

Chapter 21

Islamic Education as Asymmetrical Democratic Interaction

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Introduction

Religious education, in general, and Islamic education, in particular, are challenged in terms of coherence. Paul Hirst (1974), for instance, holds that “religious education” is meaningless since rationality is involved in education whereas religious beliefs are dogmatic and there could not be a coherent combination between a rational and a dogmatic endeavor. Concerning what is actually happening in religious communities under the name of religious education, Hirst states that “education” is used in such cases in a rather primitive sense which is nothing but indoctrination and education in this sense should not be confused with the modern meaning of education in which knowledge and rationality are pivotal.

J.M. Halstead (2004) talks about Islamic education in the same way that Hirst dealt with religious education. Comparing Islamic education with liberal education, Halstead maintains that in Islamic education “the autonomy of the subject or discipline, at least as understood in liberal thinking, is excluded, for all subjects and all knowledge needs the guiding spirit of religion to give them purpose and direction” (p. 525). Again, according to him:

Certainty may sometimes be achieved through an acceptance of the authority of the teaching of the “*ulama*” (the learned) about the Qur’an and the Prophet. Islam, therefore, encourages an attitude of respectful humility towards such legitimate authority and trust in the truth of the knowledge that it hands down. (Halstead, 2004, p. 525)

This view has been dealt with critically elsewhere (Bagheri & Khosravi, 2006). Suffice to say here, the relation between Islamic education and liberal education is complicated since it depends on the meaning held for Islamic education. At a more general level too, it is increasingly becoming clear nowadays that the relation between religion and secularism is more complicated than has been conceived of since the Enlightenment. As Jurgen Habermas (2012) has pointed out, both religious people and secularists have made mistakes in

understanding the relation between religion and reason. According to Habermas, the mistake of secularists has been the ignorance of the social role that religion plays in human life and the mistake of religious people has been the undermining of the role of human reason in the human life. It is also worth mentioning Derrida (1983) has urged us to embrace what he calls a “new Enlightenment.” According to him, while the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century attempted to draw a sharp line between faith and reason, the new Enlightenment rejects this contrast as simple-mindedness. Derrida holds that undermining the role of faith in the old Enlightenment led to turning reason into a faith. Now, what is expected from the new Enlightenment is to draw a new relationship between faith and reason so that each can find its proper place.

This chapter attempts to introduce a new concept of Islamic education which can play a role in drawing its proper relation between reason and faith. The purpose of this is to offer an alternative understanding of Islamic education from that held by scholars such as J. M. Halstead with a view to impacting practice. It should be acknowledged that there have been misconceptions about Islamic education among Muslims who support Islamic education as well as liberalists who critique it. Contrary to these misconceptions, a new reading of Islamic texts can provide a conception of Islamic education that has both validity, as far as the Islamic texts are concerned, and compatibility with reason. Drawing on this point, a concept of Islamic education is suggested below based on Islamic appreciations of human agency and rationality. It shows Islamic education is an “other education” not only with regard to what some, if not most, Muslims think explicitly about Islamic education or presuppose it implicitly in their educational activities but also with regard to the dominant stereotyped and misconceived view of Islamic education in the non-Muslim world as didactic and authoritarian: a form of indoctrination.

An Islamic conception of human agency

This section gives an account of human agency in the Qur'an as a basis for the nature of education suggested in the following section. Rom Harré (1983) has pointed out that action has a pivotal point in Islam. Referring to Western ethical views, he holds that they are predominantly “cognitive” whereas the Islamic view is “conative”:

Muslim moral psychology is the only traditional morality I know of with a well-articulated psychological theory of moral development. It is a conative, not a

cognitive, theory...Hence, all the will-strengthening techniques like the Ramadan fasts and the various other forms of self-denial. They are not to mortify the flesh, a kind of moral sadomasochism; they are to strengthen the will because that is the path of moral development. (Harré , 1983, p. 244)

According to Harré, since Islam holds that it introduces the “right way” to humans there is not so much need to think about the right way (the cognitive side) as there is always a need to decide (the conative side) to go through the right way. Harré’s view on the conative, rather than cognitive, characteristic of Islamic morality might indicate that the Islamic view is merely conative without having any cognitive part. However, this is not the case as it is shown below by analyzing the components of human action, including moral action, in the Islamic view. A further point in the quotation from Harré needs some clarification as it might be thought that he confines character education or virtue ethics to Islam. Obviously, character education as well as virtue ethics has a long history that goes back at least to Aristotle.

As far as human agency is concerned, it should be noted that the Qur’an introduces it as the most comprehensive human characteristic there is, going beyond the categories of age (except for early childhood), race, sex, belief, etc. All humans are considered as agents who have actions that can genuinely be attributed to them. For instance, it is stated in the Qur’an that “each one acts according to his [her] own disposition...” (Qur’an, 17: 84). In order to articulate the Islamic view on human agency, the foundations and requirements of action are explained below respectively.

Foundations of action

Analyzing the verses of the Qur’an in which human action is at stake shows that at least three underlying foundations are presupposed for action consisting of cognition, inclination, and will. In other words, any human behavior can be considered as action if and only if it is based on the three underlying foundations. It should be noted that the scope of behavior is broader than the scope of action. That is to say, any action is a behavior but not vice versa. A behavior is taken as an action only when it is based on the three underlying elements. The second point that should be clear is that the relationship among the three underlying elements is not necessarily linear. That is to say, it is not the case that cognition is always followed by

inclination and will; rather, cognition might be preceded by inclination. In the latter case, cognition provides inclination with rationalizations.

As far as cognition as one of the foundations of action is concerned, human actions are analyzed in the Qur'an in terms of cognition. Cognition itself can have different features including illusion, conjecture, and certainty. Conjecture and certainty are respectively stronger than illusion. To mention but a few examples from the Qur'an, the following verses can be addressed:

As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty takes for water till he reaches it to find that there was nothing, and finds God with him [he is confronted with God] who settles his account, for God is swift at the reckoning. (Qur'an, 24: 39)

This case deals with people who have an illusory imagination of an aim; nevertheless, the aim functions as a cognitive base for the subsequent strivings and actions. Reaching a valid and solid certainty is not so easy. It is important to distinguish it from illusions and conjectures. This differentiation is emphasized in this verse: "Many of them follow nothing but illusion; yet illusion cannot replace the reality. God verily knows what they do" (Qur'an, 10: 36).

Cognition is a defining feature of human action which appears as intentional. Intentionality means "aboutness" as phenomenologists hold. The aim of an action shows what the action is about. "Aim" is different from "end" in terms of consciousness which is involved in the former but not in the latter. While, for instance, a river that enters into a sea has led to an end, one cannot say that it has had an aim. This cognitive dimension of action is what differentiates action from a mere movement and even a merely bodily movement. As stated above, the content of this cognition needs not necessarily be true as it could be illusory. As for consciousness, it might appear as a sub-conscious or implicit awareness. However, an action cannot be totally unconscious and in that case action turns into mere bodily movement. Yet, what can be said about what Csikszentmihalyi (2008) refers to as "flow"? Flow or peak experience refers to the full engagement in an activity. By flow, absorption in an activity increases as self-consciousness decreases. In fact, intentionality is compatible with flow because what decreases in it is self-consciousness rather than consciousness. That is to say, an activity turns into an *autotelic* activity which is different from a mechanical *automatic* activity.

The second foundation of action in the Islamic view is inclination. Without a tendency or motivation, an action is like a car without an engine. Even though a cognitive picture of an aim might be motivating, such a motivation is almost always preceded by a satisfied inclination associated with the cognitive picture. Thus, inclinations, either of a low or high order, are indispensable parts of actions. That is why the Qur'an states that each person is deeply interested in his or her action even though the action might morally be wrong in actual fact: "We have made attractive to every person their deeds. They have to go back to their Lord, and He will tell them an account of their actions." (Qur'an, 6: 108)

How can we take inclination as a necessary foundation of action while some people do some of their actions out of lack of care for another as is the case in conducting some educational tasks? In such cases we should differentiate between surface and deep emotions. Lack of care is the surface of the emotional dimension of an action; however, almost always a deep emotion is involved in an action. For instance, pupils who might even hate mathematics do their homework in order to acquire their teacher's positive attention.

Finally, the third foundation of action is will. Cognition and inclination are necessary but not sufficient for an action to appear; will is also needed to make a human action possible. Here will is associated with choice and is not to be reduced to a mere power to act. Will as a necessary condition of human action can be inferred from responsibility as a requirement of human action. People are taken to be responsible for their actions on the ground that it is presupposed that they have chosen to do their deeds. It should be noted that according to the Qur'an, will is not the same as inclination or even an intensified inclination. Thus, when different inclinations conflict, it is not the case that the strongest inclination leads to action in a mechanical manner. If it were so, then humans could not be taken as responsible for their actions. According to the Qur'an, inclination or passion can be the subject of choice and this shows that will is other than inclination. Referring to this relationship, it is stated in the Qur'an: "Have you considered him who takes his own lust for his god? Can you stand a surety for him?" (Qur'an, 25: 43). That is to say, it is one thing to have an inclination and another to choose it.

One might ask if will is to be taken as a necessary foundation of action, then what can be said about a coercive action? In fact, a coercive action is not contrasted to a willed action; rather, the former is also a willed action but with only one option. That is to say, willed actions have either multiple options or merely one option and a coercive action is of the latter type.

Even though human action is based on cognition, inclination, and will, there are different sorts of limitations that surround the action including bodily, mental, social, historical, geographical, etc. limitations. As a result, not only is it the case that each person has his or her own field of action but also that each one of the foundations of his or her action can be under different sources of influence that draw the borders of the realm of their actions. The particular boundaries of each person's action is introduced by the word "*vos 'a*" (capacity) in the Qur'an, with a positive vision that God does offer a chance to meet personal potential: "God does not burden a soul beyond capacity. Each will enjoy what (good) he earns, as indeed each will suffer from (the wrong) he does." (Qur'an, 2: 286)

In its own particular manner, having accepted the limitations of human action, the Islamic view then rejects an "error theory." Such a view is to the effect that the person is basically unaware of his or her (wrong) action due to the intervention of either an unconscious realm from the inside or an insurmountable force from the outside: "In fact, man is a witness against himself, whatever the excuses he may offer." (Qur'an, 75: 14-15). Whatever happens a person is responsible for their actions.

Requirements of action

Having the foundations of cognition, inclination, and will, action has some requirements. In what follows, four important requirements are introduced without confining all the requirements of actions to them.

The first requirement is that when an action is done, it entails an objective aspect that will have its influence on the doer as well as the environment. Being objective and real, consequent influences of a deed are inevitable and cannot be helped. For instance, referring to the influence of bad action on the doer's heart it is stated in the Qur'an: "As a consequence of breaking their promise made to God, and telling lies, he filled their hearts with hypocrisy which will last till the day they come before Him." (Qur'an, 9: 77)

The second requirement is that actions shape the identity of the doer due to their inevitable influences on the person. In other words, actions of a person represent the kind of wills he or she has exercised as well as the kind of cognitions and inclinations he or she has chosen. The particular contents of these cognitions and inclinations represent the identity of the person concerned. No doubt, identities of people have different layers some of which are in fact

“given” to them instead of being “taken” or “acquired” by them. For instance, genetic, sexual, and national identity are of the given kind. However, the core of identity, according to Islam, is built by means of actions of the person. In fact, components of the given sort of identity establish the borders of the field of action: people build their core identities within the field by their actions. Equating people with their core identities, the Qur’an states: “That no one who carries a burden bears another’s load; that a man receives but only that for which he strives” (Qur’an, 53: 39-40).

The third requirement is responsibility. Humans are responsible for their actions since they are the main source of their actions. Even though when a deed is done its influences on the doer as well as the environment are inevitable, the person is responsible for both kinds of influences. Thus, it is stated: “Every soul is pledged to what it does” (Qur’an, 74: 38).

The fourth requirement is that action has a dynamic nature but steadily becomes static. Given the underlying foundations of action, it is in principle possible for humans to change their previous actions either in a positive or negative direction. Referring to the positive direction, for instance, the Qur’an states: “To those who do wrong out of ignorance, then repent and correct themselves, your Lord is indeed forgiving and kind” (Qur’an, 16: 119). However, the more one acts in one direction the less opportunity one would have in doing action in the opposite direction due to the impact of the previous deeds on the identity of the person. In an extreme case, the Qur’an talks about a stagnation that occurs in a wrong doer via the formation of a blocked identity: “They are deaf, dumb and blind, and shall never return” (Qur’an, 2: 18).

Islamic concept of education as an asymmetrical inter-action

Drawing on the concept of human agency and rationality in the Islamic view, I suggest then in this section a fresh conception of Islamic education. Given the foundations and characteristics of action explained above, students, as well as teachers, are agents who have different types of action and constitute their identities by means of these actions. Accordingly, the following characteristics can be regarded for an Islamic concept of education.

Firstly, an educational relationship is an inter-action. It should be noted that “inter-action” here is different from mere mutual influence to be generally observed. In other words, inter-action can only be held among beings that have actions with the three foundations of cognition, inclination, and will. A relationship is inter-action if and only if each side takes into serious consideration the other side’s cognition, inclination, and will, as well as the behavior

based upon them: their agency. Whenever a person deals with another person in a way that his or her agency is neglected or denied, the relationship turns from an inter-action into a unilateral action in which the other person is reduced to a thing, acted upon. Thus, based on human agency, educational relationships should be regarded as inter-action.

Secondly, the inter-action between teacher and student is expected to provide the student with better possibilities for action. In fact, when the student is regarded as an agent, the role of the teacher cannot consist of changing the student; only a thing can be changed directly and unilaterally by a person. An agent should decide what to do and, as a result, *how to be with any other agents taken into account*. Thus, what a teacher can do is to provide the student with rich possibilities for action toward change but not demand change and this would mean, for instance, not demand that they perform work toward change in their cognitive capacities. This conception rejects the well-known prototype of teacher as a person who “shapes” the students’ minds or personalities. Instead, what is fitted to the agency of students and the sphere of inter-action is to provide students with rich possibilities for action. The interlocutor with these possibilities then *chooses* how to respond. These possibilities include both providing students with options and knowledge for “good habits” in their childhood as well as confronting students with situations and behaviours that might urge or encourage them to acquire good traits. With regard to the dynamic characteristic of action and its process of steady stagnation via the formation of bad habits of character and identity mentioned above, inter-action of teacher and student can pave the ground for forming “good habits” as well as deconstructing “bad habits.” Enabling students’ actions, rather than shaping or moulding them, is the view coherent with human agency. This conception of agency, according to an Islamic perspective, does well to guide teacher-student inter-action.

Thirdly, this conception of inter-action is different from teaching-centred and learning-centred conceptions. These two conceptions are antithetical as in one of them teaching is pivotal and in the other learning of the student takes the main place. Teaching-centred views have a long history: traditional education has been almost entirely teaching-centred. However, there are some more recent supports for this conception even though with a somewhat different version. Gert Biesta (2010, 2013), for instance, critiqued the modern view of education, namely the emphasis on learning, because the modern view undermines the role of the teacher, who Biesta sees as educationally important. According to Biesta (2013), “learnification” is a dominant trend in which every educational activity is reduced to the activity on the student

side, namely learning. Biesta is right to observe the dominance of learning in most modern educational endeavours. For instance, this trend can be observed in the so-called “Smart School”: a program conducted in Malaysia since the 1990s in order to broadly computerize the educational system. The main differences claimed between a smart school and a traditional school deal with learning. They are as follows: “self-accessed” learning (in which students know how to access the materials); “self-paced” learning (in which students learn based on their abilities); and “self-directed” learning (in which students organize the process of their learning). (Smart School Project Team, 1997, p. 133)

Contrary to this trend of learnification, Biesta (2013) holds that the defining feature of school is teaching and thus tries to replace “learning” with “being taught.” He holds that “to learn from someone is a radically different experience from the experience of being taught by someone.” (Biesta, 2013, p. 457). This is because in “learning from” the student is active and the teacher is turned into a source, such as a book, whereas in “being taught by someone” the teacher is beyond the control of the student; in such a manner it is possible that students may be exposed to unexpected truths. This gives the teaching an authority that cannot be replaced by anything else:

To receive the gift of teaching, to welcome the unwelcome, to give a place to inconvenient truths and difficult knowledge, is precisely the moment where we *give authority* to the teaching we receive. In this sense—and presumably only in this sense—can the idea of authority have a meaningful place in education. (Biesta, 2013, p. 459)

Biesta’s attempt to give the teacher and teaching a “transcendental” position, as he compares it to the religious concept of revelation understood in a secular way, might be considered as a retaliation to learnification. However, contrary to Biesta’s point that “what makes the school a school is the fact that it is a place for teaching,” I suggest that what makes the school a school is inter-action between the teacher and the student but in an asymmetrical form explained below. Accordingly, as “being taught by” is crucial, “learning from” is also vital. We can embrace the student’s role of constructing what is being taught without reducing teaching to learning.

On the other hand, a learner-centred conception of education puts the student at the centre and defines the teacher as facilitator. Dewey (1938, pp. 5-6), for instance, in his classical defence of this conception makes some contrasts between learning from text/teacher and learning from experience; impositions from above and expression of individuality; preparing for a more or less far future and using the present opportunities etc. In all of these contrast sets, Dewey prefers the second pole of the pairs. In this view, the agency of the student is at stake with the presupposition that it is being threatened by any dominance of text/teacher. In the learner-centred conception of education what is missing is the authority of knowledge exemplified in the authority of teacher. There is almost always a confusion here between authority and authoritarianism explained below.

What is common between the two conceptions is that inter-action of teacher and student is undermined or undervalued by putting emphasis on either the side of teacher/teaching or the side of student/learning. With my Islamically inspired vision of educational inter-action I mean something more than what is held as the activity of the student during the process of “being taught,” on the one hand, and what is going on in facilitation of the role of teacher on the other hand. This brings us to a fourth characteristic of inter-action.

Fourthly, providing the student with a rich possibility for action is, among other things, related to introducing cultural heritage which contains important elements such as knowledge. This brings a challenge to the fore since the cultural heritage once shared turns the relationship of teacher and student into an asymmetrical relationship. While both teacher and student are agents, their relationship becomes asymmetrical because the teacher is equipped already with cultural heritage. The asymmetrical nature of the relationship thus gives birth to a new element namely an authority involved in the teacher-student relationship. With this element, a crucial and controversial aspect of education emerges. This point is critical as the controversy between the traditional and a modern education is located here: While the former puts emphasis on the authority of teacher at the expense of denying the agency of student, the latter brings the agency of student to the fore by undermining the authority of teacher; hence the introduction of the concept of “facilitator”: I am suggesting neither conception is sufficient and we have much to learn from the Islamically underpinned idea that authority is “good enough” (as Bingham, 2008, would say) because of and with inter-active *respect*.

In the removal of the authority of the teacher is the idea of the facilitator. Some of the advocates of the idea of facilitation have offered a concession in accepting a minimal account

of teacher authority. Mathew Lipman, the founder of the program of Philosophy for Children, for instance, accepts a “procedural authority” for teachers. He has suggested that children participate in a “community of inquiry” which includes the teacher but in which there is no place for indoctrination. Referring to the idea of community of inquiry, Lipman and his colleagues state:

This is not to say that philosophy for children entails an equalizing of the status of teacher and students. In the normal course of philosophical inquiry, such as in a classroom, the teacher may be presumed to possess authority with regard to the techniques and procedures by which such inquiry is to be prosecuted. (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 45)

In this statement, the teacher authority in terms of procedures is accepted by means of which the teacher can, for instance, stop a student from continuing any talk preventing the integration of the inquiry group and denying a turn to another student. On the other hand, Lipman and his colleagues prevent the teacher from having and exercising authority in the realm of contents of philosophical views. What urges them to prevent this sort of authority is the fear of indoctrination.

However, this procedural authority is not without its own threats. These might not be less than the threat of indoctrination. Why, for instance, are the current procedures of inquiry regarded as so legitimate that the teacher can make them dominate the thought and speech of the students? If the probable threats of this domination do not make it reasonable to abandon procedural authority because of its possible benefits, why should the threat of indoctrination urge us to abandon content authority?

What has been confusing in the issue of the teacher authority is twofold. Firstly, the authority belongs in the first place to the cultural heritage of the teacher rather than the teacher *per se*. While the teacher as the carrier of cultural heritage has merely a secondary authority, the authority of cultural heritage is original and is due to its being examined and used in terms of rationality and reasonability in the field of human life. As far as a culture is reliable in these terms for a society, it has a significant role in the life of the society. Thus, authority in education is in fact a manifestation of history and heritage of the society even though it is exemplified by an individual teacher. The Islamic view of human agency advocates an asymmetrical inter-

action between the teacher and the student. This is because cultural heritage is taken to be as important as the agency of teacher and student. Cultural heritage is important in Islam but not merely because of its being a traditional phenomenon but as something that is rational and reasonable or as the accumulation of reasons. If a criticism of this position were that cultural heritage can be wrong, then Islam covers this ground. The characteristics of rationality and reasonableness of human action are to be exemplified in relation to cultural heritage. Thus, the Qur'an undermines a tradition that is irrational or unreasonable: "When it is said to them: 'Follow what God has revealed,' they reply: 'No, we shall follow only what our fathers had practiced,'—even though their fathers had no wisdom or guidance!" (Qur'an, 2: 170).

Secondly, authority is sometimes confused with authoritarianism. Authoritarianism emerges only when the teacher's secondary authority turns into a first-hand authority and this authority, in turn, becomes a pretext for teachers to impose their views on students. The characteristics of rationality and reasonableness are at stake here. Irrational and unreasonable actions are involved in authoritarianism not only because authoritarianism confuses the real source of authority, but also because an authoritarian teacher acts through selfish drives instead of conducting reasonable action. This selfish tendency is undermined in the Islamic view because, as mentioned above, teachers are important merely as carriers of knowledge and culture rather than as an authority in itself. That is why, the Qur'an undermines the way some Jews and Christians treated their religious scholars in taking them as an authority in this sense: "They consider their rabbis and monks...to be gods apart from God..." (Qur'an, 9: 31). This is, in fact, a reminder to Muslims to be aware that if they treat their religious scholars in the same way, they would also be at the same position in taking their scholars as their Lord which is considered a huge deviation from true faith. Scholars and teachers take their authority from the knowledge and source of knowledge which is represented here as God, not vice versa. This conception of authority is different from what Halstead (2004) introduces mentioned at the outset of this paper. While he attempts to show that the authority of religious scholars in the Islamic view is dogmatic, the above reference to the Qur'anic verse negates such a view as valid.

Peters (1967) once distinguished between "being an authority" and "being in authority." The former refers to teachers whose authority is due to their specialty in their relevant branch of knowledge, whereas the latter indicates that the authority is merely based on teacher's position. It seems that the latter is associated with authoritarianism whereas the former shows

a legitimate kind of teacher authority. What should be condemned is merely authoritarianism as distinguished from authority. And, in fact, what is threatening to human agency is merely authoritarianism, not authority.

With regard to the problems associated with the arguments of teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches, we need to look for a democratically inclined “asymmetrical interaction” in which students and teachers are on an equal footing in terms of having agency but the authority of the teacher, in its proper sense, is seen as *helpful* to the student. The Islamic view *requires* that education be understood in terms of such an asymmetrical interaction. This fits the Islamic view because in this view, on the one hand, human agency is supported and, on the other hand, cultural heritage is taken as important. While in the asymmetrical interaction, the interaction component is against a teaching-centred approach, the asymmetrical component undermines a learning-centred view. In other words, the asymmetrical characteristic of teacher-student relationship should be compatible with interaction writ large as democratic. Also, the interaction component should not abandon the asymmetrical relationship.

It is worth mentioning that a number of scholars have pointed out that such a conception is needed in education. For instance, Martin Buber (1947/2002) has talked about a mutual, but not equal, relationship between the teacher and the student. According to him, in this relationship inclusion cannot be mutual since the pupil cannot experience the educating of the educator:

But however intense the mutual of giving and taking with which he is bound to his pupil, inclusion cannot be mutual in this case. He experiences the pupil's being educated, but the pupil cannot experience the educating of the educator. The educator stands at both ends of the common situation, the pupil only at one end. (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 119)

Mentioned above, Charles Bingham (2008) has talked about “relational authority.” Instead of the sender-receiver model of communication, he appeals to a performative model of communication in which speaking, and not merely what is being said, plays a vital role. According to him, the teacher-student relationship would work well based on the performative model in which the authority of the teacher is inevitable (Bingham, 2008, p. 58). As Nel

Noddings (2004, p. vii) puts it, a philosophy of relational pedagogy has an important influence on both teachers and pupils in terms of bringing internal motives, instead of external rewards and punishments, to the fore. The relational pedagogy, supported by Bingham and Noddings, is deeply connected to the idea of human agency and care for this in education as vital. Unless teachers take pupils as agents, and hence have inter-actions with them, they cannot have a (human) relation with them.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to suggest a new conception of Islamic education. Some scholars have understood Islamic education in terms of indoctrination and have regarded indoctrination as the logical result of the religious conception of education in Islam. However, it is argued here that starting from the picture of the human in Islam leads us to a quite different conception of education as the requirement of the fulfilment of and adherence to that picture.

By analyzing the verses of the Qur'an it is shown that the human is taken as an agent who is on the way to constructing his or her identity by means of different sorts of action. The first requirement of human agency leads us to talk about Islamic education in terms of inter-action. A real and proper inter-action indicates that the teacher and the student regard each other's behaviour as action based on underlying layers of cognition, inclination, and will. Secondly, teachers should understand their role as paving the ground for students to conduct their best actions rather than shaping the students. Thirdly, inter-action would urge us to take a distance from both teacher-centred and learner-centred conceptions of education and allow in a sense of mutual democratic respect. Fourthly, the inter-action between teacher and student is asymmetrical since the teacher is the carrier of culture. However, because of the agency of student, questioning culture should be embraced and directed in a rational manner during education. The important point here is to acquire a sound and positive conception of teacher authority because it matters for the student and their education, not for the teacher as authority figure. According to the Islamic conception of education, authority as distinguished from authoritarianism is an indispensable ingredient of education and is not at all in contradiction with the student's important and necessary agency.

Note

The Palgrave International Handbook of Alternative Education Editors (2016). Lees, Helen, Noddings, Nel (Eds.)

The edition of the Qur'an used here is: *The Qur'an*. A. Ali (Trans). Available at: http://www.studyquran.org/Ahmed_Ali_Al_Quran.pdf

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