Creating Islamic Culture in Muslim Schools

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Abstract

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Introduction

In a previous paper I demonstrated that the Islamic aspect of establishing and developing Muslim schools is thus far lacking in many key areas (Moes, 2002). One would expect the religious agenda of such schools to be the first priority and thus the most developed rather than the least. One of the key ingredients that is absent from nearly every Islamic school is the infusion of a deliberate cultural approach to education that reflects the Islamic values, ethos, and educational paradigm. My intent in this paper is to examine this subject stressing the validity and necessity of such a program as well as the optimism that it may bring in terms of Muslims making a meaningful and unique contribution to modern education in this country.

My first area of concentration is to explore the existing research on deliberately creating school culture. Culture exists whether it is the result of a deliberate program or not. Some schools allow the pervading community culture to dominate while others have their own developed program that aligns with the school mission. The school leadership / administration is primarily responsible for managing school culture. The first case is more of a reactive approach and often results in "toxic culture" when the members of the school do not feel fulfilled. In the second instance school leaders will manage culture according to a plan that fits within the ethos of the school's mission and purpose, (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Once we settle the issue of whether or not creating school culture will make our schools more efficacious, we must then turn to the question of defining the ideal culture of the Islamic school. To this end we hope to draw on the legacy of Islamic civilization's contribution to education while also evaluating contemporary literature offered by Muslim educators on what an Islamic school should look like.

School Culture

School culture has been defined as a "complex web of traditions and rituals that have been built up over time…", (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Robert Owens (2001) has identified 2 major themes that are always present in culture: norms (rules of behavior accepted as legitimate), and assumptions (underlying unconscious beliefs that form the bedrock for norms). A distinction is also made between culture and climate in that climate refers to the atmosphere of interaction whereas culture refers to the values that undergird it, (Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Culture then, is understood to have a pervasive influence on the total institution.

Research on Organizational Culture

Research on school culture owes its roots to studies dating to the 1930s on organizational culture in businesses. The most notable of these is referred to as the Western Electric studies which demonstrated a variety of implications on the way group norms affect the productivity of employees, (Snowden & Gorton,

2002). Studies have continued up to the present that overwhelmingly indicate the power of culture in improving business outcomes. In fact, some school reformers have claimed that the key to school improvement is in operating more like businesses, (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Businesses provide a useful illustration for schools because their success is tangible and easily measured. How to define and measure effective schooling has been a far more elusive task.

Sarason (1997) argues that schools are ineffective because they have not taken the overarching aims of education seriously and in the process have devised a system of education that actually serves to inhibit these aims rather than serve them. For him "…the overarching purpose of schooling is twofold—to recognize and respect individuality and to create and sustain contexts of productive learning." Yet because these aims are not spelled out by the school, nor is how each role in its own distinctive way furthers those purposes, how they are prioritized, or how they are to be realized, schools have become bureaucracies where the aims are lost.

Sarason continues: "Contexts for productive learning are those that stimulate, support, and sustain a child's interests, questions, and exploratory actions. That requires of adults a degree and quality of observation and reaction…" While teachers may initially begin their careers with the motivation to achieve these ends, overtime, they either eventually conform to the system despite the fact that it forces them to drop their idealism or they drop out altogether, (Sarason, 1997).

Sarason is not the only disillusioned critic of the anti-education climate produced by the structure of most schools. The renowned award-winning educator, John Taylor Gatto, and Hamza Yusuf Hanson, a popular Muslim American scholar, take the argument a step further to the verge of a conspiracy. Nonetheless, they did provide ample evidence to show how the engineering of modern schools has led to the state of affairs that Sarason, Glasser (1998) and others complain of. But in contrast, they argue that this is not due to a lack of attentiveness to overarching aims, but rather an intended design that would facilitate a state of corporate feudalism over society. Schooling then serves the interests of corporations in dumbing down the masses, keeping them in a childish state beyond the years of childhood in elaborate and sophisticated daycares – public schools – which then prepare them for corporate life – a complete dependency on the corporation to sustain a lifestyle of consumerism. Incidentally, dependency on corporations by the masses secures the lifestyles, power, and wealth of the elites who own the corporations, (Gatto & Hanson, 2001), (Gatto, Hanson, & Sayers, 2001).

Consumerism is also materialistic, generating a constant source of pollution in the earth while the cultural objects in people's lives become devoid of artistic spiritual expression and meaning. Is this conspiracy then really the true object of schooling? When we discuss lofty aims of education in teacher preparation programs we talk about citizenship, lifelong learning, and quality of life. Yet somewhere the constant

barrage of "go to school, get good grades, get a good job" always creeps into the picture. What does the persistence of this phraseology indicate about the underlying assumptions that school leaders, teachers, parents and students believe when it comes to the ominous question of "why do I need to know this?"

To resolve the debate over whether school systems are the result of conspiratorial aims as discussed by Gatto and Hanson or instead simply just inadequate attentiveness and alignment with overarching aims as put forth by Sarason, is beyond our scope. Regardless, they both agree that what we have are school systems that generate a culture that is antithetical to quality learning.

This leads us to the nay-sayers in the world of organizational culture: those who believe that the manipulation of culture by management results in organizational cults and individual loyalty to undeserving companies. Arnott (2000) places the blame for this on the individual for buying in to the corporate cult, saying that "employees should not involve their spirit or soul in their workplace. Those 'close to the heart' elements are too important for work and should be reserved for family and community".

While I may seem to be turning on my own argument, it is important to note that Arnott is not challenging whether or not culture works. The power of culture is admittedly pervasive. Rather he is challenging the ethics of using culture to manipulate employees. Arnott (2000) argues that people should be defined by who they are and not simply by their job title. When

people meet and they ask one another "What do you do?" does it not imply the value that we give in American society to our work? And after all, what does the corporation offer in return for ownership of your identity? Perhaps what needs to be resolved here is that since schools *should* be integral to family and community, the use of culture does justly belong in schools.

Arnott (2000) uses the work of Geerte Hofstede on organizational culture to prove his point. Hofstede calls culture the "software of the mind" saying: "culture that runs organizations is like the software that runs computers and the mind that runs bodies. It invisibly performs the management function." He has also developed indices of organizational culture that measure cultural elements within a company on a continuum. The 6 indices are: process vs. results, organization vs. individual, worker vs. job, open vs. closed, tight control vs. loose, and practical vs. pragmatic. The cultish quality of companies can be determined by where they fall within these measures, (Arnott, 2000).

It is ironic then that proponents of school culture have taken their idea from business. But the reason for this is simple. Success in business is tangibly seen and measured through profits. Successful businesses utilize what works to motivate employees to meet company goals. In education our aims are intangible and it is much more difficult to measure success. As discussed above, our aims may even be elusive. While Arnott may be cynical about "corporate cults" as he calls them, his work is important because it demonstrates the extremes and helps

us to recall an important lesson about balance. Applying proven business success principles to schools is a practical way to determine and utilize what works. The difference is that schools are supposed to help people to enrich their own lives. The school cannot become a cult when the school culture itself fosters self-discovery and intrinsically motivated learning.

Other researchers, (Demerath, 1998), have looked at this problem as a blurring of the lines between organizational culture and religion. They question whether or not religion becomes compromised (betraying the Prophet's Message) when it becomes organized and institutionalized. These researches are critical of Terrence Deal's blurring of the lines between religions and organizational culture through the use of terminology like corporate "rites" and "rituals". Perhaps one distinction that allows us to sidestep this issue for the intents and purposes of this paper is that fact that we wish to apply culture within the context of religious schools in order to facilitate the transfer of religious culture.

This in itself begs us to define what religious culture would be. Clifford Geertz (1973) gives further insights into religion as culture. In my undergraduate studies I was intrigued by Geertz's study of Eastern and Western Islam epitomized by contrasting the geographical extremes of Indonesia and Morocco in the Muslim world. My conclusion then was that due to the essential role of preserving the integrity of the divine source material in Muslim civilization that culture and Islam are to be defined separately in the Muslim worldview. Geertz himself noted

the rise of "scripturalists" in both cultures when they were threatened by colonialism, (Geertz, 1968). Such religious reformers sought to purify the religion of culture by returning to the divine sources. This was actually an extreme that sought to deny culture altogether which is an important note of caution. Islamic schools should seek to create a culture that fits with the peculiar needs of Muslim Americans – recognizing the validity of culture while preserving religious integrity and Islamic identity.

Another compelling case for the power of culture is how it used in direct-sales organizations. Direct-sales, or private franchising, is a business model that allows individuals to establish themselves as individual business owners. Mary Kay Cosmetics and Amway Corporation are two prime examples of this model. Participants need very little investment to register their own private franchise, which then allows them to profit from the products and product volume that the corporation moves as a result of the registrant's sales and referrals. What is relevant here is that the culture of the association with other individual business owners becomes the key motivation toward success in this model, (Bromley, 1998).

Bromley (1998) is also critical of these organizations for blurring the lines between business and belief, and he contends that the profits gained by the corporate entities that supply the products and services are disproportionate to the profits gained by participants. It can be argued that this is no more the case here than with any other corporation and that the

opportunity for mobility as an individual business owner is greater than what is available to employees. Obviously though, success depends far more on individual commitment. Whereas employees can "just get by" without getting fired and continue to reap the rewards of salaries and benefits right along side their more ambitious co-workers, a private franchiser will reap no economic benefits from his/her business if it is not given serious effort. The noteworthy point being that in this case, culture becomes the primary motivator for success. The powerful elements of this culture include belief in financial success, heroes who have already built the same kind of business, interaction at seminars and rallies, and recommended books and tapes of the month that teach the values deemed necessary for success, (Virtual Tour of DSO's, 2003), (Guiterrez, 2001). One can argue as well that it is the cultural element of 12-step recovery programs (meetings, support network, recommended books, collective prayers) that break the dependency cycle in alcoholics and other addicts. If culture can be that powerful in loose and open associations that do not even have a facility, grounds, or even a bureaucracy, then how much more so is the potential of culture in the world of the school?

Planned Social Change

Thus far we have demonstrated the power of culture in corporations, associations, and even schools. We have looked at this in both a positive and critical light. As we pointed out in the introduction to this paper, whether it is utilized or not

culture still exists. Unharnessed, it is likely to become self-destructive manifesting in what Deal and Peterson (1999) call "toxic culture" or perhaps in bureaucracies that provide anti-educational climates, (Sarason, 1997). It is within the context of this current malaise that we should realize that any attempt to use culture productively must be considered what Steven Vago calls "planned social change". This is "the deliberate, conscious, and collaborative efforts by change agents to improve the operations of social systems." This process requires us to identify the target (the school), the agents of change (the elements of culture), and the methods for bringing change about, (Vago, 1998).

Even if this is seen as positive, it is still important that school leadership take into consideration what is known about how people react to change, why, and how they may be able to understand their reactions better. In any organization the people experiencing the change are key to having the changes accepted and bringing about successful results, (Jick, 1996).

According to Jick (1996), people go through four change stages, which include shock, retreat, acknowledgement, and finally adaptation. This process is sometimes difficult and uncomfortable but is essential to a healthy transition. It also does not occur on a predetermined schedule so patience is required in seeing the process through.

Jick (1996) recommends three strategies for leaders in facilitating the change process. First, understand that resistance to change is natural and even provides valuable

feedback about the changes themselves. Second, listen and empathize with the staff. Let them know they are safe in expressing their concerns and provide them with resources and support in the transition. Finally, make the capability for positive change and growth part of the organizational culture itself by involving staff in decision-making, suspending judgment, and encouraging new things. Administrators must not only seek to promote a school culture that will facilitate the school mission, but must also be judicious and wise about the manner in which this agenda is applied. The way school culture is utilized by the administration is in itself a defining feature of what that organization's climate becomes.

Elements of Culture

To understand what comprises culture we will use Renato Tagiuri's four dimensions of climate:

1. Ecology: physical and material factors in the organization;

2. Milieu: social dimensions like race, socioeconomic status, age, gender, etc.

3. Social System: organizational and administrative structure like ways decisions are made, how groups are organized, communication patterns, etc.

4. Culture: values, assumptions, beliefs, or "the way we do things around here";

It should be understood that these four elements are interdependent and interactive. Changes in one results in changes in the others, (Owens, 2001).

Seymour Sarason identified three factors that generate culture:

  - school activities (lectures, assignments, movement to classes, etc.)

  - physical objects in the environment (desks, chairs, books, etc.)

  - temporal regularities (schedules, length of classes, etc.)

These factors being pervasive and stable molders of behavior in the organization, their form in the school should be used to plan and create settings that reinforce the school goals, (Owens, 2001).

In fact, the goals of the school are one of the most vital elements in creating school culture. The school mission statement represents the vision and direction of the institution and shapes the definition of success. This is a public statement of the invisible elements of culture, namely values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms, (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Let us clarify what each of these terms mean according to Deal and Peterson:

  - values: conscious expression of what a school stands for

  - beliefs: cognitive views about truth and reality

  - assumptions: preconscious system of beliefs, perceptions, and values that guide behavior

  - norms: consolidation of all of the above into everyday actions. These can be both positive and negative.

Another way culture is enacted is through ritual, ceremony, and traditions. Ritual and ceremony allow us to act out what otherwise is hard to touch and comprehend. Rituals are the daily interactions that are infused with meaning. Such as the way people greet one another each morning or the interaction during lunch or planning times. Ceremonies are larger more complex social gatherings that build meaning and purpose. Traditions are significant events that have a special history and occur each year, (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

What is important in a school's culture is also witnessed through its history and stories. A school's culture takes shape over time and is composed of its history. This can include heroes and victories as well as past "scars" which can adversely affect a leader's efforts to improve. Successful leaders "mine the past" for its lessons. When stories become shared lore, they come to life and reinforce cultural commitments and values, (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Deal and Peterson (1999) also identify what they call the cultural network: storytellers and gossipers who keep the values of the school alive by recounting its lore to new staff. Gossips also function as real-time information providers. Spies seek current information on what is going on behind the scenes. Heroes are also part of the network, providing the culture with an image of the best that is in us.

Architecture and artifacts are physical symbols and signs of the organization's culture. Symbols are outward

manifestations of things not comprehended on a rational level.
They also provide cultural rallying points. Artifacts are
symbols that reinforce the mission statement such as displays of
student work, banners, displays of past achievements, mascots,
halls of honor, trophies, artwork, etc., (Deal & Peterson,
1999).

The architecture also communicates what is important. For
example, the prominence of the library versus the prominence of
the gym communicates where priorities lie. The designs, colors,
and other elements in the building can be used to connect to a
shared heritage and the deeper purpose and values of the school.
A clean and well-maintained facility also serves as a motivation
to staff and students as well as the aesthetic effect of the
surrounding landscape, (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Perhaps one of the most important symbolic elements is what
Deal and Peterson (1999) call the living logos: How leaders
communicate through their actions. What does the leader
emphasize in the school? What are his/her hobbies? How relatable
are they to others? Who gets recognized, what is advocated, and
what is communicated through their own art or writing and sense
of humor all have a profound effect on school culture.

Nearly all the research indicates the central
responsibility of the administrator in managing culture. For
this reason it is imperative that the principal regularly
assesses culture through various means: surveys, questionnaires,
conversations with teachers, staff, parents, and students, and
direct observation. The principal must enhance the school

culture by envisioning the future direction of the institution, establishing the connection between mission and practice, viewing problems as opportunities, stimulating creative teaching practices, thinking of others, fostering professional development, creating networks that promote collaboration, and staying focused on the most important outcomes, (Snowden & Gorton, 2002).

The administrator must also be aware of subcultures, like departmental ones, and promote collaboration. The way the administration promotes values and character education, how challenges are handled, what kind of staff are hired and their compatibility with the school's mission, working with informal leaders in the school network, handling conflicts, and utilizing communication tools are all going to set the mood and tone for entire school, (Snowden & Gorton, 2002).

Deal and Peterson (1999) characterize principals as symbolic leaders who must be the historian, anthropological sleuth, visionary, potter (shaping and being shaped by the school culture and bringing aboard staff who share core values), the poet (using language to reinforce and sustain the school's self-image), an actor (improvising in the school's dramas, comedies, and tragedies), and the healer (overseeing transition and change; healing the wounds of conflict and loss). The principal must also connect with the school community: marketing the school, bonding with the community and their shared histories, and being inclusive of all members, especially in bridging the parent gap. Parents value education and must feel

welcome at the school and given avenues within which to help. In short the principal is the living symbol of the school, affirming values through dress, behavior, attention, and routines, (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

It could be argued that such charismatic leadership is rare and that such a strong dependency on dynamic individuals is in itself a flaw in the school design. Sarason (1997) advocates seeking school designs where leadership is shared and the teachers collectively perform the symbolic functions of the principal. To a degree this may already be the case, as the role of the teacher's habits and mannerisms do play a significant part in shaping the culture of a classroom. Adding a leadership component to teacher preparation is a vital step toward sharing this responsibility and making the school less dependent on the charisma of one individual. In school's where the principal does not provide the ideal leadership for shaping a positive learning environment, he/she may in fact be hindering it, (Sarason, 1997).

High Performance Design Models

School finance experts Odden and Picus (2000) also allude to culture as a key to effective school reform. They note the importance of "system enablers": principal leadership, alignment of curriculum with testing, professional development focused on the curriculum, achievement feedback and analysis for instructional change, control over school resources, cohesive staffing, and creation of a professional community.

They go a step further by recommending high-performance design models. Like franchises, these are models of effective schooling that can be transplanted into a given school to provide the elements of culture already proven successful. Experts in the design model of choice train staff and provide resources and support materials.

Core elements of these programs include a high standards curriculum in at least the 4 core subjects (some include other subjects like art & music), defined teaching structure (age-grade or multi-age/multi-year), and substantial computer technologies. They also incorporate school-based management, they budget substantially for professional development, and in most regions of the US they can be implemented within the existing financial constraints of average per pupil expenditures so they do not cost extra. They have proven effective even with at-risk school populations, (Odden & Picus, 2000).

New American Schools (NAS), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to increase student achievement through comprehensive school improvement endorses the following high-performance designs: Accelerated Schools Project, ATLAS Communities, Co-nect Schools, Different Ways of Knowing, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, The Leonard Bernstein Center for Learning, Modern Red Schoolhouse, The National Institute for Direct Instruction, Turning Points, Urban Learning Centers, (New American Schools, 2003). This should illustrate that there are ample choices available for design models that align closest with community aspirations.

Odden and Picus (2000) point out that: "Research shows that these designs are producing improvements in student performance, both educational achievement in the core subjects and other desired results, such as better attendance, more engagement in academic work, and higher satisfaction with school in general."

This idea is not new. Other school reformers have begun developing or endorsing transferable school designs. The American Society for Quality for example, is an organization that pushes for quality in a wide range of areas from the environment to education. They have endorsed the "Koalaty Kid" model which purports to offer "…a student centered approach [that] aims at creating a school environment where all students sustain enthusiasm for learning, behave responsibly, feel proud of themselves and their achievements, and strive to meet high standards. The accomplishment of this goal occurs through the training of educators to use the process and tools of quality and through a growing network of like-minded professionals in the ASQ Koalaty Kid Alliance."

Similarly, Quality Schools apply Dr. William Glasser's Choice Theory. Glasser's Quality School model is aimed at replacing the superficial points and grades with an actual appreciation for learning and putting a quality effort into the job. The program he outlines for teachers describes what kind of teacher will elicit the intrinsic motivation to engage in quality learning. He also discusses the kind of classroom environment, the type of assignments, the curriculum, the evaluation process – all in alignment with the philosophy of

education aimed at producing a distinct culture of quality, (Glasser, 1998), (Quality Schools, 2003), (William Glasser Institute, 2003).

Another model that is important due the current prevalence of standards reform are the Core Knowledge Schools which apply E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s work on Cultural Literacy. Hirsch's work is not only intended to meet standards but also in setting them by defining what a culturally literate person should know. Core Knowledge schools create a focused environment that presents a practical answer to the question, "What do our children need to know?" (Core Knowledge, 2003).

Drawing on the same idea, some public schools have established what are called magnet schools. Magnet school designs also produce a strong school culture because they "…offer enhancements to the curriculum based on a theme or approach to learning" (Wake County Public Schools, 2003).

Of particular note are the host of choices offered by Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina such as Creative Arts & Science, (based on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences) and Gifted & Talented; International Programs like Global Communications, International Baccalaureate, International Studies, Language Explorations; Single Themes: Classical Studies, Community Model, Leadership Model (utilizes Steven Covey's Effective Habits), Montessori, Museums (based on the Paideia Principles), University Connections which is a year-round school affiliated with North Carolina State University, (Wake County Public Schools, 2003).

Wake County Public Schools (2003) detail their guiding principles and objectives for magnet schools as follows:

1. Utilization of schools – optimal use of facilities

2. Equity of educational opportunity – …make unique programs accessible to all students…

3. Diverse student population – promote positive character traits, respect other cultures and beliefs, enrich learning experiences and achievement…

4. Program improvement – …continue to search for excellent and innovative programs that meet the needs of all students

5. Parental participation and choice – …provide a wide selection of top-quality programs;

Obviously, what makes these models for reform effectively unique are the way they transform the entire school environment into a cultural climate that reflects their mission.

Culture in Muslim Schools

We now wish to turn our attention to defining ideal elements of an Islamic culture for Muslim schools. As we noted above, Islamic culture in Muslim American schools must provide a distinctly Islamic paradigm that is congruent with the Muslim experience in American society. Muslim schools in Great Britain and South Africa have already provided some of the framework for Muslims living as minority populations in secular lands to address these peculiar needs. It is important that we draw upon the research of Muslim educational organizations like IBERR

(International Board of Educational Research and Resources) in this field. IBERR (2000) has recognized the importance of the imperative to define school goals and base school planning around an agreed upon ethos. The comprehensive manual published by IBERR that seeks to address this issue is an indispensable resource for Muslim school leaders.

In defining school goals it is important to lay out the precise aims of education in the Islamic worldview. One of the initial aims of seeking knowledge in Islam is to fulfill a religious obligation. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has been reported to have said, "The quest for knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man and Muslim woman". The duration of this obligation to study is clarified in another report wherein the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Learning is from the cradle to the grave". Thus education in Islam is a lifelong religious obligation, (Al-Zarnuji, 2001).

Al-Zarnuji (2001) clarifies that this obligation is also an act of worship that must be accompanied by a pure intention to please God alone. He says, "It is necessary for the student in his quest for knowledge to strive for the pleasure of God, the abode of the Hereafter, the removal of ignorance from himself and from the rest of the ignorant, the revival of religion, and the survival of Islam."

Murad (2001) describes the purposes of education in terms of fulfilling our true human nature. He discusses the role of Adam (peace be upon him) and the significance of the Qur'anic passage wherein God "teaches him the names of things". He discusses how

knowledge allows humans to fulfill our divine destiny of "khilafa" or stewardship on the earth. Further, the centrality of education in Islam is epitomized by the fact that the first word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the word "Iqra" which can be translated both as reading and reciting. According to Murad, this is an illustration of the obligation to learn and to teach.

Upon establishing the aims of education, we now turn our attention to determining the cultural elements that follow. Al-Attas (1991) gives special attention to the role of language in shaping culture. Classically, the language of Islamic academic discourse is Qur'anic Arabic (as opposed to colloquial Arabic). Even when Islam began to spread into lands where Arabic was not the first language, the Muslim converts learned Arabic due to its central primary importance in understanding firsthand the sources of revelation: the Qur'an and the statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is a well-known fact that even the greatest scholar of hadeeth (Prophetic narrations), Muhammad ibn Isma'il Al-Bukhari was from Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Arabic language was the medium for understanding the sources of knowledge and hence, even non-native Arabic speaking Muslims learned it in order to seek knowledge.

Many may argue that in our time and place it would be impractical to make Arabic the medium of instruction and learning. However, nearly all Islamic schools require students to take Arabic language classes from preschool through twelfth

grade. The ideal of Arabic language remains an element in Muslim schools, yet modern Arabic language programs in Islamic schools not only fall far short of accomplishing basic literacy, but miss the mark completely in terms of seeing Arabic serve any pervasive cultural role.

It is not mere nostalgia for a classical era that makes Arabic language imperative in Islamic education, but rather it strikes at the root of its religious aims. In fact, it is a responsibility for Muslims to maintain the unique link that Arabic language provides to the primary sources of divine revelation. Indeed the purity of Islam lies in this preservation. But preservation is not merely an end in and of itself, but rather it is a means to provide every believer with personal access to divine knowledge. As these sources are the heart of Islamic "deen" or lifestyle, then fluency in Arabic language is a requirement for our education system, (Al-Attas, 1991). I would even argue again that the culture of French and Spanish immersion charter schools is what provides the total environment that makes mastery of a language far more possible than an hour per day course in grammar.

Once Al-Attas (1991) makes the case for Arabic language, he turns his attention to the implications of Arabic terminology being invoked to conceptualize Islamic education. His discussion mainly centers around the terms "ta'dib" and "tarbiyah" and the implications for each. According to Al-Attas, the term "ta'dib" is the more fundamental of the two, (Al-Attas, 1991). This is not to be confused with the term "tahdhib" which is also used as

an educational term referring to training, cleaning, improving, and refining, (Lemu, 2001).

Ta'dib refers to "adab" which according to Hamza Yusuf Hanson can be roughly translated as "courtesy". But it also connotes "erudition" and even "humanities". In the classical literature the nuances of "adab" are more encompassing referring to the "proper placement and ordering of things" (Al-Zarnuji, 2001). It thus has implications for every aspect of the educational enterprise, from the manners pertaining to sitting, treatment of books and writing utensils, relations between student and teacher, even the methodology, scope and sequence, curricula, as well as the importance of time and place for instruction, (Al-Attas, 1991), (Al-Zarnuji, 2001).

If classical Islamic education gave attention to such a comprehensive ordering of the entire educational enterprise, then culture is no stranger to Islamic pedagogy. Let us take a brief look at the ordering of some essential educational elements according to Murad (2001) and Makdisi (1981):

Sitting: teacher and students sat together on the floor in a semi-circle; no desks or other barriers between them; the best regarded seats are those closest to the teacher;

Books and writing utensils: these items were viewed as sacred and distinguished tools of knowledge due to the fact that God swears by them in the Qur'an. Anything that God swears by is regarded in high esteem.

Relations between teacher and students according to the 16th century Ottoman scholar Tashka Prasadi:

– The student has understands his responsibilities: Self-discipline, Sincerity of intention, reduce worldly distractions, resisting laziness, always be a student, choose a teacher who has knowledge and is pure hearted, know the basics of each Islamic discipline: well-rounded, visit other students to discuss texts and debate ideas, never procrastinate, know the nobility and dignity of knowledge;

– The teacher's duties and manners: pure intention, regard students like one's own children, emulate the prophet, pastoral guide of his students, condemn vices and unseemly behavior in his students, begin teaching with what is most relevant to the individual, must encourage even the youngest children to learn, beginning with memorization, lecturers words should never be in contradiction with his actions, conceal irritation and not mock students, not too much joking, not resentful of students, to test by asking questions, avoid egotistic disputation, elementary students should not be overburdened, but progress should be systematic, advanced students should not be stuck with easy stuff, prepare in advance, attend to whole needs of students, assist all students not just the outstanding ones, (Murad, 2001), (Makdisi, 1981).

Scope and Sequence: education of children less than 10 consisted mainly of memorization. Understanding and higher-order thinking was gradually introduced as the student advanced. Because of the level of mastery required, teachers adjusted the level of instruction to meet the individual abilities of the students. Students varied in ages and rates of instruction. Students "graduated" when they were able to demonstrate complete mastery over the subject matter to the satisfaction of the teacher. Because learning was lifelong endeavor, the student would continue in this regard until being formally certified by the teacher with an "ijaza" or diploma indicating permission to teach the approved subject matter. Obviously this made education a highly personalized experience wherein every teacher and student were acquainted with one another at an intimate level. There could be no room for doubt as to whether the student really *knew* the material or not, (Murad, 2001), (Makdisi, 1981).

Curriculum: The curriculum itself was basically divided into two categories – "Fard 'Ayn" and "Fard Kifaya". Fard 'Ayn indicates what knowledge is required for every individual in order to carry out his religious duties. Fard Kifaya refers to knowledge which is more specialized, and the obligation to seek is not incumbent on all, (Al-Attas, 1991), (Al-Zarnuji, 2001), (IBERR, 2000), (Murad, 2001). Some examples of classical Islamic subject matter are: Qur'an memorization / recitation, explanation, hadeeth science (of Prophetic narrations), fiqh (understanding and applying), speech, grammar, language: prose / rhetoric, literature, and spirituality; also philosophy,

geometry, astronomy, medicine : biology & botany; chemistry, math, physics, (Murad, 2001), (Makdisi, 1981).

All of this subject matter was considered to be interrelated in the sense that all of creation originates and exists as an interdependent whole under the divine sustenance and mercy of the One Creator. This holistic and spiritual approach to knowledge demonstrates just how foreign the philosophy of secularism is in the Muslim worldview, (Al-Attas, 1991), (Al Zeera, 2001), (Tauhidi, 2003).

Time and Place: even these held spiritual implications. With regard to time, the morning hours between dawn and noon were standard times for formal instruction. Teachers were noted for rotating subject matter throughout the week. The famous companion of the Prophet, Ibn Abbas is even documented as holding a block schedule, teaching one subject per day on a four-day rotation.

The place of instruction seemingly occurred nearly everywhere. There were formal places for learning called "madrassahs" built adjacent to mosques, tombs, as well as independently. Classes took place within the mosques themselves, but they also were routinely held in hospitals, frontier fortresses, spiritual retreat lodges, and even in the residence halls where the students traveling from around the world lived. So teaching and learning appears to have gone on nearly everywhere in the classical Muslim world. It was also all provided free of charge to students. Individual endowments took up any expenses, (Murad, 2001), (Makdisi, 1981).

One other noteworthy aspect with regard to place was the spiritual aspect of the architecture itself. Due to the wholeness of knowledge in the Muslim worldview, inquiry into the spiritual aspects of physical realities of shapes and patterns, numbers, geometric designs, etc. all reflected a balance and harmony between both quantitative and qualitative knowledge. This is what inspired the beauty and awesome character of the architecture in classical Islam – deemed as an essential expression of human spirituality in everyday surroundings, (Al-Attas, 1991), (Al Zeera, 2001).

What do our modern structures reflect spiritually? We now have cheaply built, unadorned structures designed for efficient consumption and easy removal and replacement after 20-30 years! Furthermore, the low regard for or neglect of arts, poetry, and other forms of human expression reflects an absence of holistic culture. Contrast the image of the classical Muslim world with that of "traditional" madrassahs being broadcast around the world recently in the media. These images are dark, shabby, crowded and dirty students swaying back and forth as they memorize under the threat of the teacher's stick. These modern degenerates of Islamic religious education are what Dawud Tauhidi (2001) & (2002) distinguishes from the "classical" madrassahs by terming them "traditional". The distinction is important because these schools fail to embody the holistic ideal just as much as secular Muslim schools.

This brings us to the relevance of the term "tarbiyah" as a conceptual model of Islamic education. While Al-Attas (1991)

felt that "ta'dib" embodied the proper framework for conceptualizing Islamic education, Tauhidi (2003) believes that "tarbiyah" is more appropriate because tarbiyah means "to cause something to grow from stage to stage until it reaches its full potential", (Tauhidi, 2002). The appropriateness of this term comes from the Islamic concept of "fitrah" which refers to the instinctual nature. This is the natural disposition within each person that knows God and seeks to fulfill its full potential as a human being. According to Tauhidi, "This implies that something already exists within us and that education is a process of unfolding and bringing it out, more than one of instilling and pouring in". Fitrah then is the seed of human potential and tarbiyah is the process of cultivating that seed. Related words are riba', which means growth or increase and Rabb, which means Lord. And the murabbi is the teacher. We will consider the implications further for the tarbiyah approach as we consider ways to apply this framework of Islamic education below.

Designs for Islamic Schools

Transforming current Islamic schools: One of the most practical tasks ahead is to apply what we know about culture, planned social change, and classical Islamic education to the existing Islamic schools. One of the ways this can occur is for Muslim school administrators to become aware of the full scope and influence of the elements of culture in their school and begin making conscious decisions about how to use this power in

the school's best interest. This approach does not require much in the way of structural change, but relies heavily on the administrative prowess and charisma of the school principal. In fact, the lack of strong administrative leadership in Muslim schools may indicate that a study of how to apply Sarason's ideas about schools governed without principals would be a practical move for many schools.

Another approach that has been advocated by some in professional circles is for Muslim schools to choose an existing high-performance design model that aligns strongest with Islamic aims. I have already indicated that an Arabic immersion school might be a valuable way to build a stronger school culture around the Arabic language.

Another idea is that Muslim schools organize around single-sex education which can provide an example of how to meet the gender specific needs of students. Indeed, many Islamic schools are struggling with this issue. Yet one of the biggest errors of modern Islamic education is its amnesia regarding the historical role of women in Islamic education. Female scholarship has been an integral part of the classical tradition, dating back to the Prophet Muhammad's wives. Thousands of Prophetic narrations rely on the reports of female scholars. Schools of Islamic law also rely on religious verdicts of female scholars without making any distinction between them and their male counterparts. Thousands of female scholars are listed among the teachers of some of the greatest names in Islamic learning. This means that the much of the bedrock of Islamic source material relies on the

contributions of women. The point here is that no system of Islamic education can neglect the education of its female population. Furthermore, while barriers to loose male/female interaction may be put in place to minimize distractions, this need not be a implemented in an overly strict fashion since female scholars taught men in mosques and schools for centuries – even in Makka, up until the last 70 years, (Murad, 2001).

An important way for Islamic schools to honor the diversity of its legal tradition can be found in the illustrious example of a female Egyptian scholar from the Middle Ages named Oum Hani. While studying under her grandfather she became the teacher of many great male scholars including her biographer As-Sakhawi. She was also became a businesswoman when she purchased a factory with the inheritance she received on her husband's death. From her first marriage she had 4 sons that were each trained in a different school of Islamic law, (Hanson, 2001).

While her illustrious example is instructive of about the rights and status of Muslim women during classic Islamic civilization, the lesson I wish to draw from this is how in her four sons' mastery of the four different schools of law. Islamic studies departments in Muslim schools can use this as a model example of how to acknowledge the rich and diverse legal tradition in Islam by providing a teacher for each one within the same school. If Oum Hani could promote such diversity in her own children, surely it is a practical lesson for Muslim schools.

Zahra Al Zeera (2001), a modern female scholar in Islam also contributes to this discussion in improving modern Muslim education. Among her suggestions is the recognition of intuitive knowledge along side reason and rationality. She argues that spirituality and intuition are parallel and one leads to another. The recognition and nurturing of intuition may help to increase the spiritual growth of students in schools in ways that logic, reason, and quantitative efforts cannot.

Along these lines she makes another important contribution in the recommendation of transformative research methods for student inquiry. This methodology has two concerns: the discovery knowledge within a holistic Islamic context (how that knowledge is interrelated with its context and its Creator) and secondly the connection of the students themselves to their souls and their own inner transformation from gaining knowledge and connecting with what is sacred. Such transformative learning promotes dialectical thinking, reflection and meditation, and conversation and dialogue, (Al Zeera, 2001).

The third and most important contribution we wish to visit here is Al Zeera's (2001) Islamic paradigm for education based on tawheed or unity. She applies this as follows: psychology – unity of the self; epistemology – unity of knowledge; ontology and metaphysics – unity of the cosmos and natural order; eschatology – unity of life; sociology – unity of community; methodology of tawheed – acknowledging the divine principle of unity.

As we have discussed at length the importance of culture in schools as well as the basic conceptions of that culture we can see two fundamental contradictions shaping up between theory and common practice: Secular curricula and the absence of a holistic approach. Any attempt at shaping school culture must bear in mind the inherent contradiction between Islam and the Muslim school that persists in these methods.

To this end a program has been under development to provide Muslim schools with an Islamic performance design model called the Tarbiyah Project. Thus far, the Tarbiyah Project is the only design model of its kind for Islamic schools. To a large degree progress is slow but steady and the entire project is still under development at Crescent Academy International in Canton MI. (Tauhidi, 2003).

The tarbiyah project provides all the aspects of culture presented above in congruence with an Islamic paradigm. It consists of a vision, framework, program, and strategic plan. It is based on the view that goal is not to fill childrens' minds with facts *about* Islam, but rather to teach what means to *really be* Muslim, (Tauhidi, 2001). It is both integrated and holistic. There is no "Islamic studies" class or other classes, but rather teaching is achieved through the use of thematic units that integrate relevant information from the spectrum of subjects, (Uddin, 2001). Authentic instruction and assessment are advocated approaches to instruction. The content is comprised of 9 specifically chosen areas of character development. The curriculum is built on twelve powerful ideas. The approach is

based on understanding, seeing, and doing, since students learn more by doing than by hearing. Some programs of the tarbiyah project are as follows: Pillars of Power, Value of the Month, Charity, and Junior Leadership, (Tauhidi, 2001).

An example of how the tarbiyah project is more than meets the eye can be illustrated in one of its programs, Children of Charity. Because Charity in Islam encompasses every act of kindness and good, this program is not about donating money – it is about community service. The handbook discusses this full notion of charity as well how to design and implement community service projects. It also includes model projects. Presentation assignments, assessments, and resources, (Tauhidi, Christensen, & Uche, 1998).

While the Tarbiya Project looks very promising, Tauhidi (2003) says the project is still under development and will be so for several more years. Workshops are available for those schools who want to learn more and the school where it is being developed, Crescent Islamic Academy in Canton, MI may be also visited. However, my own observations of at least two of the other schools cited in the research for their participation in the project may not be implementing their ideas at the same level. Their implementation is not being supervised by any Tarbiyah Project staff because at this point the focus is still on development, Tauhidi (2003).

Before closing it is worth noting one other possibility for reviving the classical system of Islamic education is through homeschooling or deschooling. A small group of

homeschoolers can easily be assembled together under a scholar or a teacher who is familiar with the classical model. It can be argued that even students who are simply being taught at home by a parent are following a method of education that more closely resembles classical Islamic education than any other, (Muslim Homeschool Network, 2003), (Zaytuna Institute, 2003).

Conclusion

In closing, I feel that the ideas explored in this research are critical to paving new directions in Muslim schools in America. Muslim school educators have not paid enough attention to the importance of deliberately shaping school culture to produce the kind of institutional climate that is most in line with their goals. Neither have they investigated carefully enough their own historical legacy in education. Ironically, Makdisi (1981) shows that the western educational system owes its own roots to the classical Islamic tradition. How then did we get into the position of operating poor imitation versions of public schools. Instead, it is my hope that Muslim educators could seriously and creatively consider how the ideas here offer their schools new alternatives.

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