allows the board the opportunity to construct its own identity ([Bakker 2013](#); [De Jong 2012](#); [Faber 2012](#); [van Koeven 2011](#); [Miedema and Vroom 2002](#)). The (religious or secular) identity of the school, the so-called *conviction* of the school, makes the school distinctive and justifies its existence in accordance with Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution of Education (the right to ‘establishment’) ([Grondwet 2022](#)). Using this right, there are some Catholic schools where only Catholic teachers work, as well as Protestant, Jewish and Islamic schools. After all, the school board has founded a school to offer the pupils education based on a specific (religious or secular) life orientation. In practice, not all Islamic schools have the option to choose to work only with teachers who follow the same religious (philosophy of life) tradition as the school board. The reason for this is that from the start of the two first Islamic schools, there are simply not enough teachers ([Budak 2014b](#), p. 41; [Budak et al. 2018](#), p. 96). Schools are often forced to hire teachers who have a different (religious or secular) life orientation than the school. At Islamic primary schools, approximately 60% of the teachers are non-Muslim ([Beemsterboer 2018](#), p. 284).

In certain cases, this situation (working with teachers who have a different worldview than that of the school) causes a clash between what the board wants and what the group teacher does every day at school. On the one hand, the board or management wants to implement a certain identity, and on the other hand, teachers do not belong to the religious movement to which the school adheres, and from their own (religious or secular) life orientation, they give hands and feet to the daily teaching at school. In extreme cases, this causes irritations and conflicts between board and staff ([Bakker 2011](#); [Bakker and Rigg 2004](#); [Bertram-Troost et al. 2018](#); [De Jong 2012](#); [van Hardeveld 2006](#); [van Koeven 2011](#)). Such a conflict is not unknown to Islamic primary schools. Fenny Brinkman, one of the teachers at an Islamic primary school who regularly came into conflict between her life orientation and that of the school, has written the book ‘Haram’ concerning this ([Brinkman 2005](#)). In her book, she describes in 29 short stories what the conflicts were for her with regard to the rules at school. Topics covered include: not being allowed to sing, a prohibition on lipstick or nail polish, the prohibition of celebrating Sinterklaas, the separation between boys and girls, and also the separation between man and woman among staff. In addition to these identity-related aspects, she was particularly irritated by the, according to her, intolerant school board. All this resulted in her eventually resigning from the school in question. When her book was published, the conflicting aspects were widely covered by the national media ([Haft 2006](#)). Most board members have a different way of operating than Brinkman’s example, and most non-Muslim teachers are open to participating in the development of identity of the school ([Beemsterboer 2018](#); [Budak 2021](#)).

Since the start of the first two Islamic primary schools in 1988, Islamic schools have had to deal with a teacher population with a different world view than that of the school. The two first Islamic primary schools started with almost exclusively non-Muslim teachers ([Budak 2021](#)). According to many studies, the Islamic identity of the school, partly because of this fact, could not shape the ideal Islamic identity according to the founders of the school ([Merry 2007](#), p. 25; [Shadid and van Koningsveld 1991](#), p. 120; [Wagtendonk 1991](#), p. 167). After all, the teacher has a very important role in shaping the identity of the school ([Bakker and Rigg 2004](#), pp. 31–33; [De Jong 2012](#), p. 80; [van Koeven 2011](#), pp. 275–79). For example, the philosopher and ethicist Dupont argues that if we want to have insight into the identity of a school, we not only “need to know what external features the school has, such as a building, but also who the persons are and from what motives these persons act within this school” ([Dupont 2010](#), p. 47).

Most of the teachers, Muslim or not, are interested in the identity of the school. They do their best to shape the ideal identity. In my PhD research, I first noticed that the contribution

of these teachers is important (Budak 2021). To date, relatively little research has been done into the constructive contribution that teachers of a non-Muslim origin make to the ideal identity of the school.

Taking the above into consideration, this article answers the question below:

What contribution can a non-Muslim teacher make to the ideal identity construction of the Islamic school?

To answer this question, it is necessary in the first instance to provide clarity concerning what the ‘*ideal identity*’ of an Islamic school entails. I have chosen qualitative research for which I have consulted various forms of data such as: literature and source research, school documents, websites of schools and ethnographic fieldwork. The empirical part is based on an analysis of a test assignment for teachers in Islamic schools, a lesson observation and a video recording of a reflection on a lesson. I return to this in paragraph three.

2. The ‘Ideal Identity’ of a School

2.1. School Identity

What exactly is meant by the Islamic identity of a school is difficult to describe. This has to do with the fact that each person has a different idea of what the identity should be. The identity description for school identity cited by many researchers is that of Anneke de Wolff (2000), who wrote about the development of Christian schools, that also applies to Islamic schools. This is as follows:

what makes the school, in their opinion to this school, or what are the typical characteristics of this school, what the members of the school have in common (what applies to the members as a collective) and what has a certain degree of permanency or continuity in time (de Wolff 2000, p. 53).

In order not to dive too far into details of different descriptions and to keep it simple, I use the following definition for the concept of Islamic school identity on the basis of this description by Anneke de Wolff:

Islamic school identity is what makes a school to this school and what is inspired by the Islamic tradition (Budak 2021, p. 72).

When we talk about the Islamic identity of a school, we are referring to the specific characteristics of a school with which its members make a link to Islam. In other words, we can only speak of an Islamic school identity when it can be justified according to Islamic sources. The school identity is formed by several people in which internal but also external factors and actors play a role. These identity influencers for schools are the board, management, group teachers, parents, the church for Christian schools and the mosque for Islamic schools but also the training of teachers or the education inspectorate (Budak 2021; Faber 2012; van Koeven 2011).

2.2. The Ideal School Identity

After all, founders of a school have an ideal that led them to start a school. These ideals are reflected in school documents, school plans, identity documents, which are also called the ‘*formal*’, ‘*official*’ or the ‘*ideal*’ identity¹ (Faber 2012, pp. 12–17; Onderwijsinspectie 2003). It should be clear that staff do not carry out everything displayed in school documents in daily practice. How staff members give substance to the identity, what happens every day at school, is called the ‘*informal*’ or ‘*lived and experienced identity*’ (Bakker 2011, pp. 102–16).

Many board members and parents have a so-called ‘*narrow identity perspective*’. They focus on some practical and directly religion-related activities such as religious education and the celebration of religious festivals. We speak of a ‘*broad identity perspective*’ if stakeholders (such as board members, principals, teachers) pursue an integral perspective regarding the identity of the school in which educational, organisational, pedagogical and didactic aspects are thought through with the identity of the school. These two concepts, introduced by de Wolff, are relevant to the discussion that this article deals with (de Wolff 2000, pp. 68, 69).

2.3. A Closer Look at the Ideal Identity

Islamic schools distinguish themselves, first of all, mainly by narrow identity practices, such as how they deal at school with prayer, the celebration of Islamic festivals, religious education and such narrow identity practices. These narrow identity practices are essential for an Islamic primary school. In addition, they formulate broad aspects of identity to these narrow aspects of identity. Islamic schools have general pedagogical, social goals that they name in their ideal identity documents. For example, all Islamic schools in the Netherlands indicate that they are educating pupils from an Islamic perspective in the Dutch multicultural and religious society (Beemsterboer 2018, p. 288). Emphasis is placed on respecting others and being aware as a Muslim. For many board members and principals, one of the goals of the school identity is raising a proud Muslim citizen in Dutch society. According to the ideal identity, pupils should have knowledge of others and know that they must gain their place as a minority in this society (Budak 2021, pp. 204–6). As shown earlier, board members basically assume that the ideal identity is achievable when they work with Muslim teachers. On the other hand, a number of school boards consciously choose to appoint non-Muslim teachers while they could hire Muslim teachers. They believe that the non-Muslim teacher should by definition be given a place at school to make the students aware of the diversity in society.

In an interview with RTV-Utrecht (a regional broadcaster), the principal of Al-Amana (a foundation of eight Islamic primary schools) says: “We consciously recruit Muslims and non-Muslims as teachers. We want to be a reflection (likeness) of society” (RTV-Utrecht 2021). In the identity document of the SIPOR schools, a foundation with six Islamic primary schools, the following is stated about this:

For the children it is also important that they have knowledge of their environment and the society of which they are a part. Knowledge of customs, culture, values and beliefs is a prerequisite for understanding. The school therefore sees it as its task to prepare the children from their own identity for life in Dutch society (SIPOR 2020, p. 13).

Furthermore, many Islamic schools emphasise certain core values such as tolerance, justice, self-determination, honesty, respect for every person, helping each other and living together (Aktaran n.d., p. 37; Budak 2021, p. 203). From the start of the first schools, emphasis is placed on ‘*Akhlâq*’, good behaviour (Budak et al. 2018; SIPOR 2020). These general values that are important for all schools are explicitly mentioned in identity documents for Islamic schools. All teachers, regardless of their religious background, contribute to the *Akhlâq* of the students.

In summary, we can say that the ideal identity of an Islamic school comes down to the fact that the school provides education, supports the pupil in his/her education and guides him/her to become a conscious ‘*Abd*’ (servant of Allah) and responsible ‘*Khalifa*²’ (world citizen) (Aktaran n.d., p. 52; Budak 2014a, pp. 9, 10; SIPOR 2020, p. 7). Taking the above into consideration, the ideal identity of an Islamic school could be formulated as follows:

A school that supports the pupil, from Islamic tradition, in his/her development into a conscious servant of Allah (‘*Abd*’) and responsible world citizen (‘*Khalifa*’).

The ‘*Abd*’ component is linked to narrow identity aspects such as prayer, religious education and the celebration of religious festivals. The ‘*Khalifa*’ component, linked to the broad identity, focuses on value education in relation with how to live responsibly in society. In regard to the main research question, I will analyse the contribution that a non-Muslim teacher makes to the ideal identity, focussing on the ‘*Abd* and *Khalifa*’ component.

3. Method

Before explaining the structure and working method of this article, it is important to describe my position in relation to the respondents.

Since 1990, I have been involved in Islamic primary schools. In recent years, I have been a religion teacher, chairman, principal and trainer within these schools. In 2021, I com-

pleted PhD research on the identity of Islamic primary schools (Budak 2021). At the time of writing this article, I was coordinator of identity policy and religious education of the SIMON schools. SIMON stands for Foundation for Islamic Education in central and eastern Netherlands and is the umbrella board of 10 primary schools (simonscholen.nl 2022). Similar to all other Islamic schools in the Netherlands, SIMON Schools is a Sunni Islamic organisation. The background of most pupils is Turkish and Moroccan.

This research is a descriptive study (Baarda et al. 2018, p. 38). The aim of this research is to describe how non-Muslim teachers contribute to the ideal identity of an Islamic school. From this perspective, I have only made choices that can be marked as good examples in line with the definition of ideal identity.

By means of a portrait, I present how the non-Muslim teacher works daily at school and what this means for her and her environment. The portrait is a compilation of a selection of three different types of data concerning three different female teachers and their 'best practice' examples. The best practice examples had to meet the two criteria of the ideal identity of an Islamic school, namely, a clear contribution in relation to the development of a good '*Abd*' and conscious '*Khalifa*'. I did not focus on conflict situations such as Brinkman's example, because in this article, I want to describe what the positive contribution of the non-Muslim teacher can be.

All three teachers worked at the SIMON schools foundation, which has the same description of the ideal identity that I use in this paper. Through this portrait, one can learn how a non-Muslim teacher gives meaning to the narrow and broad identity of an Islamic primary school. From my personal observation and experience with non-Muslim teachers within Islamic education, I can indicate that the portrait is a representation of the average non-Muslim teacher if they can be coached about the goals of the ideal Islamic identity.

The data that I use to compose the portrait consist in the first place of the text of an assignment handed in by one of the teachers who followed the DIO-training (Docentschap Islamitisch Onderwijs), a refresher course for staff of Islamic primary schools. Reference to this assignment is made via T1. This training course was conducted by me between 2014–2018. Over 123 teachers participated in this course, 53 of whom were non-Muslim. Participants could choose between different assignments. Part of one of these assignments was 'describe what your contribution is to the identity development of the school'.

Furthermore, the portrait is supplemented with information obtained from a personal observation of a lesson day in 2022 with another teacher. Reference to this observation is made by T2. This teacher was chosen because one of the principals of the SIMON schools indicated that this teacher was very involved with the identity of the school. Here, also, the choice was based on a 'best practice'. This teacher knew about my visit in advance. I indicated that I wanted to do a free observation to see what the day of a non-Muslim teacher entails. I also indicated that when processing the data, I would use a pseudonym for her name. I chose a free observation (Baarda et al. 2018, p. 211) so that the teacher could feel free to do what they do on a daily basis and would not frame themselves by a predetermined observation list. The only thing I indicated was that I wanted to see what leads can be seen during the lesson in relation to the religious identity of the school. The starting points of the ideal identity served as observation criteria for me. For this reason, I looked at what the teacher does in relation to supporting the pupil in his/her development into a conscious servant of Allah ('*Abd*') and responsible world citizen ('*Khalifa*').

Thirdly, the portrait is complemented with a lesson example provided by a teacher who afterwards tells how she did it and how the pupils experienced the lesson. Reference to this conversation is done through T3. This teacher was introduced by another principal within the SIMON schools. This part was recorded as a video. For the recording, permission was requested for display for the purpose of this paper and possibly other courses in relation to Islamic education.

One of the respondents was no longer working at the school at the time of writing this article. For this reason, the article was shared with two of the above teachers before publication and they were asked for comments, in particular, whether they recognised themselves

in this story. The respondents indicated that they certainly recognised themselves in the portrait. One of the respondents wrote,

“I certainly recognise myself in the portrait, I talk to the children all day about doing good and what they should do if they do make a ‘mistake’ (doing a good deed in return and saying *estavorallah* to Allah³)” (T3).

4. Portrait of Linda

Portrait of Linda; a Non-Muslim Teacher at an Islamic Primary School

Linda has been a teacher at an Islamic primary school in group 3 for two years. She is non-Muslim and comes from a village where hardly any immigrants live. She teaches children from 5, 6 to 7 years old.

In her village of birth, there is little contact between Muslims and non-Muslims. According to her, this is the reason for ‘a lot of ignorance about Islamic culture and the Islamic faith’ among her family, friends and acquaintances (T1). Concerning this, she says:

I think it’s important that children get a representation of current Dutch society. In our Dutch society we have to deal with different cultures and beliefs. It is important that the children qualify for this and learn that there are differences between people. I think it is important that pupils also have to deal with a Western non-Muslim teacher. In this way they learn that they are taken into account by non-Muslims and that they are accepted, but also that they must take non-Muslims into account. For example, by explaining holidays or their identity, because non-Muslims do not know everything about Islam. In addition, children are also just children, regardless of faith or culture (T1).

When she indicated that she would be working at an Islamic primary school, she encountered various reactions:

My parents, for example, didn’t agree with it in the beginning. Because why are you going to work at an Islamic primary school if you are not a Muslim yourself? From friends came mainly questions, such as: do you have to wear a headscarf, do you have to speak Arabic? From acquaintances I mainly got resistance. There have been people who wanted to have a whole discussion about this. They saw the Islamic faith as negative and associated it with the terrorist attacks committed by ISIS. There were then comments from the other party such as: you teach future terrorists (T1).

Her parents were ‘*afraid*’ because they thought that Linda, as a non-Muslim, would not be taken seriously by the pupils and that there would be no respect for her as a teacher. On the one hand, they supported their daughter and stood behind her choice, and on the other hand, they themselves did not like Linda’s idea of working at an Islamic primary school. The same was consistent in Linda’s circle of friends. They knew from her that she was always looking for new challenges and that she could find that within Islamic education.

However, there were the same fears that my parents had: would I be respected, would I like working there, would parents, mainly men, accept me as a teacher? Those were some of the questions that prevailed among my group of friends (T1).

When Linda noticed that friction had arisen with different parties, she actively provided information at the beginning,

“I explained what I based my choice to work in Islamic education on. In addition, I gave information about Islamic culture. Once I started working at school, I also started telling stories about school, the colleagues and the children” (T1).

She indicates that, in this way, she wanted to show that the Islamic primary school is an ordinary primary school but one that pays attention to the Islamic faith, that the children are like all children, and they just see her as a teacher. Her colleagues see her as a colleague and work with her, and they are open to her questions about Islam. In this way she hoped to create more acceptance between the different parties. A year later, her parents have

come to realise that she indeed has to deal with parents and children just as in all other schools (T1).

Linda indicates that it is known that the school performance of immigrant pupils lags behind that of Dutch pupils. The drop-out rate among pupils in secondary education with a foreign background is considerably higher than among native Dutch pupils. Linda is committed to eliminating this backlog (T1). To prevent this drop-out, good education in primary education is necessary. See, for example, the study: 'Children of migrants are 10-0 behind' (Koot et al. 2022).

Linda starts her lesson by asking one of the pupils to read *Sûrat al-Fâtiha*⁴. She does this every day. After this opening, every Monday she discusses the *hadith*⁵ of the week that is linked by the working group identity to the method 'Vreedzame school (Peaceful School)', a method for social competences and democratic citizenship (De Vreedzame School 2022) (T2).

This week's *hadith* is about showing understanding. She first reads the *hadith*, "the Prophet Muhammad said, not one of you is a true believer until he desires for his sisters and brothers what he desires for himself". Then she asks the children, "how many of you want a beautiful bike?". All the children raise their hands. Then she asks, "which of you wants to have the same bike for your friend next to him or her?". Most pupils raise their hands. There are a few who do not. Linda asks one of the children: "why not?" The pupil says, "He is stupid to me all the time, that's why I don't want it". "Do you know what the prophet means by the *hadith* I just read out?" "No, I didn't understand." "He says that if you want to be a good Muslim then you have to want what you want for yourself for someone else." Linda looks at the other pupil and asks, "do you want someone else to be stupid to you all the time?". The pupil says no. Linda then says, "what you don't want for yourself you shouldn't want for others". The pupil looks at his classmate, holds out his hand and says "peace". They shake hands. The pupil says, "Teacher, now I want him to get a nice bike too, am I a good Muslim now?". The teacher smiles and says "yes, that's what Muhammad says" (T2).

She continues her programme with language, maths, outdoor play and other lessons. During her teaching, she corrects the pupils on their behaviour by occasionally saying "*is that how a Muslim should behave?*". She says, "*Towards the children I try to be interested and also to participate a bit. To show that even though I am a non-Muslim teacher, I am mainly there for their story*" (T2).

Linda reads from the book '*Wat ben je mooi* (You are so beautiful)' (Aaras 2021, *Wat ben je mooi!*). The book is about the creation story and the uniqueness of the children. The teacher reads the book first and then she instructs the pupils to tell each other what they like about themselves and the other person. The pupils also have to say what they wish from Allah. During this lesson, she receives the reaction of a pupil "beautiful is not only on the outside, but also on the inside, teacher!". Another pupil responds with "Teacher, I think my heart is so beautiful". At the end of the lesson, the teacher chooses a number of children to say a dua (supplication). Pupils then say, "O Allah make me beautiful inside and outside" (T3).

In addition to providing lessons, Linda is also part of the committee of Islamic festivals together with two other group teachers, the religion teacher and two parents. Together they propose to the team how Ramadan and Eid al-Adha (feast of Sacrifice) can be celebrated (T1 and T3). She also gives information about well-known Christian festivals, such as Christmas and Easter (T1).

The contribution of Linda is recognised by the pupils, so she says that one of the pupils made the following comment, "Teacher, you are not a Muslim but you are becoming a Muslim" (T3). This remark shows recognition of the pupils of how the teacher treats certain values with the pupils. The pupils are aware that she is not a Muslim teacher because she tells the pupils about Dutch cultural and religious feasts.

Above, Linda shows how she participates in narrow identity aspects, such as the recitation of the *Fâtiha* and the discussion of the *Hadith* of the week. However, she also contributes to the broad identity of the school, to be part of the Identity council of the school

and support the pupils in their process to become a conscious '*Abd*'. Furthermore, we see how she makes the pupils reflect on their behaviour from an Islamic reference. In this way, she guides the pupil to a responsible *Khalifa*. Her presence as a non-Muslim teacher in itself contributes to the vision of educating pupils from an Islamic perspective in the Dutch multicultural and religious society. In addition to this, she tells the pupils about Dutch cultural and religious feasts.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Many Islamic primary schools employ non-Muslim teachers. Several authors have questioned the identity development of Islamic primary schools because there are not enough Muslim staff employed. They assume that teachers with a non-Islamic worldview can contribute little to the ideal Islamic identity of the school. This article makes it clear that this angle was drawn too quickly and, therefore, does not correspond to the ideal identity of Islamic schools. This view fits a narrow identity perspective.

According to the ideal Islamic school identity, board members strive to prepare the pupils to become a successful citizen in Dutch society and to be a reflection of Dutch society. By also hiring non-Muslim staff, the board consciously or unconsciously works towards this vision.

In order to function well as a proud Muslim citizen (*Khalifa*) in Dutch society, which is an important part of the ideal identity vision, mutual acceptance is important. In Linda's example, we see that the non-Muslim teacher eliminates the prejudices of her parents and circles of friends towards Muslims and, in particular, the Islamic primary school. Her conscious choice to work at an Islamic primary school makes a certain positive contribution to the broad identity of the Islamic primary school. Her presence as a non-Muslim teacher at an Islamic primary school in itself contributes to respect between Muslims and non-Muslims. She also tells the pupils about the Dutch cultural and religious feasts, which makes the pupils conscious about the diversity of world views. The pupils come into contact with other life convictions, which gives them insight into the diversity. In this way, pupils learn, among other things, to show respect for others and to be aware of their own identity. This presence also makes a positive contribution to the ideal identity, whereby the aim is that pupils can become successful citizens in Dutch society.

An important point is that the teacher and board in question are aware of the differences and are open to good cooperation. In the first instance, a safe pedagogical climate is required. The example of the identity development of the school where Fenny Brinkman worked does not reflect the ideal situation. On the one hand, because, according to Brinkman, the board of the school was intolerant, and on the other hand, because Brinkman herself was in too much conflict with the identity of the school. Let me be clear that the average non-Muslim teacher who works at an Islamic primary school is aware of the differences and has an open attitude towards Islamic identity. According to my more than thirty years of experience, the portrait of Linda gives an average picture of the non-Muslim teacher who is coached. The teacher in the Netherlands ultimately voluntarily chooses to work at an Islamic primary school. Teachers who too often come into conflict with their own identity and that of the school quickly resign.

In Linda's portrait, I have shown how a non-Muslim teacher can make an important contribution to the ideal identity of the school. To do this, the non-Muslim teacher should be open to the formal identity of the school and not be reluctant to think along and participate in all kinds of narrow identity activities. We see this in Linda's linking of the *hadith* to the peaceful school. Despite the fact that she is not Muslim, she shows that she discusses the essence of a *hadith* with the pupils. We also see this in the lesson "You are so beautiful". The teacher discusses important values that all Islamic schools see as core values, such as having a good heart and respecting others regardless of skin colour. A non-Muslim teacher is not a teacher of religion but can make the pupils reflect on who the child is, making a link with Islamic values and norms. For this she needs material; similar to this school where the *hadith* is linked to the peaceful school, and she used the book 'You are so beautiful'.

Unlike a few years ago, there is now a lot of material on the Dutch market that the teacher can use⁶.

Furthermore, she contributes to the development of the Islamic identity of the school by being actively involved as a member of the identity committee in preparation for the Islamic festivals.

From my personal experience, I can say that stakeholders (such as board members, principals, teachers) who do not have a broad identity perspective are more likely to have difficulty with non-believers in such an organisation as the school. On the other hand, stakeholders who pursue a broad identity perspective will see the importance of having a staff member with a different (religious or secular) life orientation than the school's foundation. For this group, these types of teachers are an integral part of the ideal identity.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In this article, I now use the term 'ideal identity'.
- ² In this article, the concept of Khalifa is only discussed in the sense of world citizen because it is described in the formal documents of the Islamic primary school. For the sake of readability and coherence, the political significance of the Khalifa (Kersten 2022) is deliberately omitted.
- ³ Astaghfir Allāh, this means Allah forgive me. It is a statement that Muslims make after making a mistake.
- ⁴ The first chapter of the Qur'an.
- ⁵ Hadith is a text that says something about what the prophet said, did, or allowed.
- ⁶ Some examples that can be used (Aaras 2020; Arrassi 2022; Kaya-Postema and Budak 2021).

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