

## **The Subjects Primary Education Students Focused On Most (A Research on the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students)**

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### **Abstract**

*In this article, religious topics primary education students are curious about most have been discussed to reach a determination. Our study will assist in finding the answer to the question: "On which subjects should Education of Religion and Ethics teacher train and prepare himself/herself?" In this research conducted amongst 200 students in 5th grade primary school, as the main problem, it was aimed to determine the questions students would demand to learn from a religious educator. In the questionnaire aimed for this purpose, students were asked to write down "Three questions on religion they are most curious about and eager to find out answer from a religious educator". Top five questions of students are; worship and faith, doomsday and life after death, prophets and Kor'an, spiritual beings like angel, evil spirit and soul and Allah.*

### **Introduction**

Human beings try to capture the events and the causes giving way to their occurrence. Thus we can describe humans as "questioning and investigating beings" on accounts of their interrogative characteristics. People start asking questions in the early phases of their lives. The child, even before s/he starts talking, views the world with curious eyes. This child, who desires to grasp the background of events, gradually gains experience by finding about the world. The child who discovers the hidden tie between words and objects and realizes that people and objects indeed have names starts his/her first step in the cosmos of perception with this never-ending question: "What?" This step is a journey from the word "what" to the complicated system of our language and our world of ideas. By asking "where?" question the child tries to find out if any other person has control over himself/herself or whether he can have an influence on someone else.

Then the child, in a way, tires everyone around with continuous "why?" questions. Now that s/he directs "Where did this come from?" question, s/he tries to search the origin of everything (Klink, 1972: 67-8). In order to satisfy his/her inner curiosity granted by birth, the child's questions are not confined to his or her own being or other people and the world surrounding them; at certain times s/he also asks religion centered questions. This feeling of curiosity which is at its highest level in early childhood age continues throughout primary education period as well. Curiosity feeling in these children exhibits itself with more accurate questions compared to pre-school age. The child who, starting from age 7, gets more interested in religious topics and enters a different stage after age 9 starts questioning metaphysical space (God, doomsday, heaven, hell, death) throughout ages 11-12. This period which is known as a transition process from childhood to youth and named as "last childhood" or "pre-adolescence" lasts till ages 13-14.

One of the most obvious characteristics of this period is the passion for knowledge. The tendency and absorbance of knowledge in early youth age, unlike the period preceding it, is not emotional but rather mental. These children do not accept knowledge unquestionably any longer and rather they try to understand them logically. Therefore, just as it should be in the whole education system, in religion teaching as well, it is important that data be grasped through mind (Bilgin-Selçuk, 1991: 73). The leading subjects children are most curious about in this period are religious and spiritual, or in other words abstract subjects and beings. In this article, religious topics primary education students are curious about most have been discussed to reach a determination. In line with that, our study will assist in finding the answer to the question: "On which subjects should Religious Education and Ethics teacher train and prepare himself/herself?" In this research conducted amongst 200 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade primary school, as the main problem, it was aimed to determine the questions students would demand to learn from a religious educator.

In the questionnaire aimed for this purpose, students were asked to write down “Three questions on religion they are most curious about and eager to find out answer from a religious educator”.

## Research Findings

### A. General Information on the Students Participating the Questionnaire

Research sampling consists of 200 students of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students trained in a primary school in Bursa during 2007-2008 training period. 100 of these students are girls, 100 are boys. 4% of students claimed to have “low” income, 90% middle class and 6% stated to have “high” income level. Of the fathers in sampling 50% are primary education graduates, 39% are secondary education and high school, 11% are university graduates. Of their mothers, 66% are primary school, 31% secondary school and high school and 3% are university graduates.

### B. Findings on Students’ Questions and Evaluation

**Table 1: The Subjects Students’ Questions are Focused on**

Question fields	Girls	Boys	Total
Worship and faith issues	84	72	156
Death and its aftermath, Doomsday, Heaven-Hell	86	79	165
Prophets and Kor’an	25	36	61
Angels, Satan, Evil spirit, Fairies, Spirit	23	26	49
Allah (God in Islam)	12	11	23
Other current events and notions	18	23	41
Creation of Man and Universe	8	14	22
Our conduct towards Mothers	15	2	17
Christianity	6	10	16

As pointed out in Table 1, top five questions of students are; worship and faith, doomsday and life after death, prophets and Kor’an, spiritual beings like angel, evil spirit and soul and Allah. Other questions, although contain some abstract notions as well, are mostly about current events and practices in everyday life which proves that social life has a vital influence over child. This social life, depending on the child’s development, is the most important element in forming the interests and needs and improving the curiosity of the child.

#### 1. Questions on Worship and Faith

According to research result, amongst the subjects 11 year old group is most curious and ask questions about are worship and faith. Prayer, salaah, -generally Friday prayer- ablution, pilgrimage, zakat, fasting, religious offering are some of these subjects.

Acquisition of salaah performing habit has a significant place. It proves that children are keen of worshipping and they are in certain ways ready. This deduction becomes even more meaningful when we assess it from Mohammad the Prophet’s verse that advises to teach children in salaah and worship at the age of 7 (*Tirmizî, Ebvâbu’s-Salât, 299; Ebû Dâvud, Salât, 26*).

Children in the first stage of primary education are not yet ready to grasp the meaning of abstract and philosophical religious concepts. However they are instinctively interested in religion, religious topics and practices and they love to learn more. Children at this age try to understand the causes that lie behind the rules. Within this framework, they want to learn the acts and rules banned or allowed by religion.

Starting from age 10, as a consequence of the betterment in abstract thinking and level of knowledge, the scope of faith also widens. During the early years of school, religious practices that were mostly in the shape of modeling and copying, now turn into actual, personal religious practices. Now the children are capable of conducting religious practices on their own. Children at this age make choices from religious practices they learnt earlier and habitually practiced (*Doğan-Tosun, 2003: 119*).

If these children gain the habit of salaah from age 7, during the last years of primary education which is the most agreeable period of childhood, they conduct this habit without any force. From this perspective in ages 11-12, there may be an increase in worship based questions of children.

As evident in Table 1, girl students are more curious about worship which indicates that they are keener on religion. It is noted that women are more disciplined in religious service, particularly willful practices. When it is taken into account that girl children usually model their mothers and get influenced by their conduct, it is possible to claim that girl students are more sensitive to worship-related topics (*Kılavuz, 2006: 280-281*).

As for the worships, children would like to learn the reasons to pray, why it is a must to perform ablution prior to salaah performance, why laughing during salaah is banned, why men and women cannot perform salaah side by side, why women are not allowed to attend Friday prayer, what is the reason for Friday prayer, what is the religious aspect of not being able to attend Friday prayer during class hours, if or not a person having drunk alcohol can perform salaah, whether or not a middle class family is responsible to give zakat, if a woman not covering her hair can worship, whether or not eating willingly at age 11 breaks the fast and what is the reason for sacrificing in Feast of Sacrifice.

Such questions make clear that children are quite keen on worship and worship related subjects and moreover they are eager to conduct practicing. On the other hand, some of these questions are issues widely discussed in media and public. This indicates that media and social agenda have vital roles in religious thinking, development and determining a child's area of interest. The child adopts the subjects introduced by media and discusses them in class as well so media designates an area of needs and interests for the child. In other words, it is obvious that in establishing the needs and interests of individual, media is rather effective.

Other subjects children want to find out and which are mostly based on faith are whether or not it is a sin to use toilet or bathroom, to talk, play, make noise, lie or sleep, sing during azan; to cut nail at night, why it is sevap (good deed) to clean oneself and cut nails on Friday; why the day Friday is holy; whether or not thieves are afraid of Allah, how sinful it is for a pilgrim to swear, if it is sinful to waste bread, if reciting *İhlâs* Surah for 10 times clear all of our past sins, what is kept inside Kâaba, whether or not our sins are written on right and left sides, why we should not look at the mirror at night, why it is a sin to put our feet against Kiblah on bed, whether or not imam wedding is a sin, whether or not the ones who run away with their lovers are sinful since they humiliate their families, the cause for salâ and azan recitals, whether or not eating with left hand is sinful, if it is impossible for angels to visit houses furnished with sculptures or pictures, why there is more than one religion in the world, if we are destined to do what we do then why are we still responsible for the deeds that were meant by God earlier, what Allah thinks of women's headscarves, whether or not Islam is the true religion, if a music band's poster is on the wall, is it true that angels do not enter to this house...etc (For an earlier research on the same topic, see *Yavuz, 1983: 86*).

These faith centered questions are at the same time about a Muslim's daily activities. This points out that children have a certain level of awareness concerning ,religion-life and individual-religion interactions and that they are aware that religion dwells in life itself and is in close connection with daily life and personal life. Questions like "Aren't thieves afraid of Allah?" signify the possibility to establish a relationship with material world and spiritual world and besides they point out the extensions of conscientious responsibility. In children belonging to this age group, there is an inclination to obey the rules to be honest, trustworthy and decent children.

However questions such as "Why should not we look at mirror at nights?" reflect the traditional yet superstitious beliefs transmitted from society to children. These questions also make it clear that desire and tendency to learn is vividly available in children.

Within the framework of current, religious law subjects children demand to find out if it is wrong to have manicure and pedicure, if women can be imams, if it is sinful to donate organ or do exercise, what would happen if a person does not give blessing, if there is such thing as magic, if it is right to have a dog at home etc. Such questions validate the deduction that children keep up with current events in social life and they are aware of social aspect of religious life. Besides, it is evident that concerning human conduct and social interactions, they have a religious sensitivity. These questions prove that children indeed need true, scientific knowledge. On the other hand, we meet the traces of traditional yet not religion-based superstitions. Taking initiative from these questions of children, certain religious themes can be emphasized. Besides, it should be paid heed that religion should be narrated as a concept harmonized with daily life. Since children in this age need to learn more about everyday subjects, such knowledge should be taught to them and more religious materials should be offered.

For that purpose, it is necessary that children's experiences be enriched, that they get acquainted with worship and religious subjects (cf. Özeri, 2004: 187).

While answering religious law questions one should be careful not to make an impression that religion is just a set of rules. Moreover, in order to prepare the children to development stages, activities based on critical thinking improvement should be arranged.

## **2. Questions on Death and its Aftermath, Doomsday, Heaven-Hell**

Death and life after death are important concepts to satisfy the feeling of eternity of mankind and offer a meaning to life. The meaning and peace of this material world largely depends on the answer s/he finds to the question of after death. Mankind, unable to find a scientific answer, relives himself/herself with a religious solution because religion is the greatest institution bestowing a meaning to death.

According to the research and Table 1, another subject age 11 group is most interested in is "life after death" (Âhîret). Concerning this subject, total 165 students, 86 girls and 79 boys asked questions. Life after death is a subject continuously attracts children. It is followed by death, deceased ones, what to experience after death. Children demand to learn about cause of death, the nature of endless life, the purpose of interrogation day, questions to be answered in this day, when and how Doomsday will be at the door, if the ones dying in Doomsday will go to Hell or Heaven, how will the deeds be weighed in the next Life and if the sins and misdeeds are equal what will then take place, how will the days and nights be like, the nature of Hell, fire in Hell and the punishments, the life in Heaven, if good deeds of a wicked person will help him in the next world, whether or not disabled people will be interrogated, the role worships play in putting one to Heaven or Hell, the greatness of Heaven and Hell etc. A similar result was put forward in other researches as well (Yavuz, 1983).

The impacts of elderly people and chats between children and adults are important factors in carrying such subjects to their agenda. This way, children acquire some information- be it true or false. These questions reveal that children believe in life after death, existence of heaven and hell, feeling of responsibility for the life after death and that they can establish a connection between this life and next world and have an awareness of this situation. Questions are mostly related to problems which have been discussed for a long time by various religious sects. That is why a religion teacher needs to have sufficient knowledge on both religious sources and philosophical thoughts. Yet it is no doubt that the answers to children's questions should be appropriate to their development levels.

Such questions that attract attention of everyone regardless of age intrigue children as well. A teacher of Religious Education and Ethics can give answers to these questions by referring to Kor'an addressing to their level of understanding. Children's questions reflect their interest and curiosity for the life after death and besides their faith and expectation to get what they do in this life in the next world and concerning these issues they are a bit worried both for themselves and for their dear ones. That indicates that at the same time children should be explained positive aspect of religion as well since religion concept, most of the times, seems to be associated with Hell and punishment. Nonetheless particularly for children it is more important to explain and underline beauties, acquisitions and love aspect of children.

## **3. Questions related to Prophets and Kor'an**

Prophets and the Book are two fixed sources of knowledge and historically tangible institutions of particularly divine religions. As seen in Table 1, total number of children asking questions about prophets and Kor'an is 61; 25 girls and 36 boys. Mohammad the Prophet comes first among all other prophets children are curious about (cf. Yavuz, 1983: 86). They want to know who named Mohammad the Prophet, how He addressed people while introducing them Islam, how come he never made a mistake all his life, whether it is true that children whom he loved greatly entered to his dreams, if we can see Him in our dreams, what kind of a mark is Prophecy sign; why we put our hand above our heart when we mention His name and say "s.a.v" (sallallâhu aleyhi vesellem=May God's salute on him); since our Prophet's smell of sweat is like rose then whether or not he is genetically different; if it is possible to become a prophet through hard work and concerning other prophets where is Adem (Adam) Prophet and others; why forbidden fruit exists and why that specific tree was hidden from Adem Prophet; who are the first and last prophets etc. Similar results were obtained in an earlier research as well (Yavuz, 1983: 86) Children's questions on prophets generally concern their personalities and aim to know them better. Children would like to learn lives and personalities of Mohammad the Prophet and other prophets.

Prophets are physical beings for them to understand and know better. In child development modeling and copying is quite an obvious feature and critical process in forming personality. In acquiring religious and moral behaviors and personality training, introducing and explaining historic personalities it is an effective method therefore it is crucial that for the child's personality development such questions be satisfied with sufficient data and correct pedagogical approach. The training students receive at school, respect and admiration teachers and parents pay to prophets, books, radio, television and other mass media drive children to obtain more information on prophets. Religious educators who would like to explain the traits of prophets to students need to consider developmental phases of them. It might cause some problems if they create a belief that prophets cannot be modeled, their acts and behaviors cannot be reflected because in a way such an emphasis on the inapplicability of prophets' behaviors means that it is not possible to follow Kor'an either.

Children are curious about the origin of Kor'an, its first reader, its meaning, why it is in Arabic language and some common beliefs concerning Kor'an.

According to us children's questions on Kor'an are determined by their own relationship with Koran and also, primarily their families, the attitudes of their surrounding to Koran. In our society it is a well known fact that families are generally highly respectful towards Koran yet they have no close connection with it. In our society, Kor'an is mostly reserved for shelves, remain there untouched but dearly loved and respected. This reality seems to be reflected in children's questions as well. In other words general feature of questions indicate that they do not know Kor'an well enough. Thus Religious Education and Ethics teacher has a responsibility to introduce Islam and its holy book Kor'an to children. Teacher is expected to know and explain Kor'an well and encourage students to read and learn correctly.

#### ***4. Questions on Angels, Satan, Evil spirits, Fairies and Soul***

Angel, Satan, fairies and spirits, though abstract and complicated notions, have always been a fountain of curiosity for humans. For children the attraction and confusion of these notions become even bigger.

As seen in Table 1 questions on this subject belong to 49 students; 23 girls and 26 boys.

Children would like to find out creation of angels, if angels will fall to the world on doomsday, if there is an angel for each human being, the duties of angels on our right and left sides, the reason for the existence of Satan who is evil doer and why it does evil, if this Satan has parents as well, why unlike people it was created from fire not soil, which prayer can keep Satan away from us, whether or not Satan can die if it is true that whistling or finger cracking bring it closer, what kind of beings are evil spirits and fairies, ceremony for evil spirit calling, whether or not they come to this call, if they can be seen by people and they can be distinguished from humans, if there is such thing as 'possession', the action evil spirits taken during azan recital, what is a nightmare and if there is evil spirit in it, if stepping on crumbs invites evil spirits, whether or not our souls will revive after death.

Such questions of children reflect both their childish curiosity and some knowledge based on Islamic beliefs. The fact that angels are invisible (abstract) beings is a reason stimulating their interest. Children are always curious about such things. The questions indicate that children have a certain background of knowledge concerning Satan and that they comprehend the relationship between evil and Satan. That is why questions are mostly directed towards the relationship between Satan and wickedness. Furthermore, it is evident that social beliefs on this issue are also reflected in students' questions as well. Accordingly, we can assert that children are ready to hear Koran verses related to Satan so long as these verses are explained consistent with their comprehension level.

Spiritual beings like evil spirits, fairies and soul have always been mysterious subjects taking people's attention because humans have always had an interest and curiosity towards invisible things. Next to this feeling of curiosity, social beliefs and attitudes concerning evil spirits and fairies are also elements determining and increasing children's interest and curiosity on such things.

On the other hand, invisible (abstract, spiritual) beings have always been associated with religion. Within this framework, evil spirits, fairies and soul subjects are also perceived as religion centered. Mentioning soul and evil spirits in some verses might also be effective in this perception.

## 5. Questions concerning Allah

As exhibited in Table 1, 12 girls, 11 boys total 23 students asked questions “concerning Allah”.

Children are able to ask questions concerning Allah even in pre-school age. However although in this period children’s interest to religion is great, still it is not feasible to claim the existence of a religious belief (Goldman, 1970: 52-54). Therefore, it does not seem reasonable for pre-school age children to comprehend cognitive aspects of religion.

5<sup>th</sup> grade students who are at the last stage of tangible religious thought phase can understand certain aspects of religion despite the fact that they are furnished with limited logical thinking ability (Karaca, 2007: 53-54). Children at this age are capable of asking questions concerning Allah and they can understand the answers given in line with their development level.

Questions concerning Allah are such; if we will be able to see Allah in the next life; why the ones who know Allah’s 99 names will go to Heaven; what Allah looks like; why Allah first creates then destroys us; the nature of relationship between people and Allah; why we cannot see Allah; how Allah came into existence (or by whom and how) exactly how great He is; the most intelligent man of Allah; unless Allah is listening to our telephone conversations, how it can be possible for Him to hear us.

Such questions concerning Allah are critical since they prove that children also think subjects on Allah faith. In other words, maybe some of their questions are childish but at times they are capable of contemplating on basic problems and search for solutions.

Such questions demonstrate that in their God picture the influence of anthropomorphism and egocentrism is no longer dominant. Some of their questions make clear that since they are far away from abstract thinking level, they have a human-like God picture on their minds (Holm, 2004: 87).

Around ages 10-11, children tend to imagine God as a holy existence filled with magical powers and supernatural signs symbolizing this power. Only through adolescence will they manage to leave material thinking behind and incline to imagine God in less physical terms.

Questions of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students enable us to assume that their instability and skepticism which are characteristics of adolescence are reflected in their God thoughts as well (Ratcliff, 2004: 101-116). At that point, the existence of a benevolent, all-powerful and all-knowing being, a Holy Being unexcelled and always trustworthy can be explained to children (Doğan-Tosun, 2002: 119).

## 6. Questions on Other Current Issues and Concepts

Religious content programs in media (particularly in TV channels) and some religious concepts reflecting everyday lives of Muslims can also form the scope of students’ questions. Of the 41 students asking such questions, 18 are girls and 23 are boys. Concerning religious programs, children demand to know whether or not TV programs namely ‘Sır Kapısı’ (Gate for Secrets), ‘Büyük Buluşma’ (Great Meeting) and ‘Kalp Gözü’ (Eye of the Heart) are based on facts. The questions reveal that children are curious about the events and subjects taking place in those events. These events which also have visual aspect can be effective and intriguing for children. Particularly in behavior acquisition, films and visual aids are rather influential on children. This child who becomes affected by the events narrated in media and channels and who has an inclination to identify himself/herself with events or heroes can get even more emotionally and consciously touched upon witnessing the stories. In the end attractive events and subjects can pose questions for religion teacher at school.

As for religious concepts related to our daily lives and frequently heard of like, “Good and Evil”, “Bismillah”, “Sübhâneke”, “S.A.V.” (Sallallâhu Aleyhi Vesellem=May God’s salute and blessings on him), Kelime-i Tevhid”(oneness of God) and “Haram” (misdeed) are concepts children are curious about. A similar result was put forward in other researches as well (Yavuz, 1983). Religious concepts reflected on children’s questions are mostly issues that carry significance for Islamic beliefs, acts, personal and social lives of a Muslim. Also such subjects are issues that take place in the curriculum of Religious Education and Ethics lesson.

Another notion in students’ questions which is rather “Dabbe”. Concerning this issue around 13 students asked questions and they wanted to find out if there was such thing as “Dabbe”, whether or not it would emerge and if yes when and where it would be visible.

Questions on Dabbe indicate that children knew almost nothing on the nature of this subject but they simply heard the rumor. We believe that that is because adults themselves lack sufficient knowledge and even more, this subject has not been clear enough. Still it is possible to assert that some children are aware of the fact that this subject is under discussion in some religious scope.

### **7. Questions Related to the Creation of Man and Universe**

As presented in Table 1 total 22 students, 8 girls and 14 boys directed questions on the creation of man and universe. Accordingly, compared to girls, boys are more curious about creation.

Children have a great interest to the subject of creation. Concerning this issue questions are such; if man is created from soil, why water, which is a solvent cannot decompose man; how Âdem was created, how man was created, was it a human being or another being that was created at the first stage, why people looked like that, if or not men are descendants of monkeys, why Allah created each of us differently, why humans were created from soil, not something else (For similar findings, see to compare; *Yavuz, 1983: 84*).

As for the creation of universe, children want to find out how Allah managed to create this great universe out of nothing. Children between the ages of 10-12 who constitute the scope of our research take a step forward in asking questions with full admiration by simply gazing at the creatures (*Yavuz, 1983: 86*).

Questions are signs of self search. Creation and existence process of mankind has always been a source of interest for humans therefore this issue has been on the agenda of religions and religious texts (particularly of divine religions) and questions on this subject are tried to be explained even though answers are restricted. So humans whose curiosity remain unsatisfied by answers have searched for more elaborate ones and looked for the details in religion. Although some questions of these children are answered in religious texts, still it is necessary that this information be given parallel to their level of knowledge.

In Kor'an we come across several verses, information and description on the creation of man and universe (*Such as 'Alak, 96/1-2; Âl-i Ìmrân, 3/6; 3; En'âm, 2/2, 101; A'raf, 7/54; Yunus, 10/3; Hûd, 11/ 7; Hicr, 15/85; Nahl, 16/3; Enbiya, 21/30; Furkan, 25/59; Secde, 32/4; Fussilet, 41/11; Kaf, 50/38; Hadîd, 57/4; Talâk, 65/12.*) Hence we assume that this caused an urge for children to find answer to their questions from a religious authority.

It is evident that questions on the creation of universe are rather few in number when compared to other subjects and particularly the topic concerning creation of man. As obvious, children are more interested in their own creation rather than the universe.

### **8. Questions Concerning Conduct towards Mothers**

Concerning questions about the conduct towards mothers, 15 girls and 2 boys total 17 students asked questions. Although the number of questions on this issue is relatively lower, still it is noteworthy that children are interested in this subject as well. Concerning conduct towards mothers, children demand to learn the consequences of bad conduct towards mother; why heaven is under the feet of mothers; why mothers beat their children; what are the possible consequences of disrespect towards our mothers; whether or not the punishment of our own wicked acts is taken from our parents.

Rather than father figure, questions are focused on mother and they are mostly asked by girls. It is apparent that towards parents but particularly towards mother, children have a close affliction and emotional tie. The cause for this interest and such questions might be related to the fact in addition to their close interaction with mothers on accounts of their age, stressed and striking statements in religion and Kor'an on mothers are also stimulants for questions. Consequently children seem to be willing to adopt guidance of religion on parents. This matter is a chance not to miss to protect social and familial values as well.

### **9. Questions Concerning Christianity**

Children of Muslim parents, though aware of the existence of other religions, have limited knowledge on other sects. 6 girls, 10 boys total 16 students worded their curiosity on Christianity or Christians.

Concerning Christianity, children are curious about the things Christians worship; a person marrying a Christian can become the same after marriage; if Christians will go to heaven or not; why some nations are Christian and how Christians can become Muslims.

These questions make it obvious that children are aware of the differences of other religions next to Islam and they have the ability to compare their own religion and faith with other religion and faiths. Feeling of curiosity towards different beliefs and religions can be taken as a sign of ability to make a comparison between them. Offering objective information on religions can help children to make a sounder decision. Children should be able to reach information that can allow them to assess both his or her own religious beliefs and other beliefs. A child who can get satisfactory answers to questions can become even more attached to his or her own faith and be able to defend this faith more comfortably in different environments.

### **Conclusion**

Students at 5<sup>th</sup> grade in primary education are not thoroughly ready to comprehend the real nature of religion since they are just in the phase of transmitting to abstract thinking level. Students at this age are able to grasp some religious thoughts even though it is restricted by logical thinking ability. During this stage when children come closer to adolescence, they become face to face with the reality to leave ego-centric approach. Events such as experiencing the death of a beloved one, sharing and sacrifice remind the children to keep away from “ego-centric” approach. At this point children transmit from an “self-directed” religion approach to “not self-directed” one. At this age, children start to understand abstract aspects of piety and when compared to earlier years, they feel less urged to express everything in physical terms.

In children who are at the stage of physical religious thinking, there are also some restrictions in the usage of religion language. They may repeat a symbolic word or statement and even more they can experience a symbolic word emotionally. However, children at this age lack capability to fully comprehend this symbol and moreover they are not efficient in explaining it to others. As a result, it is possible to claim that children in this stage have a limited experience in learning religion.

Religion is a subject that is discussed within family, friends, social groups, mass communication, mosques and several other places (*Başal, 2001*). Thus, starting from early childhood children develop a feeling of curiosity towards religion, religious objects and notions. Children want to ask questions on such issues and they demand answers. Starting point of children in religious education is most of the times related to the things they see and worry about. Teachers who let students talk, who give ears to them and encourage their curiosity can gradually assist by allowing them to make deeper and more spiritual evaluations and appreciate the religious aspect of these experiences.

Asking both religious and non religious questions by children and students is the key and origination of learning. That is because curiosity and interest are significant sources of motivation in learning. Determining the curiosity and interest of students is a crucial point of origin for teachers and instructors. From this perspective, establishing the subjects students’ questions focus on is rather important. From the view of a teacher however questions are perfect opportunities since they are the moments students are most available to learn. Interest and curiosity factors and questions related to them are cases teacher should seriously handle and benefit.

In child education and learning, questions directed by them in line with their own development need to be answered according to their level, needs and progress. Children’s questions are parallel to all of their development phases. A child’s questions concerning religious subjects should be answered with greatest accuracy. Answers should be in line with his or her level, clear and simple, plain and understandable and satisfying his or her curiosity.

At certain times, it might be hard to answer children’s religion centered questions. It can be alleged that in Education of Religion and Ethics lessons to answer children’s questions it is a must to have a background on psychological developmental features and past life of the child as well in addition to religious knowledge. Furthermore it is essential that child’s opinion on religion be understood well. Children may have diversified opinions concerning religion just as it might be the case for non religious subjects as well.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of primary education although children start to think more logical than earlier years, still they tend to think in physical terms and try to solve the problems in the light of their own experiences which are rather limited. Only during adolescence will they be able to use a great deal of abstract and symbolic terms step by step. Religious education teachers are expected to appreciate children’s questions on religion no matter how irrelevant or irrational they appear. These questions at the same time reveal the developmental stages and past experiences.

An important duty of teachers of religion is to answer children's questions which seem to be immature, insignificant and meaningless. Only adults with pedagogic formation in religion can give appropriate answers to children thus help them establish religious ideas by providing sufficient experience.

The fact that a child asks questions on religion is the most significant indication of his or her respect towards religion itself. These questions are once again directed to the ones whom s/he trusts and respects most. The child not only demands open and simple answers but also wants elderly ones to become aware of his/her interest and experience on religion. That is how the child can attain a chance to express religious feelings and thoughts by questions. For that reason educators should encourage them to ask questions and actually prepare chances for them to express their curiosity. Consequently they can also grasp the nature of problems dwelling and occupying the mind of children. Furthermore if we consider the fact that a child asking questions is more attentive, alert, interested and even talented the necessity and significance to pay utmost attention to his/her questions emerge spontaneously.

Religious education teachers who feel themselves incapable of providing sufficient knowledge to children's questions should try to help the child by saying "I do not know, but let's try to find it together". The main purpose of educators should be establishing love and curiosity in a child. If educators can manage that, in such an atmosphere the child will continue to search to find an answer to his/her won question and in the end reach a sound conclusion.

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