‘... And what about prospective teachers?’

Some reflections on the development of proficiency
Johan Valstar & Henk Kuindersma

Outline
This contribution deals with two aspects of educational didactics. First of all it sketches the tensions that prospective teachers are faced with. The underlying question is if and to what extent primary teacher education can be of adequate assistance to them through a more comprehensive induction program. The authors are of the opinion that this should include a basic orientation on personal development, essential disciplinary content, specific concepts, aims and methods. Subsequently, the second section of this contribution deals with the challenge of religious education to communicate with pupils. Finally seven instructions on the level of the student are presented. These were formulated in connection with an introductory lecture on ‘theological conversations with children’ at Windesheim School of Education.

Section 1: Prospective teachers / first considerations

1.1 Reality shock
Many novices or teachers to be experience their first year in primary school more or less as a shock. Confronted by the reality of school life they discover pressing personal deficiencies. Not only with respect to their particular role in school, but also to the social and cultural contexts in which learning how to teach takes place. They feel regularly compelled to adapt themselves to the given routines of daily practice in the classroom. The penetrating problems facing novices have been summarized by Hans Vonk (1995, 1982, 1989) in three interfering dimensions.

1. The personal dimension. Characteristic questions here are amongst others: How do I master difficult challenges and stressful events. Can I be myself or do I need to adapt, or will I adapt for the time being and choose my own course of action later? Or shall I follow my course of action right now?

2. The contextual dimension. Characteristic questions here are amongst others: What is my position and function in this trainee school? Which written and unwritten rules are important? What are the expectations of the pupils, the mentor, the other teachers, the parents? And what do the educators of the teacher training institute expect of me?

3. The dimension of knowledge and skills. Characteristic questions here are amongst others: Do I have enough content knowledge? Where do I acquire my knowledge? How do I teach the pupils how to work? How should I deal with the methods? How do I control difficult situations?
1.2 Induction
Surely, teacher training provide beginning teachers with induction programs containing ‘need-to-know’ information, including standards, checklists, FAQs, practical tips, hints and ideas for classroom activities. Nevertheless they scarcely pay attention to the dimension of personal development. Students may be hard put to finding personal assistance which they can turn to in their first critical months of teaching. Commonly induction programs offer answers to practical questions. Although these answers are important, there is more to deal with. Novices need to find a balance between the experience of limitations and ambitions, shortcomings and qualities, failures and successes. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety may lead to intriguing questions like: ‘Who do I really want to be?’ or: ‘Who will I be for the pupils?’ Such key questions must not be neglected. This also applies to the comprehensive question: ‘What is the aim or mission of education?’ We join Neil Postman (1995). He speaks in a critical and ambiguous way about ‘the end of education’, suggesting that ‘without a transcendent and honorable purpose schooling must reach its finish, and the sooner we are done with it, the better’. So, why not provide beginning teachers at the start of their professional careers with a transcendent and honorable big picture of education?

1.3 Proficiency
According to Benner’s application of the Dreyfus Model of skill acquisition (Benner, 1984) a teacher passes through three levels of proficiency during teacher training: 1) novice, 2) advanced beginner, 3) competent. The next levels of 4) proficient, and 5) expert are subsequent options in progression towards professionalism. To give some conspicuous features of novices: as beginners they usually do not possess much experience of situations in which they are expected to perform. Their situational perception is restricted. Unequal aspects are assigned equal importance. The experienced feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness confuse them and make them insecure. As beginners they learn predominantly by trial and error; they are not able to take deliberated educational decisions. They tend to follow taught rules and ready-made prescriptions in school methods. They solve their personal problems by focusing on immediate tasks and reliance on principles out of context as paradigms.

1.4 Pedagogical questions
The novices’ ideas about what their educational task may be all about, does accelerate when they have to draw up their first lesson plan. This is a somewhat complicated process – especially for beginners – involving no fewer than nine interrelated factors: (1) who should learn, (2) what, (3) when, (4) with whom, (5) where, (6) how, (7) with what, (8) why, (9) and to what end (Jank & Meyer, 2002). The list looks so daunting that very few fledgling teachers get to the most important question of all: why is this lesson good for these pupils in this group? And who can blame them? Because the common form that is prescribed for all subject / educational areas does not ask this question. In fact, so many issues are raised by the first seven questions that the final two pedagogical questions (why and to what end) usually fall by the wayside. This is really an unfortunate situation, because precisely these questions can lead to essential reflections on meaningful learning of pupils and corresponding insights into skills to be developed and obtained.

1.5 Recipe for success
Novices need to survive. That is why they embrace any recipe for success eagerly. When they are introduced to the direct instruction model (DI-Model), they tend to experience it as an all-round solution to their uncertainty. No wonder: emphasis in this scripted teaching model is on transfer & achievement in prescribed order by control on behavior of learners, rather than on focusing on the

1 Incidentally: dropout rates of novices in teacher education primary level (2006 – 2007) amounted to 38.7 %.
more complex developmental pedagogy. From the novice’s perspective DI is regularly regarded as an adequate and efficient strategy of explanation. To be sure, if the direct instruction model actually provides more structure and transparency in education, there is nothing wrong with the model as such. But novices have to recognize that direct instruction needs to be complemented with other strategies. Conversations and negotiations are for instance essential to make the contents more plausible, intelligible and fruitful for learners. A second and even more important concern to be revealed is that the DI-Model correlates by nature as appropriate model within the mainly empirical approaches and methods of the natural and social sciences. Although there are some methodological similarities between science and humanities, their contents differ. In science learners learn to deal with phenomena by observation and explanation. They are expected to unearth the inherent true rules of natural origin, or ‘covering laws’ (for instance: causes <-> effects), provided that a teacher guides their learning process with instructional skills. The humanities make a distinction. The disciplines in this area have another scope and domain-specific horizon. Humanities are about the human condition: how people create the world they live in; how the world they live in makes them the people they are. Humanities education explicitly acknowledges the human basis of the learning experience. That’s why the DI-Model appears to be a less suitable ‘recipe for success’ in religious education.

1.5.1 Hermeneutics

Other than (natural) science, humanities focus on the hermeneutic process of human understanding (‘Verstehen’). The elementary question from this perspective is: what coherence and sense can be discovered in the experience of people’s reality in their expression of thoughts, feelings, actions and events. Religious education makes sense if this particular scope is recognized and applied. In brief reference to the discipline of history: Frank Ankersmit, professor for intellectual history and historical theory, argued the inadequacy of the science explanation (‘covering law’) with respect to historical understanding (Ankersmit, 1983). He advocates his philosophy of historical representation² (Ankersmit, 2001) as a viable way to discover the past in an aesthetic and immediate experience. This split moment of disclosure has been qualified by Ankersmit in terms of ‘the sublime historical experience’ (Ankersmit, 2007).

We return to the novices. In our perception they are hardly if at all aware that different disciplines take diverging suppositions, aims and didactical methods as their starting-points. Let alone their familiarity with underlying ‘language- games’ (Ludwig Wittgenstein) and their implications for the novices’ personal actions in daily teaching practice. This is something which the novices should not be scorned for. The cause lies simply in the inability of teacher training programs to achieve the realization of a more integral curriculum (Cf.: Schoenmaker, Stomp & Valstar, 2002; Valstar 2004). Be this as it may: the state of being uninformed about the methodological principles of hermeneutics in religious education calls forth feelings of discomfort and frustrations in novice teachers. We present an example from teaching practice.

---

² According to Ankersmit an historian cannot derive objective meanings from past research, but he can derive subjective (re)presentations, which function as replacement of a by definition past reality. Meanings are constructed as (re)presentations by the historian himself.
1.5.2 Pitfall

Novice Tom prepared a lesson in children’s science about ‘floating and sinking’, with interesting examples to discuss and to explain. During the preceding lectures at the teachers training college he has been given conceptual instructions. The main points of attention are:

1) Classroom teaching and learning should address the processes of constructing and reconstructing scientific knowledge.
2) Conceptual replacement and addition depends on plausible argumentation and fruitfulness of new ideas about causes and effects.

The lesson concerned, in which the pupils are actively engaged, goes very well. Afterwards the coach remarks that Tom conducts excellent conversations with the pupils. This is the kind of compliment he needs. Since communication with the pupils on ‘floating and sinking’ has worked out so well, the next assignment for a discussion during a lesson of religious education will probably also work out fine. Initially this indeed seems to be the case: the pupils listen amidst breathless silence to the story of Joseph. But the subsequent discourse fails to some extent, even if he had prepared the conversation as carefully as for the successful lesson on ‘floating and sinking’.

1.6. Eye-opener

The problem outlined above constituted such elementary significance to the developers of the new Dutch RE Handbook Verwonderen & Ontdekken [Marvel & Discover], that they paid attention to it both conceptually and practically in the special of the first chapter ‘A look at Religious Education’.

A text by the poet Huub Oosterhuis (1968) functioned as input for the recognition of the religious language game. He distinguishes two languages in language, two ways to communicate, two levels of linguistic usage.

**Level 1**: ‘The first language is that of the clear-cut truths, notions and formulas. The language of lucid logic, of objective information, of the sciences. The language of the telephone directory. It says what it says, you say what you mean, as precisely and unambiguously as possible. It is a good thing that this language exists. Our world cannot function without it and everybody understands and speaks this language to some extent. But this language is inadequate to give vent to feelings, to express what is inside a person, concealed, almost inexpressible. In matters of love and death and God and human being, this first language, this way of speaking, is not only inadequate but also dangerous.’

**Level 2**: ‘There is a second language, deep down under the first, as a much older layer of the earth, or widely surrounding it; ‘second’ in attention and appreciation, and also more vulnerable and modest than the first. The language of what is actually impossible to utter. The language you speak in order not to fall completely silent. The language of refined emotion and ecstasy.’

Huub Oosterhuis puts it like this: Where life’s peaks and crises are concerned, we try to communicate in the second language. Then the language of rational reasoning, definitions and dogmas fails us. We then reach out for images, fragments of visions, dreams and intuitions. It is the language of poets and prophets.

As soon as novice teachers acquire an awareness of the difference between the first and second language, their views on how to communicate with their pupils in religious education will change. They will discover that you access a deeper language level for important matters, convictions and feelings. However, this is not always easy and self-evident.
Section 2 Prospective teachers / communicating with pupils

2.1 Open conversations

In primary schools teachers communicate with their pupils all the time. The conversations are quite diverse in nature, depending on the occasion and the envisaged goals. The wide range of possible types of discourse can be found in the didactic literature, often neatly organized systematically, based on a specific theory. An analysis of everyday educational practice shows that the various types of discourse cannot always be distinguished clearly from each other, even though they may be distinct in kind and goal. There are quite some variations, combinations and intermediate types that are actually less easy to classify. Under this proviso a brief characterization of open conversations includes the distinctive fact that everyone involved participates in the conversations on an equal footing. The difference between open and closed conversations lies in the degree of freedom for pupils to air their personal responses. There is no fixed outcome in open conversations. They have added value in the sense that both the teacher and the pupils themselves may obtain a better insight into the diversity of ideas, their personal opinions and the underlying - often hidden – motives.

2.2 Some observations

As early as in the initial stages of their training courses, young teachers are taught the ideal observational framework for ‘open’ and ‘closed’ conversations. In evaluations of protestant religious education practice at Windesheim School of Education, the responses of 73 undergraduate students in the 2007-2008 courses repeatedly showed a remarkable fact. They were of the opinion that open conversations during religious education lessons in the higher forms of primary education were generally far less frequent than closed conversations.

They related this observation of causal effect with the current religious methods and common traditional formats (cf. RE Handbook Verwonderen & Ontdekken p.46, pp.81 ff.) When asked, the majority of the students in the beginners’ phase appeared to start from the presupposition that an open discussion in a religious education lesson would certainly be no sinecure and even a rather risky affair. This view should, however, be toned down to some extent. An inquiry a year earlier among 181 students in their fourth year showed that some 25% had attended an inspiring religious education lesson at some point in time during their traineeship. On inquiry during lectures, a direct relation with the teacher’s interactive qualities was mentioned spontaneously in all cases. Also, the outspoken concern of the teacher with respect to what pupils experience as significant was repeatedly mentioned. The communicative skills of the teachers concerned was described in terms of ‘state of the art’. Note, however, that the conversations of the evaluations among both target groups at Windesheim School of Education were of an exploratory nature. The indications mentioned above give rise to a more extensive subsequent investigation as to the status quo of religious education in protestant primary schools and its implications for primary education teacher training.

2.3 State of the Art

Even if it is true that a remarkably high percentage of the prospective teachers at Windesheim School of Education do not mention inspiring religious pedagogical practices in the schools of their training period, other perspectives are, however, apparent as well. We refer here to a limited number of primary schools where time is invested in the developmental approaches from a shared religious pedagogical view. In these schools conversations are commonly of a more open nature. Quite expressly, for instance, under the heading of ‘philosophizing with children’ and the related variant of ‘theologizing with children’. In the former case the teacher’s role is mainly restricted to initiating and facilitating open conversations. In the latter case the teacher participates in the open conversation as a participant on an equal footing, albeit in the modest role of companion or learning-guide, who guides the pupils in their explorations.

This requires a ‘well-prepared learning environment’, a term taken from Maria Montessori. Such a learning environment equips the pupils with the required orientations, materials and incentives to
pursue their own intrinsic learning quests in perfect freedom. The set-up of the required learning environment is of a structurally supportive nature.

With respect to the teacher’s input the assumption is that companionship stretches the possibilities of discovery and development for the young learner. Here we can refer to Vygotsky’s notion of the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’, which he defined as ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development lies between what the pupil can do independently and what the pupil can do only with someone else’s assistance. From this perspective any conversation should by preference take place in the zone of proximal development, where pupils construct, under the help of a more skilled or capable other (whether teacher or peer) understandings of important ideas, concepts and meanings they would otherwise not understand on their own.

2.3.1 ‘Enabling teacher’

In order to clarify the pedagogical role of the teacher and the kind of learning environment, we may refer to the didactical concepts in Verwonderen & Ontdekken, where we pay a great deal of attention to the learning environment and to conducting open theological conversations. However, we first refer to the work of the renowned English literary scholar Aidan Chambers in the domain of English language, so as to broaden our perspective. The reason for this excursion is his outspoken focus on communicative aspects in conversations with pupils on children’s literature. In his approach the technical term ‘Booktalk’ for the activity is the essential part of learning in reader-response contexts (Chambers, 1985). In his most widely read ‘The Reading Environment’ (1991) Chambers outlines the teacher’s responsibility in terms of enabling and empowerment. In his complementary work ‘Tell Me: Children, Reading & Talk’ (1993) he offers language teachers a structured framework with important key questions to deal with. After reading, the story / the text is discussed using open-ended questions to guide the pupils’ talk.

According to Chambers, teachers must hold back their own personal opinions till late in conversations, picking up pupils’ remarks and questions. Chambers stresses the importance of the enabling teacher (or ‘scaffolder’) in the reading environment to support the learning process of the learners. At the same time he acknowledges the fact that learners do learn a lot from one another. Conversely: teachers who play the role of enablers do learn a lot from their pupils.

2.3.2 ‘Tell me strategy’

Within the framework of children’s talk Aidan Chambers identifies (a) three kinds of sharing and (b) four kinds of sayings.

(a) Sharing enthusiasms (i.e. likes & dislikes), sharing puzzles (i.e. difficulties) and sharing connections (i.e. discovering patterns).
(b) Saying for yourself (i.e. inner speech as part of the thought process); saying for others (i.e. to clarify your own mind and to communicate thoughts to others, saying together (i.e. joining in a discussion as a attempt to sort out with others those matters that are perceived as too complex to sort out alone, saying the new (i.e. generating new understanding that no one till then could have articulated).
Although Chambers’ insights and indications refer to the domain of English language, they are mutatis mutandis undeniably of cross-curricular significance. The added value of his practice-based concept lies in the elaborated series of elementary questions, divided into categories: basic questions, general questions, special questions. These questions of meaning are not intended to be used as a fixed prescription for (prospective) teachers, nor should every question systematically be asked. Chambers’ question list is expected to be used as collection of prompts or guides, and should be rephrased to suit the pupils with their specific questions in their specific contexts. The open style and discourse culture that Chambers advocates with his ‘reading environment’ and his ‘tell me strategy’ undeniably display similarities with the approach used in theological conversations, where pupils are the subject of their own learning process, in conformity with the starting-points of the international Network of Child Theology. The ins and outs of this new approach have been described in the past decade, both in terms of theory and practice, since 2002 in a series of publications of the Network of Child Theology. In setting up the Dutch Handbook for RE: Verwonderen & Ontdekken, we did gratefully take advantage of educational theories and practices described by Petra Freudenberger - Lötz (2003, 2007).

2.3.3 Competences
The Aidan Chambers concept and framework with elementary questions of meaning could certainly function as a useful compass for the domain of religious education. In Verwonderen & Ontdekken we have provided a preliminary basis with the description of required professional qualities. In general terms of competencies these have been described as: observation, interpretation and guidance. The skills in weaving together the coherent competences need to be learned by prospective teachers in classroom and subsequent conversations in teacher training (V&O, pp. 51 - 53; pp. 155 - 159). In short: in our opinion these very competences are important challenges for Dutch religious pedagogy. If only since the core of the mainstream of protestant religious education in primary education until today has been fixed exclusively to storytelling. In itself there is nothing wrong with this. It is recognized that narratives make pupils think and thus lead to discussion. However, the problem is that this pedagogical aspect is de facto only honored marginally in the usual methodological formats. Since teachers and prospective teachers in Dutch primary education to a large extent go by school methods, it is not surprising that communication often does not exceed the level of pupils’ responses to the teacher’s questions. To counter this form of educational neglect the RE Handbook Verwonderen & Ontdekken emphasizes the importance of the development of the intended competences.

2.4 Theological conversations
Verwonderen & Ontdekken didactics devote an entire chapter to conducting theological conversations with children (V&O, pp.130 – 159). This chapter starts out by phrasing that dealing with children’s questions is not a case of ‘the child asks and the teacher answers’. On the contrary, the central idea is that posing, deepening and clarifying questions and the joint search for answers by the children themselves, have to be perceived as preconditions for a good learning process. Ready-made answers block their inquisitive attitude: nothing left to discover and nothing left to learn. The reverse holds for situations where pupils and teacher enter into dialogue on intriguing questions. As mentioned earlier, the teacher restricts his role in this situation as companion or guide. This very role was advised by the church father St. Augustine (354-430) in reaction to the question of a catechist on good education. St. Augustine’s advice was: ‘Learners should essentially be seen as strangers who come to stay with you. Suppose that you would like to take them on a guided tour of the city, then you need to identify completely with them. Through this personal commitment you will be able to rediscover the city through their eyes. Learning is worth the effort when you go on a tour of discovery with the pupils.’ (St. Augustine, ‘De Catechezandis Rudibus, ch. 17).
2.5 Basic notions
In view of limitations we will in this contribution not go into the content of the V&O chapter with respect to theological conversations with children. As the focus of this contribution is on the prospective teacher, we list below seven basic notions at student level on compact feedback related to questions and remarks of 181 students after the introductory lecture on ‘theological conversations with children’.

2.5.1 Teaching preparation
The idea that a teacher does not play an active part in open conversations with children, is a misconception. By definition it is possible to make a personal contribution as equal partner in the discussion and as guide, notably from the pedagogical perspective and in a manner that is ‘following’ rather than ‘steering’. This role requires a well-prepared and structured educational environment. Its design hinges on ‘looking ahead’, i.e.: identification with the pupils and awareness of the possible course of the discussion.

The English pedagogue of religion Brian Gates speaks in this connection of ‘prospective awareness’ (Valstar, 2007). But this can naturally only be the case when you have a good grip on the content of the religious lessons concerned. At least equally important is the condition that you know your pupils. If not or not yet, it is hardly possible to anticipate the discussion at hand. This is undoubtedly a stumbling-block to young teachers who have not yet built up a relation with their pupils and have not been informed of their personal biographies either. This constitutes a priority of major importance.

2.5.2 Pupil-led group talk
The closed discussion, in which the teacher ultimately provides ‘the correct answer’, is easier to manage than conducting an open discussion, which may take much more time and effort than initially foreseen. But this is inherent in the communicative process that takes place in the framework of collaborative learning. This working-method refers to any activity in which pupils work together and depends particularly on pupil-led group talk. Leave ample room for the pupils to exchange ideas. Let them supplement and help each other in their search for a variety of answers. And always provide positive pedagogical feedback where needed. Follow the basic rule that everyone’s input is appreciated. In an open discussion there are no ready-made answers in advance. And remember that it necessarily takes some time for pupils to acquire this starting-point.

2.5.3 Preparing for the conversation
Let us assume that the conditions mentioned above have been met and that you as a teacher have indeed reflected carefully on the possibilities for a conversation, for instance in connection with a certain narrative from religious tradition. The V&O toolbox then confronts you with a number of related elementary questions. To mention some examples: ‘How is this story made up?’ / ‘What is this story about?’ / ‘What is the crux of this story?’ / ‘Is this story in one way or another relevant to the pupils?’ / ‘What possible experiences does this story evoke in my pupils?’ / ‘Can it possibly contribute to their development?’ Positive answers to
the latter questions lead to subsequent didactic questions such as: ‘What incentives could so to speak function as flywheels for the conversation in the exchange of thoughts?’

2.5.4 Peripheral conditions
Before proceeding, we linger on the importance of looking quite realistically at the nature of the group and the qualities of the individual pupils when preparing for a discussion. Do the pupils relate to each other constructively? Are there notorious obstructionists? Are the pupils familiar with open conversations? In other words: can we speak of a safe climate? For properly conducting the intended discussion, communication rules in the classroom are simply indispensable. These include general rules such as: ‘We respect each other all the way, even if we may have very different opinions’ or in other words: ‘Every opinion matters’, or: ‘We are all equal participants in conversation – nobody’s contribution is more - or less - important than anyone else’s’.

2.5.5 Open climate
An important characteristic of theological conversations is dealing with research questions to which no clear-cut answers are available. For this reason it is important to point out the basic rules to pupils prior to the open discussion, such as (1) listening carefully to the contributions of others (2) thinking before speaking, and (3) being prepared to change your mind. Of course the starting point of ‘there is no right or wrong answer; you are free to say what you think’ should not prevent pupils from inquiring after each other’s underlying ideas and arguments. Practice shows that the option of an on-going open discussion is a totally new experience to most pupils. This is understandable: they adhere to the innocent supposition that in fact only one answer can be the correct one, as is for instance the case in their arithmetic lessons. And they see it usually as their teacher’s task to provide the correct answer. This view may stop the children from formulating their own thoughts and from asking questions that are close at heart.

2.5.6 Empathic interventions
In this connection another point to notice is that asking a question, or answering someone else’s question, does not always appear to be quite simple for most pupils. This certainly holds for the situation when their minds are still in the process of an undecided search. The advice should therefore be to listen empathically to what the pupils are trying to convey. In other words: do not be rash in your interpretations, but keep asking further questions where necessary in a friendly manner. Incidentally: avoid the impression of hearing a lesson. Dialogue is always about equality of participants in communication. Some examples of constructive questions: ‘Do I understand you correctly when you say ...?’ Or: ‘How did you find out ...?’ Or: ‘Can you perhaps give an example?’ Or: ‘Could you possibly have a different opinion on that?’ If pupils only react in terms of ‘yes’ or ‘no’, further questions are called for. But you should also realize that these reactions may be the result of questions that are too intricate or not open-ended. Furthermore, there may occasionally be a sudden silence during the discussion. It is in the nature of open conversations that pauses occur during a thinking-process. There will always be a reason for this. As a matter of fact pauses should for this reason even be recommended. This may e.g. be done by saying: ‘Maybe you have never thought about this before. I myself need to think about it for a while as well. Let’s all do that for a moment.’
Such an intervention does justice to all pupils. Also to those who are so keen to respond that they do not take sufficient time to think about their own input in the open conversation. Sometimes pupils completely change the theme during the discussion. When you see this happening, do not intervene too soon after an unexpected turn that you have not prepared for and may therefore find difficult to handle. At a critical moment like this just wait how the group talk develops and ask yourself why the conversation took this turn. There has to be a reason for this. Sometimes it may be useful to go back to the previous point in the discussion or to the central theme, so as to help pupils to regain focus.

2.5.7 Closures
Finally: conversations do not only have a beginning, but also an ending. As stated above, in theological conversations you are as teacher first of all a partner in the conversation. At the same time you function as a companion and learning-guide to the pupils in a well-prepared learning environment. This also implies that you are responsible for concluding the discussion appropriately. Do not forget to summarize what has been learned in the discussion. In your summary try to do justice to the input of the pupils in an optimal way. When they perceive that you have taken their input seriously in all respects, you may expect even franker and more outspoken input in their next theological conversation.

In summary: taking the above notes into consideration, the intention of the theological conversation in a nutshell is ‘the joint challenge to raise elementary questions and to discover new meanings by means of open dialogue’.

References


Section 1: Prospective teachers / first considerations.

About the authors
- Drs. Johan Valstar is theologian, specialized in pedagogies of religious education and e-learning. He has been working as senior lecturer at the Windesheim School of Education / Zwolle. Currently he is adviser of a national parent’s organization. His research as PhD-er (Free University / Amsterdam) aims at the development of innovative practices in teacher education and primary schools, based on his Dutch adaption of the Tübinger Elementarization Model; the comprehensive concept of the RE Handbook: Verwonderen & Ontdekken.

- Dr. Henk Kuindersma is lecturer in religious education, ranging the broad spectrum of children and youth. He is a specialist in religious communication with children. Actually his focus is directed particularly to new approaches based on the pedagogical perspective of children’s theology, as published in the RE Handbook: Verwonderen & Ontdekken. In his training courses meaningful interaction between the learners and religious contents which they meet in real life-contexts, is a basic concern.

© Valstar & Kuindersma 2010. All rights reserved. No part of this article may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the authors. Correspondence address: Johan Valstar jgvalstar@gmail.com