

## RE-CONCEPTUALIZING OF EDUCATION AND RE-FRAMING THE SCHOOL AS A PLACE FOR PREVENTING RADICALIZATION

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**Abstract.** The aim of the article is to analyze the necessity of re-conceptualizing knowledge (education on Islam) and re-framing the school a place for preventing radicalization, concerning Muslim minority in Bulgaria.

To re-conceptualize knowledge, it is necessary to take advantage of the difference between knowledge and wisdom, used by Eastern philosophy, bearing in mind how data, information, and knowledge are being radically transformed in our times. The process of re-conceptualizing education needs the implementation of the ‘emergent knowledge’ and ‘techno-moral value’. Techno-moral virtue serves as a collective intellect that enables to see what is really good and can assure adequate educational environment for the so called New Young Muslims. Thus, underline the role of the school as a factor of preventing radicalization.

The author concludes with the necessity to develop a ‘sophiological epistemology’ and world view which has a global fundament in all cultures and religions on the world.

**Keywords:** education on Islam; re-conceptualization; emergent knowledge; techno-moral virtues; radicalization

### Introduction

Right of education is guaranteed in the Constitutional level. Primary and secondary education in state and municipal schools shall be provided free and become compulsory up to the age of 16. There are two types of schools in Bulgaria, which are the State Schools and the Municipal Schools. The primary and high schools are called Municipality Schools; and the vocational high schools are called State Schools. Every Bulgarian citizen has a constitutional right for the development of the culture of the ethnic community to which he/she belongs (Jelyazkova 2012, p.12).

Bulgaria is a state where Bulgarian and the people of various ethnicity such as, Roma, Turkish, Armenian, Jewish, Vlahe and Gagauz reside within its borders. In the same way, Bulgarian schools are multi-ethnic and multicultural.

The new education policy started in 2004 along with the “Educational Integration Strategy of Children and Students who are Members of Ethnic Minorities” which was approved on the 11 of June 2004<sup>1</sup>, by the Education Ministry and was updated in 04.03.2010<sup>2</sup>.

The strategy remarks, policies for quality inclusive education need to be sustainably continued and upgraded. Particular attention should be paid to the full inclusion in the educational process of children with special educational needs, by minority groups, including asylum seekers and migrants<sup>3</sup>.

The problems of the Turkish minority children and students by the Ministry of Education are as follows:

1. Problems of Turkish children not knowing sufficient levels of Bulgarian language;
2. The low level of quality of education;
3. The ethnic centralization creates negative attitude towards the Turkish minority in the educational system.
4. Turkish children having adaptation problems in kindergartens and primary schools<sup>4</sup>.

To resolve the problems some strategic goals has been set:

1. Improvement of the legal basis for granting higher quality education and requirements;
2. Renovation and introduction of interactive whiteboards in secondary state spiritual Muslim schools in Ruse.

Deepening social inequalities and migration processes globally makes it difficult to involve certain groups in education and their active participation in the labor market. In Bulgaria there are socio-economic, demographic and other barriers to education.

In the field research I conducted in the period of 2006 – 2010 on the territory of the Eastern Rhodopes<sup>5</sup>, for most respondents the place of religion was outside the secular school. They wanted to have a subject that would give informative knowledge about all religious systems. Education in Bulgaria ever since primary school is very intensive, the material in all subjects is presented in a complex manner. That's why according to parents and students, it was necessary to update the curriculum, to include more useful disciplines related to new technologies and entrepreneurship. For the students, the inclusion of the religious subject was an additional burden. It was not seen as an opportunity to educate moral qualities and responsibility for their actions and deeds, as Islamic ethics teaches. In Islam, learning and raising are parallel processes. Islam regulated the society through virtue and to carry out a number of activities to popularize knowledge and wisdom.

Already in antiquity (8th century), on the initiative of Caliph Mamun (786 – 833), a “House of Wisdom” was created in Baghdad, where encyclopedists

such as Farabi, Kindi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd had the opportunity to comment on the ancient texts. Central to Islam is the God-man relation and practical philosophy centered on human behavior and deeds. Therefore, it is extremely important to instruct one's behavior and build the student's habits of observing ethical norms, striving for education and mastering methods of self-knowledge.

Farabi defines two specific methods – “soft” and “hard” for education through the means of knowledge. If the educated person has a desire to learn, strives for work and good deeds, the “soft methods” of education should be applied, which will strengthen these aspirations. If the student is wayward and lazy, then the “hard ones” should be applied. These methods are tied to the moral qualities of the learner and the trainer. In this vein, al-Farabi challenged Aristotle's Code of Moral Rules, believing it to be too universal in nature. According to his “Treatise on Exemplary Training of the Youthful Mind”, dedicated to the pedagogical problems of the student, conditions must be created for the formation of moral foundations (al-Farabi 2002). Similar ideas are offered by N. Tusi in his treatise “On the Education of Learners”. Elevating science higher than faith, al-Kindi developed the idea that a child should be educated with a high intellect that promotes his moral improvement and self-realization, an idea further developed later by Roger Bacon. The main goal of education is to achieve happiness by mastering virtues and doing good deeds (al-Kindi 1950).

Following Avicenna's idea that children should be educated collectively and not individually, because this is how they learn from each other and better master the material, Islamic teachers believe that in the educational process people are equal and cooperate with each other, and have a chance to learn how to act as good agents in future social activities. They should be responsible and participate actively in discussions related to social issues. Education requires to be cautious, to ask questions, to express views, and even to provide answers. The spirit of tolerance is still very important. In the process of dialogue, the children will inevitably produce contradictions due to their difference. The improvement of ethics will also help the development of a model of good education. Therefore, live contact with the teacher is extremely important. In addition to broad knowledge, the teacher must possess moral qualities and observation.

The students should continue to uphold the good tradition of strengthening the construction of cultural quality through knowledge transfer, so as to improve citizens' learning ability.

Three factors are decisive for the formation of moral consciousness among students in Islam: the family, the social environment and the school. Knowledge in Islam is related to human dignity and is treated as an obligation. It is necessary to raise adolescents with concrete ethical norms, not just abstract kindness. In general, Islam itself has a huge educational potential and manages to preserve traditional values. It does not ignore the crucial role of the family in the process

of upbringing and education. Neglecting parental duties in Islam is treated as a sin and carries severe consequences. The combination of secular education with moral principles instills in children not only a desire for knowledge and wisdom, but also respect for elders, patience, hard work, courage, justice, charity, respect for national sanctuaries. Family and the school are factors directly related to the process of socialization of students.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the educational process in Bulgaria in general, and in particular on education in areas with a mixed population, where there are strong social inequalities and a lack of opportunities. The main mission of the school – to develop harmonious personalities (as a harmony of the soul and the body, inherent in the process of personal development) – was violated.

During times of a pandemic, teachers feel dissatisfied with the learning process, due to the fact that they do not control the audience, cannot become role models and cannot teach in the spirit of tolerance. The exams are conducted inefficiently. This results as a discouraging to pursue education at bachelor's and master's degrees. Students are not able to argue on different topics or debate because dialogue is absent in virtual space. They are deprived of the opportunity to be educated collectively and to learn from each other.

Both parents and students advocate a positive opinion about the role of the school as a factor in education, for a balanced and tolerant presentation the subjects and facts. It is very important to feel comfortable for Turkish minority children in terms of psychological and spiritual wellbeing in order to achieve full attendance in school. In this regard, history as a subject, takes very important place.

The use of an intercultural approach by teachers and compliance of the new curricula with European values is of great importance, too. According to experts, principals and teachers, there is an objective presentation of history compared to the history textbooks of other Balkan countries. History is a peculiar way of thinking related to the spiritual culture of man, and a psychological way of perceiving the world. Key in the education of children of ethnic origin are the good intentions and high qualification of teachers, the opportunity to form a tolerant attitude towards others and critical thinking in order to overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

The school in the postmodern time has broken the connection between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge without wisdom has made students spiritually homeless, alien to the other. *“Positivist and rationalist epistemology followed by relativist and nihilist ethics have brought more knowledge to the modern world but less wisdom. In regard to the Socratic tradition of self-knowledge and the humanist tradition of seeking to form thought and human actions as ‘wisdom speaking’ philosophy has lost its way”* (Verene 1997).

The COVID crisis reveal the necessity to retain the balance of wisdom and knowledge from one side and re-conceptualizing knowledge, from the other.

### **1. Re-conceptualizing knowledge**

In the 'information age', placing interactive whiteboards in every classroom is a natural process, aimed at developing digital skills, the ability to schematize and work with an algorithm. But information and data stand to replace knowledge. Children are not capable of analyzing not only a text from the educational changes, but since it is a question of secondary spiritual schools, the same applies to an analysis of the Holy text. Due to new technologies they used Quranic texts in English, not in Turkish or Bulgarian.

We can apply Rorty's educational philosophy to reaffirm the school as a place for socialization.

[t]here is only the shaping of an animal into a human being by a process of socialization followed (with luck) by the self-individuation of that human through his or her own revolt against that very process (Rorty 1989, p.32).

Socialization and critical thinking are two sides of a process that must be followed in parallel. In a distinctive way Rorty describes the need of autonomous knowledge and the problem of hegemonic discourse. Unfortunately, the autonomy now belongs to AI, which generates knowledge solely on the basis of patterns and correlations.

In order to re-conceptualize knowledge, it is necessary to take advantage of the difference between knowledge and wisdom, used by Eastern philosophy. Exploring wisdom has deep roots in Eastern cultures. In Muslim civilization, the conceptualization of knowledge was a major intellectual activity from the tenth to the fourteenth century, spurred by the fact that knowledge (*Ilm*) and related terms such as observation, reason, reflection, study of natural and social phenomenon occur in some 750 verses in the Qur'an. Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazali, produced a lot of definitions of knowledge: human knowledge and Divine knowledge, scientific knowledge and spiritual knowledge, propositional knowledge and knowledge as practice, attitude, doubt (Rosenthal 1970). For Ibn Rushd, knowledge is a combination of sense, perception and 'intellectual intuition', an amalgam of essence and being (Kogan 1985). He tried to substantiate a cultural vision of wisdom to be acceptable both in tradition of Islam (religion) and in the tradition of logic (philosophy). Ibn Rushd regarded this as a method of overcoming sectarianism and differentiation and possibility of the synthesis of reason and wisdom (Yaran 2007, p. 98).

Al-Ghazali suggested true knowledge reveals the reality of things as they are, and transforms the knower. He insists on the connection of philosophy to morality and self-knowledge. Al-Ghazali argued that knowing by itself was not enough, 'wisdom was necessary to act morally and distinguish right from wrong' (al-Ghazali 1962). Wisdom is also needed to go beyond sensate knowledge based on speculation and ignorance. Mullah Sadra talked of 'transcendent wisdom' - knowledge was mode of existence, wisdom takes a quantum leap to another dimension. Other Sufi mystics

illuminated the notion of wisdom through deep spiritual explorations, such as Ibn Arabi's „The Bezels of Wisdom”, or moral stories, such as Rumi's „Masnavi“ (Kalin 2010). Al-Farabi defined wisdom as ‘power of excellence of deliberation and production of the things which are most excellent and best in what is done to procure for a man a really great good and an excellent and noble end, whether that is happiness or something which is indispensable for obtaining happiness’ (Bakar 2018, p.88).

But along with knowledge, information too was increasing rapidly. Big Data and gargantuan information have radically transformed modes of production of knowledge as well as the nature of knowledge itself.

Knowledge represented processed, analyzed or synthesized information that could be procedural, propositional, experiential, philosophical, objective or subjective. It provided theoretical, practical or experiential explanation or understanding of a subject. Together information and knowledge increased efficiency rather than what in management terms is called ‘effectiveness’: that is doing the right thing. Efficiency can be automated, but not effectiveness and for that reason Russel Ackoff requires wisdom.

“Wisdom involves the exercise of judgment; it cannot be programmed”. While “we are able to develop computerized information-, knowledge-, and understanding-generating systems, we will never be able to generate wisdom by such systems. It may well be that wisdom – which is essential for the pursuit of ideals or ultimately valued ends – is the characteristic that differentiates man from machines” (Ackoff 1989).

His ideas provide a good starting point and template to show how data, information, and knowledge are being radically transformed in our times (Sardar and Sweeny 2016), and what that implies for wisdom.

For the contemporary Islamic researches, the process of re-conceptualizing education needs the implementation of an ‘emergent knowledge’.

Ziauddin Sardar in his recent book, “Emerging Epistemologies. The Changing Fabric of Knowledge in Postnormal Times”, describes Big Data and gargantuan information driven knowledge as ‘emergent’ because it is a product of interconnected, networked, evolving components: that is to say it is a complex system, that can spontaneously generate order, adaptation, feedback loops. ‘Emergent knowledge’ has no borders: “it is intrinsically multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary; it is simultaneously global and local; it codifies both the external and internal features of its subjects and objects. It incorporates and commodifies both the essence and being of individuals, groups and communities. It is contradictory and chaotic. And it can produce totally new manifestations of itself – which cannot be predicted” (Sardar 2016).

How can wisdom be infiltrate in the midst of such challenges?

Laila Varley suggests, ‘wisdom necessary for a wise future does not lie in knowledge’ but “in the ability to take disparate pieces of knowledge,

sometimes incomplete, and see a bigger picture” (Ramirez, Ravetz, Sharpe, Varley 2019).

Since wisdom is primarily found in humans (Pargman et al. 2019), wisdom may not be an attribute that could be transferred to a machine – however ‘intelligent’ it may be. Wisdom cannot be simply reduced to a set of rules. Human wisdom also incorporates the rather essential notion of responsibility.

Sardar suggests to think wisdom as a communal virtue (not so much individual), networked by the role of school (Sardar 2019, p.43).

Such communal wisdom, according to Sayarer, “will have a couple of extra layers of genuine knowledge that AI could never require: *tacit knowledge* and what we may call *handheld knowledge*. ‘Tacit knowledge’ is culturally embedded, it makes sense, and provides sense of direction, within a particular cultural milieu. It is the knowledge of indigenous cultures, traditional societies, and scholarly communities, where it is passed from generation to generation. ‘Handheld knowledge’ is knowledge of a more intimate nature: knowledge we acquire through deep listening, inner reflection, or metaphysical speculation, or numinous elation, or communion with nature – ethereal insight and understanding we can all pass on to each other. “It is the kind of knowledge that brings people together for mutual erudition, caring, healing, and for growth” (Sayarer et al. 2019).

Shanon Vallor reflects further. To be adequate in the existing reality the school has to explore what she describes as a ‘*techno-moral virtue*’ – the ability to see the moral dimension of accelerating technological change. “Techno-moral virtue is somewhat different from established virtues such as honesty, flexibility, humility, and self-control in that it is not a precise temperament but a general condition of well cultivated and integrated moral expertise” (Vallor 2016, p.154). It functions as a lens through which we contextualize and cultivate old virtues “with a new and explicit adaptation to our emerging global techno-moral environment. ‘Techno-moral virtue’ serves as a collective intellect that enables us to see what is really good in a changing context and choose viable and wholesome futures from a plethora of destructive and inhuman options” (Vallor 2019, p.153).

Thus, we can assure adequate educational environment for the so called New Young Muslims, who are very active in the digital space.

## **2. Re-framing the School as a place for Preventing Radicalization**

The question: What is it like to be a Muslim in a non-Muslim society? often provokes self-education, a combination of one’s demand for sources, lecturers, books and visiting social networks. There is a ‘cognitive opening’, that seeks new alternative views and ideas, as well as openness to new Islamic trends.

We speak about new young Muslims who start to identify themselves as part of the “Global Islamic Movement”, which further enables them to share their perceptions of the global network.



The school should be the place for preventing radicalization that gives opportunities for direct access to the ideas of modern Islamic scholars and various Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals. A place which teaches children to investigate, hypothesize and test what is known and unknown.

The school have to represents what Alberto Melucci calls ‘networks of shared thought’ (Melucci 1996) or communities united “by the shared interpretation of Islam and a high ability of critical thinking of opposition to general religious understanding” (Viktorovich 2005, p.17).

We must consciously create wisdom networks and communities where the community can provide a modicum of capabilities and competences to see through the “smog of ignorance and navigate postmodern times”, if we feel ourselves responsible to the future of the upcoming generation.

The visions for the future of education could be directed to:

Challenging existing paradigms by providing alternative systems for the study of Islam;

Revisiting understandings and misunderstandings in long-established academic traditions in the study of Islam - the main focus should be on how we create, study and disseminate Islamic data.

### **Conclusion**

The article explores the problems of education on Islam, after the crisis of COVID, from the perspective of the historical relationship between Islamic concepts of knowledge (*Ilm*) and wisdom (*Hikmah*). For most of the medieval Muslims philosopher’s wisdom has been related both to knowledge and philosophy, and to religion and morality. The accent in education should be on the wisdom as an intellectual, emotional and spiritual characteristics, related with the knowledge of the self and virtuous actions. Wisdom and knowledge are closely related to each other, and while knowledge is more theoretical, wisdom is more practical and experiential. In Islam, reason and experience are two mainstreams by which knowledge is attained. There are many verses in the Holly Qur’an on the subject of wisdom and knowledge, but above all it is a book dedicated to the importance of the upbringing. The Islamic religion has a deeply developed system of education, which is a priority and plays a key role in education, both in the past and current times. The role of the school is to build in students habits of compliance with ethical norms, striving for knowledge and self-education. Knowledge in Islam is considered a duty. The need for adequate education within rapidly developing technologies requires the inclusion of concepts such as “emergence knowledge” and “technomoral virtues”. This will support the process of re-conceptualizing knowledge and will bring back the important role of the school – to prepare harmoniously developed individuals, capable of analysis, critical thinking, capable of defending moral norms, values and virtues.



The engagement of young people with social activities and the opportunity to obtain adequate knowledge at school not only about the philosophical heritage, but also about the ideas of modern philosophers will prevent them from surfing the social networks in search of the information they are interested in. Various Islamist sites offer such and hide potential dangers of radicalizing young people and recruiting them for various jihadist networks. Thus, another very important role of the school stands out today – to protect against radicalization.

Wisdom makes students understand the rational, value and importance of education for ordering their social life. That's why it is necessary to reinstate the broken dialogue between wisdom and knowledge in the school. Development of the self should be considered as a goal of acquiring education. The teachers should develop a '*sophiological epistemology*'<sup>6</sup> and world view which has a global fundament in all cultures and religions on the world.

## NOTES

1. See: Strategia za obrarovatelna integratsia na detsata i učenitsite ot etniçeskite maltsinstva. Odobrena ot ministira na obrazovaniето i naukata, 2004. [Стратегия за образователна интеграция на децата и учениците от етническите малцинства. Одобрена от министъра на образованието и науката] <http://www.minedu.government.bg/?go=page&pageId=74&subpageId=143> [viewed 16 October 2015].
2. Aktualizirana strategia za obrarovatelna integratsia na detsata i učenitsite ot etniçeskite maltsinstva, utvirdena ot ministira na obrarovaniето, mladejta i naukata na 04.03.2010. [Актуализирана стратегия за образователна интеграция на децата и учениците от етническите малцинства, утвърдена от министъра на образованието, младежта и науката на 04.03.2020 г.] <http://coiduem.mon.bg/page.php?c=4&d=16> [viewed 16 October 2015].
3. Strategic framework for the development of education, learning and studying in Republic of Bulgaria (2021 – 2030).
4. Aktualizirana Strategia za obrazovatelna integratsia na detsata i učenitsite ot etniçeskite maltsinstva utvirdena ot ministira na obrarovaniето, mladejta i naukata na 04.03.2010. [Актуализирана стратегия за образователна интеграция на децата и учениците от етническите малцинства, утвърдена от министъра на образованието, младежта и науката на 04.03.2010]. <http://coiduem.mon.bg/page.php?c=4&d=16> [viewed 18 October 2015].
5. Project to Fond Scientific Research, Ministry of Education, Bulgaria, titled: "Bulgarian ethnic model – myth or reality?" (2005 – 2009). [Проект към ФНИ на МОН, „Българският етнически модел – мит или реалност?“ (2005 – 2009)].
6. The term is proposed by prof. Yaran in his book "Understanding Islam", Dunedin Academic press, Edinburgh, 2007.

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