

## **Structural Identity Consultation: story telling as a culture of faith transformation**

Ina ter Avest\* & Cok Bakker\*\*

\* Vrije Universiteit/VU University Amsterdam the Netherlands

\*\* Utrecht University, Utrecht the Netherlands

### **Abstract**

In this contribution we explore the Structural Identity Consultation (SIC), and the opportunities this kind of team meetings offer for a non traditional way to live with religious tradition. We take our start in the classroom, characterised by religious diversity. The thoughts of Levinas, and his view on the relationship of 'I' and 'the other', opens our mind the encounter with the other, and the sensibility for the need of the other, resulting in answerability for the other. Structural Identity Consultations in our view create an open space to explore differing narrations on encounter. The narration of a young teacher, and the deconstructive reading of this narration as a text, shows the innovative power of (religious) tradition. It is our conviction that teachers' story telling in Structural Identity Consultations enlarges religious literacy and improves religious sensibility.

'Life is not the life you have lived,  
but what is remembered,  
and the way it is remembered  
in order to pass it on in narrations'.

Gabriel Gacía Márquez 2002

in: *Vivir para contarla*

## **INRODUCTION**

These days, in various European countries, the public demand is heard for a clear cut national identity. Whereas in the earlier days the newspapers would hardly give any space to a banner on religion or identity, in these days the publication of a report of the Scientific Advisory Board for the Policy of the Government (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) on religion and identity, results in screaming headlines in the newspapers. In 2007 the WRR published two reports, one on the role of religion in the public domain, the other on the process of identification in a globalizing world. Both the reports took as their starting point the diversity of the Dutch population regarding the ethnic and cultural background of the inhabitants, which was defined as a problem. This problematic diversity also shows itself in schools and classrooms, focussing these days mainly on the diversity in religious orientation. A so called islamisation of the problem is at stake. On this diversity in religious orientation we elaborate in Structural Identity Consultations (SIC), which we describe as a ‘culture of storytelling’, facilitating the religious development of the participants.

In the first paragraph diversity is presented as it is perceived by teachers in Dutch classrooms. In the second paragraph we elaborate on the thoughts of Levinas, and his ideas on diversity, resulting from the meeting of the (O)ther. In the third paragraph we explore the concept of encounter as we introduce it as a Structural Identity Consultation (SIC) in Christian schools in the Netherlands. Storytelling is the subject of the fourth paragraph. The fifth paragraph, entitled ‘Diversity, envy and transformation’ we will show that a striking, yet until now underestimated aspect of encounter is, the social comparison in which feelings of jealousy and envy are involved. In the sixth paragraph we emphasize the innovative power of tradition and conclude that SIC can be a rich environment for story telling as a culture of faith transformation.

## **DIVERSITY IN DUTCH CLASSROOMS**

Diversity, in the last decades, has become an important aspect of changing European societies, the Netherlands being one of those societies. Starting with the arrival of guest workers in the sixties of the last century, little by little ‘being different’ no longer is an abnormality. On the contrary, this kind of ‘abnormality’ seems to be ‘normal’, that is: the standard, as is shown in the title of an educational project ‘Ik ben gewoon anders, anders is heel gewoon!’ (‘I just am different, being different is common practice’). The Dutch

homogenous, though pillarized society<sup>1</sup>, changed during the last decades into what has been coined as a ‘colourful society’, a name with the connotation of pointing at the multicoloured and multicultural society in a positive way. This approach of the growing diversity in ethnic and religious background of the population of the European countries has been described by our German colleague Peter Schreiner as a process of pluralisation of society (Schreiner 2001, 253–266). Whereas Schreiner in a rather neutral and objective way describes the different approaches in RE in European countries to the changes in the second half of the last century, Bakker in the same volume gives an insight in the actual situation the teacher meets in the classroom and critically explores the concept of ‘diversity’ (Bakker 2001, 203-221). In line with Bakker’s view, our British colleague in RE Robert Jackson completes the thoughts on diversity as a challenge, and sees the development from an assumed homogeneity to an articulated diversity as desirable and of great value for developing societies in the post modern world. Jackson emphasizes the challenge of pluralism in the edification process of pupils in a globalizing world (Jackson 1997).

As all teachers will agree, diversity in the classroom can be perceived in many different ways (Bakker 1999). The classroom is filled with ‘others’, children who differ from each other. It is obvious, Bakker states, that children have different religious backgrounds, but there are a host of other variables to consider: differences in character, in socio-economic background, in intelligence, differences in knowledge across a number of different fields of knowledge, different learning styles and different skills in co-operation and communication (Bakker 1999, 59). However, these days in the public debate the ethnic difference is on the foreground, narrowed down into a religious difference. In the public debate, being different from the other has been islamised, which has serious implications for teacher’s perception of pupils in the classroom, as well as for teacher’s conversations in team meetings whenever ‘the other’ is subject of deliberations. Before we elaborate on the consequences of islamisation of ‘otherness’ for the discussion in team meetings, we wish to turn to the thoughts of Levinas, who starts with the meeting of ‘the other’ from a developmental perspective, stating that without the encounter with ‘the other’ an own authentic and unique identity can not come into existence.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive description of the pillarized Dutch society, changing into a secularized post-pillarized society, see Ter Avest, Bakker, Bertram-Troost & Miedema, Religion and Education in the Dutch Pillarized and Post-Pillarized Educational System, Historical Background and Current Debates. In: Robert Jackson, Siebren Miedema, Wolfram Weisse, Jean-Paul Willaime (eds.), Religion and Education in Europe, Development, Contexts and Debates, Waxmann: Münster/New York/München/Berlin.

## **LEVINAS: THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER ‘WHO CONTRASTS ME’**

The encounter with the other is described by Levinas as an intruding moment, an experience of contrast, at which one becomes aware of the need of the other, and decides to answer the other's needs. Such a moment of encounter influences the perspective on culture, as a way of living together, in an ever changing way. For Levinas the awareness of the difference from the other, starts in face-ing the other. The process of learning to live together, is referred to as the development of a 'complex pattern of behaviour and attitudes' that cannot develop without taking into consideration the interests of others and knowing one's own place. For Levinas in 'knowing one's own place' is included, having an open mind, being receptive to and opening up for the needs of the other. Just as I am, the other is there; the other 'who surprises me' (cf. Levinas 1969/2003, 17). 'The other awakens me, alarms me, arouses me'. In the encounter the feeling of responsibility for the other emerges. The presence of the other becomes an inner-presence in the form of a fruitful and restless uneasiness that summons to responsibility and co-humanity (see also Verhofstadt ...).

In Levinas' train of thought 'I' and 'the other' are inseparable, though separate at the same time. In Levinas' view the relationship between 'I' and 'the other' is not so much characterized by the wish to attunement with the other, but more so in an open attitude towards the other. In the encounter the other offers his representation of his or her life view, as a contribution to the developmental process of self-awareness and an authentic worldview. In the encounter with the other a transformation occurs of the 'I' that already exists.

In Levinas' view, the human being is a responsive creature, responding to the other. Just as I am, the other is there, as a '*the painful difference*'. This painful difference at the same time is the pitfall for colonising the other, 'to turn a blind eye to this 'difference' and try to transform the other phantasmatically into an identical 'alter-ego' (Burggraeve 1985, 42). However, I also feel pulled towards the other; the other who is in conflict with me and at the same time intrigues me and inspires me. Listening to the other I have to resist my natural tendency to colonise the other – when I describe him in familiar concepts and situating him in my own frame of reference (see also Verhofstadt 1995).

Not colonizing the other, but meeting the other as a response-able person, results in a transcendent encounter. In Levinas' view transcendence refers to 'this relationship with the (O)ther that does not reduce the (O)ther to the same' (Levinas in Hardy, 2002, 461). Meeting the other face to face, my idea of the other surpasses the image I already constructed of him. The encounter with the other asks for respecting his alterity. I have to mend my ways

and re-form my frame of reference in order to make room for the other and give him his own voice in my Self. I cannot become a human being without recognizing that I am imperfect, in need of the other. Characteristic for this tuning in in the other is, that it is done of one's own free will, good will. We will turn to the matter of 'good will' below, discussing the feelings of inferiority teachers experience in contrast to the certainty in belief, in team meetings exposed by orthodox Christian colleagues. Before we articulate these contrasting feelings, we clarify in the next paragraph the concept of Structural Identity Consultation (SIC).

## **ENCOUNTER IN SIC**

In team meetings teachers most of the time meet each other to discuss practical problems entailed in the pedagogical task of the school. The encounter with other colleagues, results in complex patterns of group dynamics. In these processes, theological as well as psychological aspects are interwoven. We make them subject of debates on the school's identity, the so called Structural Identity Consultation (SIC).

In meetings and consultations with individual teachers we notice that in their daily practice teachers hardly ever discuss their personal commitment to the formal Christian identity of his or her school. It does happen that teachers don't know what is written on this subject in the school guide or the school curriculum. Very often teachers only are triggered to reflect upon the Christian identity of the school, the moment they become fully aware of the differences in the background of life views their pupils are socialized in. In addition we observe and see confirmed that the concept of 'school identity' is perceived in a narrow understanding. For many of the teachers it is in the first place that the subject of RE causes a certain degree of tension (Bakker & Rigg 2004). A personal commitment to the subject of RE, stemming from a personal feeling of belonging to a religious community, is rather rare.

To improve the strength of the commitment to RE, we suggest a remedy that is radical inductive in its approach. Instead of interpreting this tension in a negative way, the feelings are seen as a signal of commitment – be it a negative involvement. The exploration of this way of being involved is the aim of our inductive approach in the team meetings. In order to explore the personal commitment of the teacher(s), we invite them to describe a 'critical incident' in which in their personal view the school's identity is at stake. As an example of such a 'critical incident' we present in the next paragraph the narration of a young male teacher in a Christian school in one of the bigger cities of the Netherlands.

This radical inductive approach has the effect of making educational interventions, with the aim to trigger teachers' development by reflecting and evaluating their daily practices as

part of their professional biography. This reflection, told in personal stories, however touches upon the level of the daily practice and advances to the layer of valuations and basic motivations, rooted not only in the professional biography, but even more so in the personal biography. These sometimes highly private and subjective stories are characterized by four layers, which we denote as the layers of knowing, recognizing, acknowledging and commitment.

The first layer in the personal narrations denotes what a person knows, what he or she is aware of. It touches upon unknown competencies, turning into known capabilities. The second layer in the narration is related to the recognition of the meaning of knowledge by doing. Knowledge turns into practical wisdom. Acknowledging is the fourth layer of the narration. The fourth layer of the narrative consists of the acknowledgment of the authenticity and uniqueness of the other. Englert denotes this aspect of the narration as 'religious sensibility' (Englert 2007). The last layer, in a concentric model the core of the circle, is the layer of the personal commitment. This layer is involved in the performative representation of religious concepts. By telling the story, the person contributes to the revival of the core concepts of the story; by narrating for example the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, the storyteller edits the story (Copley 2007) in order to open up a space of encountering salvation.

For us a leading principle is the statement that a teacher is a professional and that every professional is not only trained class-room management skills and in the use of pedagogical, organisational and educational 'instruments', but that in the deliberate choice for the narration of one specific story from the religious tradition in exactly that topical situation, individual valuations and basic motivations are at stake. The world view and life-orientation is central. World view and life orientation constitute a person's identity, which is 'work in progress'. Not longer given from parents, by birth, identity has to be constructed by the person herself (Taylor ...). It is by story telling, in telling the personal biography as a life (his)story, that a person constructs her identity. Narrative identity emerges from 'critical incidents' being the milestones that shape the biography of the narrator. In our qualitative research project we have invited the teachers to tell us about such a 'critical incident' that in their opinion still has a deep influence on their 'being a teacher'. As is known from literature 'critical incidents' and 'critical persons' shape the professional identity of teachers (Kelchtermans 1994). It is in particular the subjective educational theory as well as the normative professionalism that are influenced by those events and persons, that left a profound impression in the teachers' life.

This idea of a *normative professionalism* is crucial in the approach we develop in SIC. SIC in our view is a space of encounter, where the meeting of the (O)ther(s) (in persons, as

well as in narrations from religious traditions) creates a culture of knowledge construction. It is *in these stories* that teachers tell what they think is meaningful and how they reflect on the significance of their professional behaviour, that the authentic characteristics and profile of the school is actually generated. This *is* the identity of the school, be it in a dynamic mode: a narrative culture as a culture of transformation of faith, as a contribution to the cumulative religious tradition(s). In the next paragraph we will elaborate on the culture of story telling in SIC.

### **SIC: A CULTURE OF STORY TELLING**

In earlier days the identity of a person was determined by one of the main stories in the culture one lived in (Taylor ...). Knowing only a few aspects of a person, for example that he or she was born in the Netherlands in a working class, gave enough cues to fill in the rest of his or her identity: the religious commitment, his or her membership groups, professional training and the age to get married and have children. The story was told already before the person him/herself could even speak! Nowadays, however, identity is not given beforehand anymore. Every person has the task to construct his or her own identity, taking advantage of the materials from other stories, personal narrations as well as (non) religious doctrines.

Storytelling seems to be a natural disposition of persons. In everyday life people meet each other and inform each other about their name, their daily activities of working, shopping and eating, the economic discourse. However, this kind of storytelling is not what we aim at in the SIC-processes. The way we introduce stories in SIC is as narrations being told whenever life seems to come to a standstill, and breath stops short. Stories as ‘critical incidents’ (Kelchtermans 1994). Such stories, rather narratives, have the function of creating coherence, like ‘beads on a string’; stories on a variety of situations that are held together by the ‘string’ of the plot of the life story. ‘Critical incidents’ in our view are an essential aspect of identity construction. Religious traditions have the texts that make you find out who you’re up against, since they show an explicit worldview. In the Christian tradition for example the world is represented as a creation, good luck is an angel from heaven, the stranger is ‘thou neighbour to be loved’ and the future is represented as ‘Kingdom of God’ (Englert 2007).

Collective storytelling raises the awareness of shared values as well as conflicting values. The embeddings of these values in religious traditions, strengthens the awareness of the pivotal role of faith in teachers’ biographies, in the context of a multicultural and secularized country. Depending on the motivation of the participants, this role can be binding and bridging, as well as conflicting (Shadid 2000).

In the SIC not only the school's identity is subject of such a construction process, but even more so the construction of the personal and in particular the professional identity of the teacher. According to Ricoeur it is only in a narrative way, reflecting upon the relation between 'I' and the environment, and constructing coherence in the diversity of situations we become involved in, that man's identity can emerge. Identity construction, in the view of Ricoeur, is a lifelong process of telling and retelling stories. Identity is a continuing story, 'work-in-progress' (Ter Avest & Bakker 1999, Ganzevoort & Visser 2007, 112). For this process the concept of 'biographising' is coined by Giddens (in: Ganzevoort & Visser 2007, 50). In telling the story our life is structured according to the red thread of the continuing narration, a narration however that could have been constructed in a different way as well. Narratives that are told in the cultural and religious context of the person offer plots as examples of possible scripts for the life story. Religions offer a language for the interpretation of life events that otherwise leave people speechless. Habermas sees religions as frames of reference for the interpretation of one's life. For example the religious concept of 'angel' enables people to communicate about situations in which they felt to have escaped from an accident, by telling the story as being saved by a ministering angel (in: Englert 2006). Such a concept contributes to the religious literacy of the person. The personal and unique life story derives its credibility because of the role of angels in the main narratives in the cultural context.

The Nijmegen psychologist Hermans emphasizes the fact that more than one example of possible scripts are offered, resulting in more than one perspective in the life story. This results in the concept of the multi-voiced self 'a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in an imaginal landscape' (Hermans et al 1992, 28). Voices of different I-positions tell the life story from a different self-chosen perspective, according to a script layed down in the main narrations embedded in the cultural context. In order to understand the story a persons tells about himself, first of all it is important to relate this to other stories the person tells about himself, as well as – in the second place – to the stories other persons tell about him or her. Thirdly it is important to trace elements of the main stories embedded in the cultural context, stories in which characters function as a role model, validating and scaffolding the life story (Ganzevoort 2001). After all, story telling is telling 'what is remembered, and the way it is remembered, in order to pass it on in narrations' (García Márquez 2001). The unique life story can not be told without making use of culturally embedded stories. Story telling in itself is a matter of transformation.

In the concept of the narrative identity the competence of the person is stressed “to comprehend a complex flow of action and to act appropriately within it. (...) It is the very process we use to understand the social life around us and our own position in this process” (Carrithers 1992, 78). With the concept of narrativity Carrithers is not focusing on story telling as such, but on comprehending and understanding complex relationships between actions and attitudes. In order for us to understand these ‘complex relationships’ we make use of the analytical model, introduced by Ganzevoort & Visser (2007), which is similar to our distinction in four layers of narration (see above). It helps us to read in a deconstructive way the text of the ‘critical incident’ of a young teacher, faced with the religious diversity in his classroom, told as a personal narration.

The young teacher starts his story with a beginning that reminds of the words ‘Once upon a time’. He passes on his narration in the following way...<sup>2</sup>

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“Once there was a boy in my group of pupils, who came to me, one morning, saying: ‘Mister, the little brother that was born yesterday, he is in hospital’. I knew the baby had some heart-problems. It apparently bothered the boy, so I asked him: ‘Do you like to share this with the other children in your group? Shall we tell them during our morning-circle?’. He agreed.

So, at the start of the day he told his class mates about his little brother in hospital. Well, everybody was .. eh ... they had questions, they all were very impressed. Then I asked the pupils ‘What can we do? To help?’ The children had a whole bunch of ideas, like making nice drawings, going to visit the little brother and so on. Well, eh, this was not very realistic, to go with all of us to the hospital! Well, and then, one of the pupils suggested to say a prayer.

I hesitated ... and then I said: ‘Well, yes, but we all have a different god, how to say a prayer? For whom?’. Then I asked children personally: ‘If we say a prayer, for whom are you praying?’. Well, one said he’d pray for Allah, an other child answered he’d pray for God, yet an other child told that she had a god of her own since her birth. Well, it turned out that every child has an own god for whom he’d pray, and an own

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<sup>2</sup> See also I. ter Avest (2006), *Veranderen in ontmoeting*, in: S. Miedema and G. Bertram-Troost, *Levensbeschouwelijk leren samen leven*, Meinema: Zoetermeer.

way to say prayers. I then said: ‘Well, then now I give you room to say a prayer, in your own way’.

Well, and then ... it was silent for more than five minutes ... Every child said his prayer, in his own way, to his own god ...

It still moves me, remembering this moment, and passing it on”.

The story this teacher tells about the experience of silence, in itself already is a transformation of existing stories, texts, in the cultural context the school is embedded in. This narration we read as a text, by way of ‘textually oriented discourse analysis’ (Fairclough 2003). In this approach of the teacher’s narration, the text is considered to be constructed in close interaction with the social context. It is an interactive process of meaning making. The texts are seen in terms of different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon, and articulate together (Fairclough 2003).

The start of his narration reminds of the beginning of famous tales; the end shows similarity with rituals of commemoration as it is known in the Netherlands. It must be stated at this point that in the Netherlands, silence is not an unusual way of expressing a shared sorrow or grief, like at the end of a protest march against ‘senseless violence’, or, even more important in the Dutch culture, at the commemoration of the victims of the second world war – the fourth of May every year.

In the Dutch context it is a common thing to face a classroom in a Christian school, most of the pupils being Muslims and the teacher being of a secularized Christian background. This teacher does not give in to an islamisation of the problem raised, but instead of yielding for the superior power of an easy going and practical solution (like making a drawing), in a very untraditional way this teachers explores the religious experiences of his pupils in close cooperation with the pupils themselves. As Roger Säljö states: ‘the trick is to focus on what happens outside the school itself, ... to cultivate a culture of reason, analysis and reflection, based on a certain shared knowledge’ (Säljö 2004).

Speaking in a low voice, the teacher shows that he felt a bit uncomfortable when one of the pupils suggested saying a prayer for the little baby-boy. However, he immediately solves the problem, by asking the children for whom they would say a prayer. Mark the way he puts the question by asking *for* whom the pupils would pray. The formulation shows that he is not familiar with religious language. Though as a pedagogue he is accustomed to opening up the room for pupils’ own experiences. Together with them he creates a new ritual, which echoes the well known ritual of ‘two minutes of silence’ at the memorial of the death of

the Second World War. In his narration the pragmatic dimension of the Christian tradition is echoed, Christianity-by- doing, by creating room for prayer, from which a shared silence emerges.

In the story narrated by the teacher, we see him learning *with* tradition in a non-traditional way (Englert 2007). Starting with an initiative from one of the pupils, the teacher allows for experiencing contrasting ways of praying amongst the pupils, and at the same time facilitating the construction of a new ritual, shows the innovative power of traditions (see also Senge ...). The philosopher Hannah Arendt would coin the way the situation is remembered and passed on, an example of natality, the unique quality of man to make a new and surprising beginning at any time (Arendt ...). Differences in his classroom are bridged; the new ritual is performative in its binding commitment, experienced as a new way of social coherence in the classroom. Knowledge *transmission* is done by supplying the pupils with additional information on the practice of prayer in different religious communities; knowledge *transformation* is facilitated by practicing the new ritual, stimulating the growth of the pupils' competence of 'religious sensibility'.

In sharing with each other the meaning making process laid down in their stories of 'critical incidents' and 'critical persons', teachers themselves create tradition, that is the continuing story of faith transformation. In doing so teachers bring into practice the original meaning of the Latin verb *tradere*.

## **DIVERSITY, ENVY AND TRANSFORMATION**

In the classroom situation given above, diversity was not seen as a problem, but instead used as a chance for development, as is the case in the interpretive approach, developed by the British RE pedagogue Robert Jackson. Their innovative approach is a direct result of the recognition of diversity and its stimulating role in the emergence of an authentic religious identity of pupils and students. The emphasis he and his team lay on the representation of religion in the local context of the child, as well as the interpretation and reflection by the child, accentuates the educational value and meaning of pluralism. It is by telling each other stories about habits and rituals at home, about signs and symbols of awe, about 'critical incidents' like feasts and religious festivals, that children learn about and from each other's culture at home, at their religious communities and their religious tradition as it is represented in the local context. This interactive process stimulates the development of an own authentic religious identity. In this process in the classroom the teacher is of pivotal importance, as we have shown above.

Not always, as in the above given example of the classroom discussion of the teacher with his pupils, does a situation of diversity stay away from islamisation, or conflict. Sometimes the result of social comparison is less favourable than we pointed at above, in Levinas' theory, where 'I' and 'the other' come to the conclusion that they wish to answer to the need of the other. Good will is called in in that situation, and is involved in developing the attitude of answer-ability for the other. However, not in all situations does social comparison end up in good will to bear response-ability for the other.

In an interesting article the Italian psychologists Micelli and Castelfranchi elaborate on the feelings of envy that result from comparison with the other (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007, 449-479). Although envy is regarded as one of the most widespread emotions, usually it does not receive the attention that it needs, and that is the same for psychological studies. Jealousy has received more attention, to which envy is closely related. The main difference between the feeling of jealousy and envy is the difference between 'loss' and 'lack'. Jealousy starts with full hands, and one is afraid to loose something, whereas envy starts with empty hands and one is suffering from lacking something.

The teacher's uneasy feelings arise, at the moment one of the children mentions the possibility of saying a prayer in the classroom, as an answer to the need for comfort of the classmate whose little brother is seriously ill. Since the teacher obviously experiences a certain lack of religious literacy, the confrontation with the feelings of religiosity of his pupils, makes him feel uncomfortable. His uneasy feeling, as well as his experience of a lack of religiosity, might have resulted in feelings of envy. The Italian psychologists Miceli and Castelfranchi describe two main characteristic elements of envy. In the first place envy results from social comparison and the awareness one lacks something, and, secondly, that ill will is shown against the better off (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007, 450). The social comparison with someone rather close (a pupil in the classroom, a colleague in school) results in the feeling that the other has or does something better than you, which results in feelings of uncertainty, or even inferiority; in suffering from your part. The envious mind results from feelings of disappointment. The person feels enclosed, emprisoned in the not self chosen difference. The person has to free himself from the dominant difference and the accompanying negative feelings and ill will, but on the contrary change his perspective on the situation. Not the lack of something he'd like to have, but a shared longing for doing something together – the good will - opens up the possibility to learn with the other. It is exactly this feeling of disappointment that might awaken a deeply felt desire for a common goal or a corporate activity. And indeed, as we have seen in the narration of the teacher above, the pupils show

the capability to change their perspective and overcome their feelings of disappointment, and create a shared space of encounter. Longing for binding, results in bridging the difference and creates a new space of encounter, the space of attentive silence.

Above we have explored the feelings of envy, resulting from a perceived lack of religiosity. In fact this exploration can be seen as an example of *respect*, in the sense of the original meaning of the verb, originating from the Latin *respicere*. Since in a culture of story telling, the encounter with different stories is unavoidable, respect is required.

In everyday situation the word respect very often is used as an umbrella-concept for all kind of situations in which we do not want to judge on somebody-else's attitude, behaviour or pointedly expressed opinion. Many people use the word *respect* as if it is an expression of neutrality, which people interpret positively. Not judging is seen as an act of respect. It seems as though one is giving space to others to have their own opinion, notwithstanding the fact that one does not really take the effort to show a genuine interest in what the other's opinion really is about. Respect though, in the sense of the original meaning of the verb *respicere*, denotes quite something different. The literal translation of the word *respicere* means: 're-viewing something; give something a second glance, a closer look; follow something attentively' (Haers 2003, 85). Respect seen in this way is closely connected to exploring the other in order to notice the most valuable of that person. In particular for a teacher, respect denotes the honestly devoted and caring attention to the student, to speak kindly to the student in such a way that the teacher creates the space in which the student can grow (Haers 2003, 85). Respect is not just present or absent, but respect grows whenever people are touched by the aspects of value of others – be it their behaviour, their attitude, their qualities or their thoughts. The teacher shows respect for the experiences of his pupils, in particular in the way he is moved by the way he remembers this 'critical incident', and passes it on in his narration.

In the same way the teacher concretises the abstract concept of respect, in attentively listening to his pupils and by showing that he is touched by their story, so we aim at a respectful atmosphere in SIC-meetings, where teachers share their 'critical incidents'. Respect in the SIC-meetings concentrates on *respicere*, as attentively re-viewing the commonalities as well as the differences in the teachers' narrations. In the same way that children tell each other about the 'critical incidents' that represent their religion at home, in our Structural Identity Consultations we invite teachers to tell each other their 'critical incidents' of which in some way or an other religion is part. The aim of SIC is the creation a space of encounter where different cultures meet. In this space the maximum sense of community might be the result to

share the feeling that it is a common thing that every teacher and every pupil is different, an agreement on disagreement (see also Droogers 2002, 18).

*Respicere* and re-telling contribute in an untraditional way to tradition that is learned by listening, repeating, and memorising, by imitation and participation. Without learning about traditions, people get lost in naive and mythical frames of reference, faced with the difficulty of 'reinventing the wheel'. The risk of 'reinventing the wheel' is its egocentric character, and the lack of exchange with a well founded and solid grounded world view. Without tradition the personally created world view is too fragile, not viable to confrontation with different world views. Without tradition people rest speechless at life events. Tradition offers a frame of reference for the interpretation of vital questions; knowing about different traditions offers the freedom of transformation of an authentic and unique self-image and world-view.

### **THE INNOVATIVE POWER OF TRADITION**

In the above paragraphs we have explored the character of Structural Identity Consultation as a culture of story telling, a space of encounter. As an example we quoted the 'critical incident' of a young male teacher. We interpreted his 'critical incident' as a narrative text and read it in a deconstructive way. This way of reading the classroom situation, revealed a possible underlying feeling of envy, transformed into an untraditional way of working with religious traditions. This analysis, in itself a transformed story, offers food for thought in team-meetings, as long as it helps to facilitate the emergence of longing for a shared goal or a common activity.

The result of our analyses open up new aspects of religious knowledge in teachers' lives, and show post modern ways of representation of religious traditions. Worded in every day language, and using every day terms and symbols, as they are familiar in Western culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular in the Netherlands, the teacher's story reveals new and untraditional interpretations of age-old religious traditions. The narration show nowadays ways of identification with religiosity the teachers commit himself to. He integrates this background as a religious dimension of his professionalism, in other words: in this way he develops religious sensibility as an important aspect of his normative professionalism.

In (team-)interviews with teachers, we learn that a majority of teachers seems to be willing to face the difference in stories of their colleagues. The prevailing culture in most of the primary schools in a multicultural context, on the one hand, is strong on social cohesion and solidarity, engagement and respect for each others' differing opinions. On the other hand,

there is a minority holding to fixed stories for example on the pedagogic foundation of the school, the didactics and the schools' identity. Such a minority very often is not willing to face the differences and enter into an open dialogue. Whereas the majority is looking for new ways of transformation of the Christian tradition, and willing to turn the difference into a fruitful and development stimulating crisis, they at the same time value highly social cohesion in their team of colleagues. It is this positive feeling of belonging, which seems to turn into the negative feelings accompanying the perceived hindrances to enter into a process of creating new stories, new knowledge to deal with the changed classroom population (Tillema 2004). Interesting is that conflicts in this view are seen as disturbing, and not as offering opportunities for growth (see also Vygotskij ...), for example of the competency of 'living together in difference'. Avoidance of conflict prevails, which withholds the teachers from the energy to grow, as a result from the exploration of contrasts. An explanation for this behaviour of avoidance can be found with Worchel, Woon & Woon (1992, 95). Following their train of thought the majority might feel uncomfortable, confronted with an outspoken and persuasive point of view of the orthodox Christians. A point of view they probably remember from their upbringing. It might be the case that they feel jealous or even envious, missing this kind of clear cut convictions and beliefs that functions as a directive in unmanageable daily practices.

Our own research shows that there is reluctance in education in particular to discuss one's own personal convictions (Bakker 2003). Since in the second half of the last century, secularization resulted in religion and belief becoming more and more a matter of individual choice, teachers no longer are accustomed to talk about religion and express their religiosity in the public domain, in our case in the SIC processes in the school. We noted that they were often unable to find the words to describe in a coherent way their personal felt religiosity and held belief system, like the teacher in our example stammering as soon as the children offer a religious ritual to meet the need of their classmate.

From our analyses of the 'critical incident' of our young male teacher, we learn that illiteracy in the wording of the deepest feelings of commitment, is a serious problem. Confronted with strict religious doctrines, secularized Christians have no reply. What they need to develop their answer-ability and face the new situations is the growth of their religious literacy. That might help them to overcome their feelings of uncertainty, which so often leads to the negativity of envy. The worst case is that these feelings of envy result in a negative ambition of the majority to begrudge the minority's feelings of certainty they derive

from their faith, in stead of striving at an untraditional and dialogical way of discussing religious affairs.

The uneasiness in wording their deepest feelings concerning the ultimate concerns, hinders team members to sharpen their minds in the contrast of differing stories, representing differing ways of transformation of tradition. Necessary are refresher courses that facilitate re-iterating the teacher's unconsciousness competency, his 'practical wisdom' in RE, aiming at an awareness of his or her own professionalism in RE, to arrive at the competence of religious sensibility. Since in many teams we meet a priority on social coherence and solidarity, we fear this leaves no room for differing religious stories. Lacking is an untraditional way of learning *with* tradition, in articulating differences in SIC, as a community of faith transformation.

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*Ina ter Avest* is senior researcher in Religious Education at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and research lecturer in Denominational School Identity at CHN University at Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. E-mail: [kh.ter.avest@psy.vu.nl](mailto:kh.ter.avest@psy.vu.nl).

*Cok Bakker* is professor in Religious Education at the Faculty of Humanities (Sub-Faculty of Theology) at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. E-mail: [cbakker@theo.uu.nl](mailto:cbakker@theo.uu.nl).

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