

Teaching Islam Islamic Religious Education in Sweden, by Jenny Berglund, (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, vol. 17), (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2010), 253 pp., ISBN 978-3-8309-2277-3, €29.90 (paperback)

Teaching Islam is the seventeenth volume in a series on Religious Diversity and Education in Europe. The inside of the front cover states, "The publishing policy of the series is to focus on the importance of strengthening pluralist democracies through stimulating the development of active citizenship and fostering greater mutual understanding through intercultural education. It pays special attention to the educational challenges of religious diversity and conflicting value systems in schools and in society in general." This book appears at a time when religious education, in general, and Islamic education, specifically, has become one of the most significant challenges in the multi-religious world, especially in Europe. To my knowledge, this is the first study to present field research findings on Islamic religious education in Sweden and in Europe. Therefore, the book fills a niche in the field of religious studies.

The book explores the teaching of Islam as a minority religion embedded in a secular Christian society. Berglund raises a fundamental question: How is Islamic religious education formed within the framework and under the jurisdiction of the Swedish school system? To answer this question and to gather data, three Muslim schools have been selected. To examine the problem, Berglund poses five questions: What is the content of the Islamic religious education offered in each of the selected schools? What are the similarities and differences in content between these schools, and how are these similarities and differences to be understood? What meanings do the selected teachers ascribe to Islamic religious education? How do the teachers account for their selection of Islamic religious education content? What is the nature of the educational choices involved in creating the type of Islamic religious education offered in each school? In pursuing the answers to these questions, Berglund uses various ethnographic research methods, such as observation, interviews and the study of relevant teaching materials, as evidenced in the bibliography and appendix sections, primarily from anthropo-

logical and sociological perspectives. The author aims to increase our understanding of Islamic religious education as a lived classroom experience by examining the formation of its content in relation to the various Islamic traditions and understandings of Islam in a Swedish context (p. 15).

The book consists of seven chapters, apart in addition to reference and appendix sections. The first chapter introduces the subject, presents the background of the research, and provides information about religious education in the Swedish school system, the establishment of Muslim schools in Sweden, and the state of religious education research, pointing out the scarcity of studies. This chapter also provides a review of relevant research to give the reader an indication of where this work is situated among the other academic disciplines. In the second chapter, the theoretical framework guiding the study and the methodological considerations are presented.

The following three chapters (3, 4, 5), “Teaching the Words of God,” “Using the Past to Orient in the Present,” and “Teaching Islam with Songs,” are empirical in nature and comprise the main body of the work. These chapters address the role of the Qurʾān in religious education, how Islamic history is utilized to orient the present, and how song, music and celebration are employed. The inclusion of extensive accounts in these three chapters is intended both to demonstrate the approach used in the interpretation of the material and to provide a tangible sense of the classroom situation. “These chapters,” Berglund hopes, “will literally bring the reader into the IRE (Islamic Religious Education) classroom and familiarise her or him with the material that is taught, the manner in which it is presented and the reasoning that lies behind the educational choices these teachers have made; it is also hoped that they will make evident those elements that simply have been taken for granted” (p. 16).

The sixth chapter, “Conclusions,” provides a concise summary of the answers to the five questions raised in the introduction, all of which are contained within the findings of the three empirical chapters, and it highlights certain conclusions.

The major findings of the study are as follows. While the three schools’ local syllabi reflect some fundamental differences in the formation of the teaching of the Qurʾān, teachers themselves generally

appear to have similar teaching aims, although differences in style are evident in their classroom interactions with pupils (p. 103). The author notes that there are no clear-cut divisions between teachers despite the fact that their selection of narratives indicates that they belong to different theological traditions (p. 157). In teaching Islam with songs, sound-art expression plays an important role in the Islamic religious education of all three schools. However, each teacher uses different genres in different ways and for different purposes (p. 190). At all three schools, Islamic religious education is viewed as a subject that guides pupils into Islam by showing them the best possible way to live their lives as Muslims (p. 197).

The book also indicates specific content variations and different approaches by teachers in each school to teaching the Qurʾān (such as prioritizing “recitation now understanding later” or “understanding now recitation later”), choosing musical genres, and interpreting Islam, which influence the teachers’ ideas about teaching and education and their perceptions of their pupils’ situation in Sweden. These and many other differences show that “teaching of Islamic Religious Education in the studied schools is not simply a matter of one generation sending a fixed religious content to the next; rather, it is a matter of contextualizing, negotiating and adapting in order to make Islam understandable, relevant and useful to Muslim children living in a contemporary Western milieu” (p. 206). Hence, defining Islamic religious education as a *transmission* of Islam to the younger generation is inaccurate. The term *transmission* ignores the wide range of diversity and the importance of context in determining the outcomes of education, and it suggests Islam as a religion of insulated concepts that is capable of being passed from one generation to the next without change. Berglund suggests, “This sort of process, which involves no less than the reconstituting of tradition, would be more accurately described as *translation* rather than *transmission*” (p. 206).

In summary, although the representativeness of the research findings for Islamic religious education in all Muslim schools is technically arguable, as the author justly notes, it can readily be said that the book generally reflects the classroom realities of “Islamic” schools in Europe. This book, the product of a commendable effort by the author, is a fine contribution that will help non-Muslims, in particular, to understand how Islam is mediated within the particular environment

of a secular school system, in accordance with the author's aims as stated in the Introduction (p. 33). It is also a fine contribution to the Religious Diversity and Education in Europe series. Anyone who is curious about and unfamiliar with Islamic religious education practices from different perspectives in school settings would be well advised to read this book.

Turgay Gündüz

Uludağ University, Bursa-Turkey