

Interreligious and intercultural education for dialogue, peace and social cohesion

Mohammed Abu-Nimer¹ · Renáta Katalin Smith¹

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Recognising diversity in today's world is inevitable, irrespective of whether it is a result of media documentation, technology, immigration, the experience of studying abroad or any other manifestation of globalisation. The exposure to greater diversity is not limited to the more advanced economies and highly industrialised societies. Beyond trade, globalisation encompasses flows of information and of people, and some have argued that this international system has meanwhile replaced the Cold War order (Friedman 2000). Globalisation increasingly connects people in previously unconnected areas. Despite some claims that the economic crisis has slowed down or put an end to globalisation (see, for instance, James 2009), it just as possible that it may actually help to speed up certain aspects of globalisation in ways not directly linked to international trade. For example, it might trigger an increase in cooperation between charity networks or interconnecting religious groups to help people in hardship, while negative effects may include greater criminalisation due to increased cash flows or international Internet-based recruitment for extremist groups (Naím 2009). Greater exposure to cultural, religious, ethnic or racial diversity (or other forms of diversity) can have positive and negative effects; it all depends on how a particular society is set to handle diversity within its local confines, as well as on a global scale.

Constructive contact with those who are different from “us” requires having intercultural and interreligious competences as integral life skills in this increasingly interconnected world. The positive effects of the global economy and access to technology are not without side effects, such as a fear of losing one's own identity or culture. Such fears spur stereotypes of “us” versus “them”, prejudice and/or

✉ Renáta Katalin Smith
renata.smith@kaiciid.org

Mohammed Abu-Nimer
mohammed.abunimer@kaiciid.org

¹ The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Vienna, Austria

xenophobia, which can create tensions and potentially erupt into violent reactions (Wieviorka 2003). And while it is true that the root causes of conflict are usually complex and consist of numerous factors, such as politics, economics, poverty and/or class divisions, it is also true that they often come to the fore along ethnic or religious lines (Carment et al. 2009). In fact, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, several scholars have argued that the majority of conflicts are identity-based clashes of ethnicities, cultures and/or religions (Abu-Nimer 2001; Love 2006; Fox 2004; Seul 1999). The Balkan Wars, the civil war in Rwanda in the 1990s, as well as more recent conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, Myanmar and Nigeria, to name just a few, serve as stark examples where violence has erupted along ethnic or sectarian lines.

Tensions are not limited to current and former conflict zones. Ethnocentric notions in diverse societies can arise due to “cultural and symbolic threats and threats to material group interests” (Wright 2011, p. 842). In diverse societies these so-called “threats” may not be felt at all times, however, even in the most diverse society “mainstream citizens do seem to reshape their definition of the national community along narrower lines in response to heightened immigrant flows” (ibid., p. 855). These fears can be exploited by populist parties,¹ politicians and religious leaders. In such cases, nationalism or identity is “associated not so much with the idea of ensuring the liberation of a nation [religion or culture] as with protecting it from external threats and purging it of the elements that could mar its homogeneity” (Wieviorka 2003, p. 109). The first step in overcoming such fears requires strengthening self-awareness and empowering internal voices and forces which support respect of diversity. This intra-faith and intracommunity conversation is necessary to assert the need for accepting those who hold different perspectives even within the same religious and cultural or national group. A second step in enhancing the immunity of such individuals and communities against the exploitation or manipulation of their identities by populists is accomplished through knowing and meeting the different “others”. This process is not innate, but rather part of a skill set which needs to be honed over time and, as with many life skills, education plays a key role in laying the foundation and the continued strengthening of these competences.

A strong society’s immunity and resilience against exclusion, discrimination and abuse of basic human individual and collective rights is dependent on a number of social, political, economic, legal, religious and educational institutions. In the context of conflict, addressing only one of the above institutions is not sufficient to resolve the root causes of the conflict (Abu-Nimer 2015). How do societies and the aforementioned institutions deal with cultural and religious diversity? This question has served as the basis for this special issue on interreligious and intercultural education, which we guest-edited in our capacity as representatives of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID).² As an interreligious and intercultural

¹ Most recently this was displayed by the populist politics leading up to and following the British referendum to leave the European Union. See, for example Bilefsky (2016).

² The acronym KAICIID reflects the centre’s full name: King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.

dialogue centre, KAICIID's own mandate is to globally promote the use of dialogue to contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflict by enhancing understanding and cooperation. Part of this process is constructively dealing with diversity in a manner which counters prejudice and violence and builds cohesive societies, supports peace and heals the wounds of conflict.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in building and enhancing the immunity and resilience of every society in confronting external and internal voices and forces which oppose pluralism and advocate for exclusion and violence (Harris 2004). Education has a profound effect on individual development and can promote or prevent prejudice and conversely promote or prevent tolerance. Lessons learned in the classroom stay with us as we continue to grow, and our learning does not stop once we have left the classroom. Thus educators can take on a central role in promoting cultural and religious diversity. In this light, KAICIID has brought together five authors from different regions in this special issue to explore various aspects of intercultural education and interreligious education and show how different societies use them as a tool to deal with diversity.

Why choose intercultural and interreligious education? Intercultural education, as defined by Milton Bennett, is the process of "acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange" (Bennett 2009). Interreligious education is a part of intercultural education and, like intercultural education, aims to build understanding, tolerance and social cohesion to "actively shape the relations of people of different religions" (UNESCO 2006, p. 14). Factors such as migration, working abroad and study-abroad programmes have led to greater diversity in many societies and have also led to classrooms becoming increasingly diverse at all levels. While this is a starting point, the mere existence of a diverse classroom does not mean that students are interculturally competent. As Italian linguist Fiora Biagi and her colleagues have pointed out, a semester of study abroad may also mean making friends with people of one's own culture or a superficial interaction which deprives the person of in-depth learning and truly experiencing the other culture (Biagi et al. 2012). And, as Scherto Gill points out in this special issue, contact and discussions with the "other" are careful to stick to "safe topics" such as food or music. Going beyond these safe topics and pursuing "fruitful interaction" through engaging in dialogue supports peaceful coexistence in diverse societies. However, it is impossible to force individuals to take part in a dialogue about their beliefs and cultural traditions. It must be done willingly with the understanding that one's perspective might change, but also that "coexistence should not, in fact, depend on weakening people's faith or moral convictions" (Colen and Smith 2015).

Fostering fruitful interaction must expand beyond the typical actors promoting dialogue: non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations (IOs) and dialogue practitioners; individuals must be interculturally competent to deal with the different "other" both inside and outside of their own cultures. This is easier said than done, and while it is one thing to say that we must engage meaningfully to ward off prejudice and preserve a peaceful co-existence, it is

another to make this interaction – dialogue – an ingrained skill. “The challenge, therefore, is to provide the student with the necessary skills to create an environment where intercultural competence can be cultivated” (Biagi et al. 2012). This is where interreligious education and intercultural education come in.

Discourses in intercultural education have existed for more than half a century, dating back to the interwar years with authors such as John Dewey, Isaac Berkson, E. George Payne and Mary Parker Follett (Bois 1939), and increasing with a flurry of literature emerging after the Second World War. For example, there were calls for more effective teaching in intercultural relations in the United States through intercultural education (Eckelberry 1945), and new methods for gauging community acceptance of intercultural education (Berger 1947), as well as examinations of the challenges facing intercultural education (Hager 1956). Although the arguments in favour of intercultural education were already quite clear in the 20th century and continue to ring true, there remains a large gap when it comes to incorporating the interreligious element within intercultural education. This does not mean that religion has not been a point of focus in the 20th century, especially following the events of 11 September 2001. Rather, the focus has generally been on improving Comparative Religion or Religious Studies³ and not on interreligious education.

Interreligious dialogue and education programmes are springing up in NGOs and IOs worldwide. In the case of KAICIID, supporting interreligious and intercultural dialogue in education is one of the organisation’s founding principles. The Centre has developed programmes to train international interreligious dialogue trainers, such as World Scout leaders (Training of Trainers),⁴ teachers who train future religious leaders (the International Fellows Programme),⁵ and religious leaders in media literacy (the Social Media Programme).⁶ KAICIID also offers an Online Course in Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KOCID)⁷ with the aim of spreading and enhancing intercultural and interreligious competence through training and education to promote peaceful coexistence. However, as mentioned above, such programmes can only reach so far and literature on the topic is still lacking. This special issue aims to contribute to filling the gap in literature on interreligious education in its own right specifically and also as a part of intercultural education, while also highlighting the role of dialogue in this process. In this issue, we start by looking at the foundations of intercultural education – the development of teachers’ intercultural competences.

³ See for example Jackson (1995, 2003, 2004, 2008).

⁴ For more information, see <http://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/capacity-building/training-trainers>.

⁵ For more information, see <http://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/capacity-building/kaiciid-international-fellows-programme>.

⁶ For more information, see <http://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/image-other/media>.

⁷ For more information, see <http://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/capacity-building/kaiciid's-online-course-interreligious-dialogue-kocid>.

Teachers and the foundations of intercultural education

Educators responsible for imparting interreligious and intercultural values and skills to students of all ages are the foundation of intercultural education. With or without education tools such as curricula and textbooks, it is the teachers who divulge knowledge in the classroom. If teachers do not value and accept cultural differences and display this in their behaviour, the best intercultural education curriculum will prove ineffective. Thus, teacher training and the opportunity for updating their own skills is a necessary component of intercultural and interreligious education. Teachers need to have intercultural competence to be able to cultivate cultural exchange and learning effectively, but up to now, there has been little advice on how teachers should cultivate intercultural competence. Our first article, “Teachers and the foundations of intercultural interaction” by *Oya Günay*, argues that it is important to internalise one’s own belief in intercultural education and intercultural dialogue “to be able to reflect it in one’s behaviour and convey to others the sense that they are genuinely accepted as they are.” The teacher must understand and believe in what he/she imparts to students in order to have the greatest impact on student learning. In essence, the belief and/or value must be “internalised” within the teacher him/herself as a personal attribute.

Individuals are socialised in the societies in which they are raised, which means that we are programmed for basing our point of view in our own culture. Intercultural competence is an individual’s ability to shift his/her point of view from an ethnocentric standpoint to one which acknowledges cultural differences, allowing for the individual to successfully interact with people of different cultures. This process starts as an extrinsic motivation– to gain a positive outcome other than personal gratification. In this light, Günay develops a questionnaire for teachers designed by combining the four psychological needs of Self Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) and coaching techniques to help teachers determine their current level of intercultural competence, invoke self-reflection, enhance self-awareness and outline ways for future improvement. In addressing teacher self-assessment, Günay’s article immediately prompts further questions of how teachers can build interreligious competence and how educational and policy-making institutions might support the process. Our second article, “Interfaith education: An Islamic perspective” by Imam *Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini*, offers some examples of programmes designed in collaboration with the Italian government which aim to improve interreligious competences of students and teachers alike.

Interfaith education: an Islamic perspective

While interreligious (or interfaith) education is a part of intercultural education, it has often been overlooked; maybe because it was deemed too sensitive or even taboo. However, an individual’s religious identity does not disappear when he/she participates in society. As Pallavicini points out, incorporating the religious element into intercultural integration was pushed into focus in the aftermath of 11 September

2001 and subsequent terror attacks in Europe. However, the topic is still subject to scrutiny. Some policymakers and school administrators call for an exclusion of religion from school curricula (see for example Lester 2007 and Killian 2007), while for religious followers, thoughts of interreligious education can stimulate fears of conversion or of pupils losing their own faith(s). Pallavicini looks at a third way. He suggests that interfaith education should serve to foster understanding of other religions beyond history and culture while allowing an individual to uphold his/her own faith. Beyond this, interreligious education should also emphasise universal values, such as peace and tolerance. Pallavicini states that “although they come in different shapes and shades, these values are common to all spiritual traditions”, echoing St. Augustine’s “true religion” as part of man’s primordial nature, “which implies the capacity to see in one’s neighbour a reflection of oneself and in the multiplicity of creation the unity of its principle”. He presents the basis for interreligious and intercultural education within Islam by quoting passages from the Holy Qur’an which support the quest for knowledge and display the acknowledgement of religious pluralism. In doing so, Pallavicini sets the stage to make a case for interfaith education, while addressing another gap in the literature by highlighting the legitimacy of such education within holy texts of the Islamic faith.

Pallavicini highlights various examples of programmes developed in cooperation with the Italian government, as well as with international organisations. One such example is the teacher and student training of the Islamic Religious Community in Italy (Comunità Religiosa Islamica [COREIS]). During this training, students learn about how different religions have contributed to art, culture and knowledge both in the past and in the present – for example the Islamic contribution to science or Christian contribution to Renaissance art. As an additional, yet integral element in this process, religious representatives support interfaith teaching and learning, and field trips to places of worship are organised, thus making them places of learning. Interfaith education therefore shifts the focus from comparing and contrasting doctrines, history, symbols and traditions to human interaction. The examples put forth by Pallavicini share an interactive and interdisciplinary approach which goes beyond the study of Comparative Religion by focusing on the relationships among cultures and religions, while fostering dialogue and student engagement. Next, with several possible programmatic ideas in mind, the question arises as to how to begin designing suitable programmes and curricula.

Context-based models of interreligious education

Country, regional background and history are major reference points in curriculum design. And as alluded to by Pallavicini, there is no such thing as a “one-size-fits-all” curriculum for intercultural and interreligious education. “Curriculum design and policy making do not take place in a vacuum ... Their philosophy, purpose, content and pedagogy are largely dependent upon a number of global as well as local factors” (Maudarbux in this issue). Context is key and adjustments are inevitable to complement societal changes. Building on elements of what Günay

and Pallavicini present in their articles, the authors of the next two contributions in this special issue take teacher training and intercultural and interreligious education down to the micro-level by exploring examples of curricula and their respective effectiveness from their own countries.

Saif Al-Maamari, the author of our third article, discusses intercultural education in Oman and offers his readers a number of lessons and recommendations to take into account when designing intercultural curricula. His article is entitled “Education for connecting Omani students with other cultures in the world: The role of social studies”. Our fourth article, authored by *Mohammad Belall Maudarbux*, considers interreligious education in Mauritius and, based upon the Mauritian experience, offers a transferable model of interreligious education for diverse societies. His article is entitled “Interreligious education: Conceptualising a needs assessment framework for curriculum design in plural societies (with special reference to Mauritius)”.

The contexts examined by Al-Maamari and Maudarbux offer insights into two different regions of the world, the Middle East and Africa, rarely studied in the West with regard to interreligious and intercultural education. These two authors put forth vastly different context-specific models of intercultural education outside of the West. Nevertheless, these studies provide those involved in curriculum design with some valuable lessons which are to some extent transferrable. Both papers also make a small contribution to filling what is unfortunately still a large void in the literature on intercultural education in these countries and more broadly in the Middle East.

How does one structure curricula so that the educational input and output are in fact intercultural and interreligious? Al-Mamaari sets out to examine how intercultural education is embedded in the Omani Social Studies curriculum. He argues that “curricula should reflect different cultures and ethnic identities at national and worldwide levels. Fostering diversity in the curriculum, as shown in the literature, requires promoting tolerance, acknowledging differences and challenging racism and stereotypes.” In reviewing the literature, Al-Mamaari identifies two main points of intercultural education. First, starting where Pallavicini leaves off, Al-Maamari argues that students should have the opportunity of learning about the socially constructed nature of knowledge, and that there is no agreement on the application of intercultural education. Second, the teacher’s role is to provide “culturally responsive and meaningful lessons”, a point which ties in well with Günay’s emphasis on teachers’ intercultural competencies. Social Studies in Oman, according to the National Council of Social Studies, is the subject in particular where students learn not only to be good citizens of Oman but also to be global citizens. Oman, located on the Arabian Peninsula, is subject to the movements of many peoples and has seen waves of immigration, as well as increased contact with tourists. The Omani population itself consists of different ethnic groups, who speak different languages and, although largely Muslim, it is comprised of both Sunni and Shi’a denominations. Al-Mamaari further clarifies that Omani life is “very much shaped and affected by Islamic culture. However, the sense of belonging to an Islamic culture has not hindered the Omani people from benefiting from the material world or interacting positively with other nations.”

Within curriculum design, textbooks are often highlighted as good or bad examples of promoting diversity or prejudice. For this study, Al-Mamaari examined 12 Social Studies textbooks used in Oman and found that while intercultural elements were prevalent in many of the teaching units, “what was not evident in these textbooks was due attention to political issues such as war, conflict, democracy and human rights which are also important aspects of intercultural education.” Furthermore, Al-Mamaari reiterates the notion argued by Günay in that he notes that while intercultural elements are present in textbook sections on other cultures, along with their interaction with Oman, contributions to history and civilisation and lessons in foreign languages, intercultural education cannot be left solely to curricula and educational tools to be effective in fighting prejudice. Rather, he identifies the need to include participatory learning and dialogue. In line with the aforementioned observations, religious studies scholar Aaron Ghiloni points out that while “it is one thing to hold religiously inclusive sentiments, it is quite another to formally develop curricula around such views ... The venture to interact intelligently with other religions is an educational venture” (Ghiloni 2011).

Al-Mamaari identifies three areas of challenge for Oman in intercultural education: (1) teacher training; (2) improved curricula centred on Brandy Olson’s (2003) components of intercultural education; and (3) a balance between “uniformity and diversity”, namely developing Omani citizens while also developing global citizens. While the Omani government has strong intentions to include intercultural education, Al-Mamaari concludes with several recommendations on how the government can improve its implementation of intercultural education to better fight prejudice, much needed in today’s world.

Having explored the concept of intercultural education curricula in the article by Al-Mamaari, the focus of our next paper moves to the more specific area of interreligious education, with special reference to Mauritius. Maudarbux begins by clearly delineating the differences between multicultural education, intercultural education, religious education, multi-religious education and interreligious education. Like multicultural education, multi-religious education seeks to teach students about different religions. Where multi-cultural and multi-religious education differ from intercultural and interreligious education is that in the former there is an emphasis on learning about different cultures or religions from one’s own point of view, while the latter emphasises learning about different cultures and religions through interaction (Maudarbux; see also Bennett 2009). In outlining these differences, Maudarbux sets out to make the case for interreligious education rather than multi-religious education by referring to the example of Europe where, in many countries, multi-religious education has been in effect for decades. Nevertheless, the current rise of right-wing populism demonstrates the lack of effectiveness of multi-religious education in dispelling prejudice and ethno-centric views (Maudarbux). Referring to the work of American sociologist Peter Berger (1999), Maudarbux further emphasises the need for interreligious education by pointing out that the status of religion is actually growing globally, dispelling the theory that modernisation means secularisation. This also means that religious fanaticism is growing and along with it, the use of violence in the name of religion – occurring due to the “problematism” of the religious “other”. Secular countries

are not excluded from this, as religion is often identified with the fear of the immigrant “other” (Maudarbux).

Maudarbux bases his article on a consultative process led by the author himself in 2008. While Mauritius is a country in which the government has historically worked to support intercultural understanding among the population, he explains that after some tensions, the government determined there was a strong need for improving interreligious competences leading towards a greater emphasis on the development of interreligious education curricula. The consultative process developed by the author’s team consisted of a needs assessment which examined 20 indicators within five key areas. The results subsequently constituted the core of the two-year Peace and Interfaith study course, which was launched at the University of Mauritius in 2010.

Back to basic interactions and the inner self

Throughout this introduction, we have discussed the importance of building intercultural and interreligious competences to be able to create global citizens and foster peaceful and cohesive societies. It is thus important to acquire skills which are conducive to lifelong learning. Gaining the intercultural competencies needed to interact in a diverse world is not a simple process. Human beings learn through interaction. Philosopher of education Tasos Kazepides argues that “Logos ... is a distinctly human achievement obtained through dialogue within real human communities – not an abstract, ethereal and independent entity outside the context of ordinary life” (Kazepides 2012, p. 90). Thus, learning about other religions and cultures to build social cohesion and tolerance requires encountering others. The “other” may seem “similar”, “unthreatening” or even “exotic”, or on the other hand utterly “foreign”, “strange”, “different” or perhaps even “frightening”. Dealing with cultural differences within a community, however slight, helps an individual gain the capacity to deal with future encounters with different cultures/religions, as his/her horizon broadens in life. “Ethnicity and religious confession are concepts around which discussion and controversy arise, generating emotions and feelings of extreme intensity ... Intercultural dialogue can be successfully provided where a community that is aware of the others comes to communicate, to cooperate, and to build the structure of a multicultural society” (Brie 2011). With our next paper, we look at how we can take what we learn in a formal educational context with us into the world. While *Scherto Gill* locates her model for interreligious and intercultural dialogue within the university setting, the tools she presents comprise a process that an individual can apply and reapply throughout life. Her article is entitled “Universities as spaces for engaging the other: A pedagogy of encounter for intercultural and interreligious education”.

What happens beyond a formal education setting? While initial engagement in dialogue requires structure, once learned, it can be applied outside of a formal education setting and become a tool used as part of lifelong learning and encounters. “The recognition of this point [that logos is obtained through dialogue] is fundamental to our thinking about education because it frees us from the

mythological view of the self and human reason as fixed, independent and unchanging creations; redirects our thinking away from the hypothetical private entity called ‘mind’, and helps us to focus on the real world of human actions, language, intentions, meanings, goals, values, practices, institutions and customs within which we are all born and develop” (Kazepides 2012, pp. 90–91). It is therefore important to create sustainable skills through education to equip students for future interactions with different cultures and allow them to be citizens not only of their own country, but also members of the global community. In this light, Gill provides a “pedagogy of encounter for intercultural and interreligious education”, which aims to establish a lifelong practice of dialogue. Gill begins by offering a literature review of the internationalisation of higher education. The internationalisation of education is ongoing due to increasing global interconnectedness – or “internationalism” – and the growing ability of students to study at universities outside of their home countries – “open market transnational education” (Bernardo 2003). Although intercultural interaction in these institutions is increasing, students are more likely to focus on similarities rather than engage with cultural or religious differences.

Gill argues that internationalisation, when positively handled, can transform the university into a platform for linking and engaging students of different cultures and religions. Drawing on a personally experienced case study, Gill develops a model starting with four intercultural learning conditions – diversity; engagement with difference; sharing personal narratives; and a listening space – which are necessary for transformative encounters to be able to occur. Although this can happen naturally, Gill argues that it is the task of universities to integrate intercultural learning into the university experience. Pedagogically integrating intercultural learning into the university setting strengthens a sense of “we-ness” which is acquired by engaging with the “other” and applies the use of dialogue as a tool which students take with them on their journey through life.

Conclusion

While the ideas presented in the five articles featured in this special issue are those of the authors rather than KAICIID’s,⁸ they cover an array of topics which interlink with each other, as well as with the work of the International Dialogue Centre, and encompass a look into several important aspects of intercultural and interreligious education.

Several issues emerge from these articles regarding the development of interreligious and intercultural education in formal and informal educational settings:

⁸ The views expressed in this special issue are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily represent those of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) or its member states.

1. There is a solid need for policy makers, especially in the area of education, to support the integration of interreligious and intercultural education in formal schooling systems.
2. Basic learning about other religions is important, yet it is not enough to establish a deeper understanding and appreciation for the need for interreligious diversity in society.
3. Intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue are essential tools in the development of intercultural and interreligious competences. A safe space to encounter the “different other” can be an effective educational tool in developing these competences.
4. Interreligious education, as well as intercultural education, is not a single curricular item to be introduced in one specific grade, but needs to become an integral part of formal and informal educational institutions.
5. Religious education and its institutions can be leading examples in introducing interreligious education to all their students.

These articles can only begin to address the many uncharted areas of interreligious and intercultural education. They do, however, open up possibilities for future investigation into aspects not explored in this special issue. One such endeavour could address the lack of empirical evidence on the impact of interreligious education in reducing violence in conflict areas. Another potential area for future research would be to examine the obstacles and the attitudes of religious institutions and governmental policies regarding the introduction of interreligious education into their educational systems. Research in general has identified that there is a problem with faith-based and state-run institutions and their policies, however there is still no in-depth description of the nature of this resistance and the ways in which these institutions are able to maintain such resistance. For example, many Western European governments and ministries of education resist interreligious education. Similarly, Muslim governments and ministries of education also resist interreligious education, however often for vastly different reasons and considerations. It is obvious that this special issue is far too small to tackle the full breadth of intercultural and interreligious education, but we sincerely hope that the articles and ideas contained herein offer a platform for discovery, and more importantly that they stimulate readers' curiosity to learn and research more on the subject. Finally, we would like to give special thanks to Anja Piskur for her considerable efforts in helping us compile this issue; its publication would not have been possible without her support.

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The authors

Mohammed Abu-Nimer is a Senior Advisor at the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) in Vienna and a professor at the School of International Service of the American University (AU) in Washington, DC. He has also served as Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute (International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program) at AU. He is the founder of Salam Institute for Peace and Justice in Sterling, VA, an organisation focused on capacity building, civic education, intra- and interfaith dialogue, and has conducted interreligious conflict resolution training and interfaith dialogue workshops in conflict areas worldwide, including Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Iraq, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In addition to his numerous publications, Prof. Abu-Nimer is the co-founder and co-editor of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*.

Renáta Katalin Smith is a political scientist and researcher who is currently working as the Assistant to the Senior Advisor at the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) in Vienna, Austria, in the field of interreligious dialogue. Ms. Smith completed a BA in Political Science at Rutgers University in 2002 and an MA in International Studies at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna in 2008. She has worked on various programmes and projects in intercultural and interreligious dialogue in her 3 years at the Dialogue Centre, and has also begun work as a new scholar in the field.