MUSLIM EDUCATORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN A SUNNI MUSLIM MOSQUE SCHOOL IN CANADA

by

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Abstract

This study addressed a gap in the literature regarding Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development, and the practices they utilize and create with their students. Participant observation and active interviewing at a Sunni Muslim mosque school in Canada were the methods used to examine four educators’ perspectives on learning and development and how those perspectives were enacted in social practices. Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987, 1994) framed the study, defining learning and development as socially, culturally, and historically situated and mediated by social practices. Observations and interviews were analyzed using reflexive, ongoing thematic analysis that aimed to balance the analysis between the etic perspective provided by theory and the emic perspective of the researcher as a practicing Muslim. Three main themes were identified. First, for these educators, learning and development was interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices and contained unique developmental goals. Second, these educators used distinct Islamic social practices to mediate the Islamic system. Third, the pedagogies educators used in the classrooms, as integral components of the social practices, included some that were intrinsic to the Islamic social practices, some that the educators developed themselves, and some that emerged from the secular cultural context. The ways in which the educators used pedagogies to mediate the Islamic system had the potential to facilitate learning and development. Further research is required to examine how these pedagogies serve to expand and/or constrain learning and the cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development of Muslim children. Limitations of this study included a small sample size, researcher biases against less-creative pedagogical approaches, like close-ended questioning, and partiality toward Islamic practices. As the learning and development of Muslim children is linked to the Islamic system of principles and practices,
attention needs to be paid to enhancing developmental potential within this system, enriching intrinsic pedagogies and incorporating and Islamizing select extrinsic pedagogies. As mediators of both the Islamic system and secular cultural contexts, educators have the potential to enhance children’s development as Muslims, as agentic members of multiple cultural contexts, and as active participants in the re-interpretation of Islamic principles for the current age.
Preface

The author was responsible for all aspects of designing this study and executing it, including conceptualizing the research questions, selecting methods of data collection and analysis, conducting participant observation at the research site and active interviews with the four research participants, analyzing the data and reporting the findings.

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (certificate number: H14-01892).
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**Glossary**

Arabic words were transliterated using the American Library Association–Library of Congress (ALA-LC) Romanization Tables (see Appendix C: ALA-AL Romanization Table). As per APA style, the first occurrence of an Arabic word is italicized with its translation in parentheses. Subsequent references may also contain translations in parentheses for ease of reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Term</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abaya</td>
<td>Flowing robe worn over clothes by women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adab</td>
<td>Islamic social etiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhān</td>
<td>Call to prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhkār</td>
<td>Phrases used in devotional practice; remembrance of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afkār</td>
<td>Thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajr</td>
<td>Reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Alayhi al salām</td>
<td>Upon him/her be peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Alayhi al-ṣalāh wa-al-salām</td>
<td>Upon him/her be blessings and peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-hādī</td>
<td>The guide (one of God’s 99 names)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alḥamd li‘llāh</td>
<td>Thanks and praise are due unto God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ālim</td>
<td>Knowing, a scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allāh</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allāh akbar</td>
<td>God is most great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allāh a’lam</td>
<td>God knows better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allāh ‘azza wa jalla</td>
<td>God, mighty and glorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-nūr</td>
<td>The light (one of God’s 99 names)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āmīn</td>
<td>Amen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Term</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aqīdah</td>
<td>Articles of belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-salām ‘alaykum</td>
<td>The peace (of God) be upon you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āyah</td>
<td>A verse, a unit of Qur’anic text, a sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bismillāh</td>
<td>In the name of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhikr</td>
<td>Remembrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dīn</td>
<td>Religion, way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du‘ā’</td>
<td>Calling on the divine, a supplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durūṣ</td>
<td>Lectures or lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiqh</td>
<td>The intellectual discipline concerned with elaborating Islamic ritual and behavioral, individual and sociopolitical expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitnah</td>
<td>Trial, tribulation, social disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiṭrah</td>
<td>Essential nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghayb</td>
<td>Beyond immediate human perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥadīth</td>
<td>A report or saying attributed to Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥalaqah</td>
<td>A dialogic circle or discussion group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥarām</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijrah</td>
<td>Geographical as well as spiritual migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥikmah</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ībādah/‘Ībādāt</td>
<td>Islamic act of worship/Plural (acts of worship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iftar</td>
<td>The meal at sunset marking the end of a fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iḥsān</td>
<td>Excellence in actions, doing what is best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ijtihād</td>
<td>Individual and collective scholarly reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Īmān</td>
<td>Belief, conviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imām</td>
<td>Religious leader; one who leads formal prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In shā’a allāh</td>
<td>God willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iqama</td>
<td>Second call to prayer, immediately before prayer begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahannam</td>
<td>Hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jannah</td>
<td>Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazākum allāh khayran</td>
<td>May God reward you with the best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinn</td>
<td>Beings made of fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumū’ah</td>
<td>Congregation or gathering for Friday prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khādim al-rasūl</td>
<td>Servant of the messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalāṣ</td>
<td>An exclamatory expression meaning finished!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuṭbah</td>
<td>Speech, sermon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lā ilāha illā allāh</td>
<td>There is no god but God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La kum dīnukum wa liya dīn</td>
<td>To you is your way, and to me is mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masājid</td>
<td>Mosques, plural of masjid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mā shā’a allāh</td>
<td>Appreciative expression attributing goodness to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid</td>
<td>Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muṣallá</td>
<td>A place of prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muwāzanah</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niqāb</td>
<td>Face veil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nīyah</td>
<td>Intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nūr</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qābīl and Hābīl</td>
<td>Cain and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qadar</td>
<td>Predestination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabb</td>
<td>Lord, educator, sustainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṭadiya allāhu ‘anhā</td>
<td>God be pleased with her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṭadiya allāhu ‘anhu</td>
<td>God be pleased with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak‘ah (plural: rak‘āt)</td>
<td>One cycle of ritual prayer (standing, prostrating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasūl allāh</td>
<td>Messenger of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṣidā</td>
<td>Pleasure and acceptance (usually of God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukū‘</td>
<td>The bowing part of the ritual prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šalāh</td>
<td>The Islamic ritual prayer; choreographed movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šallá allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam</td>
<td>God’s blessings and peace be upon him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahādah</td>
<td>Testimony of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šari‘ah</td>
<td>The law, individual and collective regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaykh</td>
<td>A person respected for knowledge or social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaytān</td>
<td>The devil, or a devilish character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirk</td>
<td>Attributing divinity to something other than God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sūrah</td>
<td>Biography of Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subḥān allāh</td>
<td>Above and beyond is God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subḥanahū wa ta‘ālā</td>
<td>Above and beyond is God, and elevated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sujūd</td>
<td>The prostration part of ritual prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnah</td>
<td>The way of Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sūrah</td>
<td>A unit of Qur’anic text, a chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajwīd</td>
<td>Grammatical rules of pronunciation of the Quran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taqwā</td>
<td>God-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarbiyah</td>
<td>Education, nurturing, bringing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Word</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawbah</td>
<td>Repentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawḥīd</td>
<td>Unity; oneness of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa annā al-masājid lillāh</td>
<td>The mosques are for Allāh alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa'ilāhi</td>
<td>By God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuḍū’</td>
<td>Ritual washing abulition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakat</td>
<td>Annual obligatory charity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur for her true openness to my ideas while simultaneously questioning, challenging, and supporting me along the way. She gave so generously of her time, attention, and dedication. I especially appreciated the way she modeled final forms of academic practice for her students, propeling us into situations where we must perform before we are competent! I am forever grateful to Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, who initially helped me enter the HDLC program at UBC. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Sam Rocha whose feedback added dimensionality to this study, and Dr. Larry Walker, who sparked my interest in developmental psychology by sharing his research and answering my questions in ways that generated more questions. Jazākum allāh khayran to ‘Sheikh Faisal’ for opening the mosque to me, to his daughter for inspiring and facilitating, and to my research participants: ‘Amira,’ ‘Tala,’ ‘Rayan,’ and ‘Imran.’ They were so generous in sharing their time and their insights, may they be of the utmost benefit other Muslim educators and students. We will always be connected through this research. Thank you to Negar Amini, my friend on the path, who added laughter and commiseration to this journey, and to Louai Rahal, who offered me guidance toward clear thinking. To Seemi Ghazi for being there to bounce ideas around with and providing insightful feedback. To Faisal Nahri, who so diligently helped me transliterate the Arabic. Over the course of my studies, Hanan Boulahbel extended an unconditional offer to take my three children at any time, which gave me great peace of heart, jazākum allāh khayran. And speaking of those three children, I thank them for their unwavering love, cheer, cheekiness, and patience as I spent many hours reading, writing, and thinking—preparing their meals on the fly and letting them dig for their own clothes in piles of unsorted laundry. Thanks to my mother, who helped fill in the tricky spaces that no one else could, like driving to early morning football
games, cooking Sunday dinners, setting traps, and bog walking. My mother-in-law provided love and prayers from afar: encouraging studies and even more studies. Finally, my partner Saadi, who supports me in every way and, most especially, in seeking deeper connection to the Source of Knowledge—alhamd li'llāh.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the children currently fleeing conflict zones in Muslim-majority countries. May they learn and develop in safety, successfully integrating the best elements and principles of their cultures of origin with those of their cultures of destination.
Chapter 1: Introduction

With the large-scale diaspora of Muslims around the world, Muslim communities are growing and integrating into the social fabric of North America and Muslim educational institutions are evolving (Niyozov & Memon, 2011), offering a variety of accredited programs from higher education institutions, to teacher education programs, to focused Arabic and Quran instruction. For Muslim youth, weekend Islamic classes in mosques and full-time Muslim schools are supplemented with summertime enrichment camps and Muslim boy/girl scouts.

Educational opportunities that Muslim educators are both contributing to and benefitting from include reforms in Western and international curricula, the evolution of educational technologies and increasing research into human learning and development (Ahmed, F., 2013). Muslim educators are experimenting with new ways of teaching Islam to children (Khan, 2013; Tauhidi, 2001). They are searching for methodologies in harmony with Muslim epistemologies (Ahmed, F., 2013). They are looking for ways to contribute to their communities through interpretations of the Islamic tradition by considering social consciousness as a primary aspect of the faith (Memon, 2010, 2012; Merry, 2005; Ramadan, 2004). But, along with opportunities, growth, and change come challenges (Waghid & Davids, 2014).

Significant educational challenges facing Muslim communities today include difficulty integrating Islamic material across secular curricula and unstandardized Islamic Studies content (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004). For many Muslim children, attending secular public schools by day, and returning to Muslim homes afterwards, creates a bifurcation in worldviews alien to traditional concepts of Islamic education (Nasr, 2012; Philips, 2013; Ramadan, 2004). A related challenge, in increasingly plural Western societies, is the preservation of Islamic values and practices in light of dominant cultural values and practices, some of which are antithetical to
those of Islam (Creery et al., 2007; Zine, 2007). Pedagogy is another area that requires consideration. Various scholars point out that pedagogies currently used in Islamic studies classrooms are not engaging students in critical, creative and caring thinking commensurate with the degree of human development required by contemporary life (Ramadan, 2004; Shamma, 1999; Tauhidi, 2001).

Further, transposing models of teaching Islamic material from contexts of origin to Western contexts without any adaptation for a particular Western context is both challenging and culturally inappropriate. Given that the fundamentals of Islamic material are considered to be universal, Ramadan (2004) said: “There is a great difference between historical models and universal principles, and today everything is proving that the formalistic imitation of models in an age other than one’s own is in fact the betrayal of principles” (p. 133). This sentiment echoes the words of Ulrich (1952): “While passing from one generation to another, civilization changes its character according to the spirit of those who transmit it—for transmission of values is not just a process of ‘handing down,’ it is at the same time reinterpretation” (p. 21). The reinterpretation of Islamic principles in contemporary cultural contexts is a major project within Islamic education.

The success of Muslim communities requires finding ways to integrate, contribute, and engage within Western societies while increasing Islamic knowledge and strengthening identity (Memon, 2012; Ramadan, 2005). Islamic education has a key role to play. Situated at an intersection between sociocultural contexts, Muslim schools are faced with the responsibility of perpetuating the socio-religious-cultural continuity of the Islamic faith while helping Muslim children integrate into the prevailing secular, Western culture. Muslim educators bear this double responsibility of making Islamic material relevant to Muslim children while simultaneously
facilitating their learning of Quran, Arabic, and Islamic studies. In teaching these sacred subjects, Muslim teachers are expected to be the most excellent teachers (Al-Sadan, 1997): “[T]he issue of effectiveness in pedagogy is of vital importance from this perspective as the whole communication of faith ultimately depends on the way in which it is taught” (p. 39). Here, Al-Sadan (1997) highlighted the role of the teacher and the importance of effective pedagogy, but went on to point out that many teachers areunprepared to teach Islamic subjects and he located the problem in teacher education programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development and how these perspectives were enacted in social practices in a weekend Islamic school in Canada. The aim was to contribute a perspective informed by sociocultural theory and practice to the international conversation on Islamic education in a globalized world; “[t]he effects of globalism are the next ethnographic frontier” (Lincoln, 2010, p. 4). Given that this study focused on a diasporic religious community, containing a hybridity of cultures of origin, embedded in a distinctly different dominant Canadian culture, it, too, was significantly shaped by globalism.

In this chapter, first I provide a statement of the issue and the rationale behind this study. Second, I articulate the research questions. Third, I sketch the context in which the study takes place: a weekend mosque school in Canada, embedded in both the global Sunni Muslim community and the local secular, Canadian cultural context. Fourth, I provide a research overview, including brief discussions of the theoretical framework, the literature review, and the qualitative methods I use to examine my research questions. I end with a summary.
1.1 Statement of the Issue and Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development at an Islamic weekend school in Canada, and how the educators interpreted their perspectives in social practices in the classroom. These two parts of my study complimented each other, shedding light on how educators think about child learning and development as related to their own roles as educators, and how this thinking informs the social practices with which they engage children in the classroom (Daniels & Shumow, 2010).

Recognition that Muslim communities are growing in traditionally non-Muslim cultural contexts provides background for the rationale driving this study. “Islam increasingly is recognized as a vital force in the contemporary world, a source of collective social identity, and religious expression for over one billion people around the world, who comprise a fifth of the global population” (Martin, 2004, p. x). With Islamic expression on the increase, the ways in which it is taught and learned—especially in non-Muslim-majority countries—becomes increasingly relevant. Mosque schools across North America, focusing on the teaching/learning of Islamic material that hails from the religion of Islam with a unique history dating back to approximately 610 CE, are at the core of the learning, development and cultural continuity of Muslim children. These schools also contribute to shaping the ways in which Muslim children view and participate in the prevailing non-Muslim culture.

Educators at mosque schools play a potential role in fostering intercultural engagement, social consciousness and identity development during the process of educating children as Muslims, children who are able to contribute in plural sociocultural environments (Memon, 2010). Educators’ perspectives on human learning and development and the social practices they use in the Islamic Studies classroom hold potential in nurturing children’s learning of Islamic
material, and their participation in plural societies, while drawing their development forward. Yet there are few, if any, studies on human learning and development in an Islamic educational context. There are three particular gaps in the literature on Islamic education that my research questions sought to address: studies of human learning and development in Muslim classrooms; Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development; and theories of human learning and development, from an Islamic perspective, along with attendant social practices. Here, I explore these three gaps more closely.

First, understanding how human learning and development happens is important in teaching/learning and it necessarily changes pedagogy. Daniels and Shumow (2010) suggested that being able to take a developmental perspective on teaching/learning interactions needs to be part of a educator’s repertoire—“attempting to perceive the world from the child’s perspective” (p. 518). Olson and Bruner (1996) pointed out that a crucial ability of educators is to understand the mind of a child. Understanding human learning and development enables educators to design learning environments and social practices that draw development forward (Vygotsky, 1987). Exploring how Muslim educators conceive of human learning and development, and interpret their perspectives through social practices in a specifically Muslim environment, could contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of Islamic education. While there are references to raising children in Islam’s primary sources (the Quran and the Sunnah, or way of Muhammad), as well as clearly-articulated qualities of adult development, there does not appear to exist a cohesive perspective on human development from a Muslim point of view. Further, there have been few, if any, sociocultural analyses of Islamic Studies classrooms that might contribute to understanding human development in a uniquely Muslim environment.
Second, little, if any, research has been done on Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development—sources and interpretations in social practices. While some research has been done with non-Muslim teacher’s practices with culturally diverse immigrant classrooms, including Muslim children, in North America (Niyozov, 2010; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009), I was able to locate only three empirical studies that focused on Muslim teachers’ perspectives and practices (Memon, 2011; Sirin, Ryce & Mir, 2009; Zine, 2004). These studies do not focus upon Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development and the social practices they use in their classrooms. Zine’s (2004) critical ethnography in four full-time Muslim schools in Ontario examined the Islamization of knowledge and pedagogy in Muslim schools, along with issues of Muslim identity and the role of Muslim schooling in diasporic communities. Memon (2011) conducted interviews with teachers at Ontario’s four largest full-time Muslim schools regarding what they wanted/needed in an Islamic teacher-education program, which he subsequently developed. As part of that larger study, Memon (2011) examined Muslim school teacher’s perspectives on teaching about social consciousness as an integral aspect of Muslim faith practice. Muslim teachers (13 out of 39 total teachers) were included in Sirin et al.’s (2009) study in public and Muslim schools in the northeastern USA examining how teachers’ views of immigrant parents predict their ratings of first-grade students’ academic competence and behavioral problems. A fourth study, by Niyozov and Pluim (2009) was a review of the literature on Muslim and non-Muslim teachers’ experiences with Muslim students and problems of racism, Islamophobia and low expectations of Muslim students. These authors pointed out the dearth of research on Muslim teachers’ experiences: “One serious gap in the research on Muslim education is the lack of teachers’ voices on their practices” (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009, p. 640). In listening to the voices of Muslim educators articulate uniquely Islamic
perspectives on human development, and observing these perspectives in action, this study contributes to both the Islamic education literature and the human development literature.

Third, the current study is a response to general critiques of Islamic education and calls to improve it. These critiques include difficulty integrating Islamic material across secular curricula, unstandardized Islamic Studies content (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004), dull pedagogies (Shamma, 1999) and the bifurcation of worldviews created between secular public schools and religious Muslim homes (Nasr, 2012; Ramadan, 2004). Along with these problems, Ajem and Memon (2011) identified two others: the unexamined use of non-Islamic pedagogy in Islamic schools and non-Islamic teacher education for Muslim teachers. Elaborating upon the first one, they said: “Sometimes conventional teacher practices are rooted in educational philosophies antithetical to an Islamic epistemology… and yet are unknowingly adopted by Muslim teachers and Islamic schools” (Ajem & Memon, 2011, p. 2). In terms of the second one, they pointed out that Islamic schools are often created in reaction to non-Muslim schools and, yet, while the founders and participants of such schools reject state or provincial curricula for Muslim children, they accept state or provincial teacher education programs for Muslim teachers.

Missing from Ajem and Memon’s (2011) framework of Islamic pedagogical principles is an explicit theory of how children learn and develop, as well as specific social practices that educators can use in the classroom to foster learning and development. Grounded in sociocultural theory, my research contributed this gap by examining educators’ educational philosophies in relation to their perspectives on learning and development, the principles driving them, and how they are enacted in social practices in the classroom. Making explicit the processes of human learning and development that are implicit in Islamic education by listening to, observing and engaging with Muslim educators addresses the two major goals of Muslim educational
communities in North America: nurturing Islamic consciousness and identity while, simultaneously, finding ways to integrate with, contribute to and engage with the global community (Memon, 2010, 2012; Merry, 2005)—preferably through interpretations of the Islamic system itself.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The two research questions driving this study were: 1. What are these Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development? 2. How are these perspectives enacted in social practices in the classroom? Based in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1987, 1994), examining this two-part research question required qualitatively examining the sociocultural environment of the Islamic Studies classroom and, in particular, the social relationships, practices and speech, cultural tools and mediation through which it was mutually constructed. The research was inspired by the desire to understand what human learning and development is, in the context of Islamic education, and how to best enact it in social practices in the Islamic Studies classroom.

### 1.3 Context of the Study

The setting of this study was a Sunni Muslim weekend school, the Jamma Mosque School (a pseudonym), in a mosque in a Canadian metropolitan city. Along with separate prayer halls for men and women on the main floor, the mosque housed classrooms in the basement in which educators taught Islamic studies to approximately 40 children on Sundays. In situating these particular Islamic classrooms, it is important to mention some of the cultural and historical dimensions of the context. Starting with culture, Islamic Studies, as an academic discipline, hails
from Islam as a religion. Unlike Christianity, there is no institutional central authority or clergy to enforce the doctrine (Sanneh, 2004). The content and practices involved in its dissemination are interpreted and authenticated by the religious leaders of particular Muslim communities that are diverse in terms of religious orientation, expression, and ideology. As Muslim communities grow and mature, differentiation takes place in their institutions (Memon, 2012). In very small, new Muslim communities, for example, one mosque might serve the whole diverse community. As Muslim communities grow, like in North America’s large urban centers today, Muslim institutions are well established; mosques and schools may espouse particular ideologies and serve particular communities (Memon, 2012).

Canada’s first sites of Muslim education were weekend and evening classes held in mosques in urban centers in the 1970s (Memon, 2012). These mosques, most often established by immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, were hubs of Muslim social life. The Jamma Mosque School started in just this way. A building that was initially a church was purchased and renovated into Jamma Mosque, opening its doors to the Sunni population of the neighborhood in early 2013. Some of Canada’s first mosque schools gradually grew the part-time classes they offered into full-time Muslim schools. British Columbia’s first full-time Muslim school, one of the first in Canada, began in 1983 (Memon, 2012), supported by the BC Muslim Association.

In the city where this research study took place, at the time of the study, the Sunni Muslim community had three full-time Muslim schools, all of which used the provincial curriculum augmented with Islamic content. The city housed over 40 weekend schools, operating informally out of mosques and community centers. In general, only a small percentage of Muslim children in the West attend full-time Islamic schools (Ahmed, G.E., 2013; Ramadan, 2004); the majority
attend informal weekend schools to be educated in Islam. This was a primary reason I chose a weekend school as the research site in this study.

1.4 Research Overview

This qualitative study was framed by Vygotsky’s (1987, 1994) sociocultural theory, in particular his idea that learning leads development and that instruction moves “ahead of development, pushing it further and eliciting new formations” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 198). In this study, social practice was the unit of analysis: identifiable social routines in which children and teachers participated on a regular basis. Vygotsky (1994) highlighted environments as developmental contexts containing final forms of engagement in social practices, as well as cultural tools, specific to a particular community that have cognitive and emotional dimensions. Vygotsky (1987) also identified social relationships as the origin of higher mental functions and language and cultural semiotics as two means through which learning and development occur.

This study foregrounded educator/child interactions in social practices to help make visible ways in which the educators mediated the Islamic system of principles and practices with the children.

While using theory as a lens on any given phenomena makes a researcher partial, perspectival and positioned (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), I also approached this study through an Islamic lens. As a Muslim convert, and the mother of three Muslim children, the ways in which Muslim educators bring their perspectives on human development to the teaching/learning of Islamic material is of vital interest to me. My Muslim positionality influenced both how deeply I understood my research context and how I was received by and interacted with the educators within it. Participating in the congregational prayer at the end of every class, being able to assist the educator if necessary, and holding a research objective harmonious to the weekend school’s
teaching objectives—the enhancement of Islamic education—were three ways in which my position contributed to building rapport with the educators and understanding the social practices happening in the school. One of the reasons to frame the study in sociocultural theory was to balance this emic perspective with a theoretical framework that recognizes as significant the role of the social, cultural, and historical in learning and development.

As noted earlier, the Jamma Mosque School was a weekend school in a Sunni Muslim mosque, called the Jamma Mosque, in a metropolitan city in Canada. Four educators associated with the mosque participated in this study: two women; two men. Each educator taught between six and ten children in a classroom in the basement of the mosque from 10am to 2pm on Sundays. The day’s lessons ended with the noontime congregational prayer in the prayer halls of the mosque above. Thus, the study took place in four classrooms, two communal prayer-spaces—one for boys/men and one for girls/women—and the playground over seven months of the school year (November, 2014–May, 2015).

The qualitative methods of participant observation and active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) were used in an iterative fashion from the outset of the study. My analytic aim in conducting active interviews was to make further meaning of the social practices I observed in the classroom. Some of the social practices taking place in the classrooms were commonplace, for example, attending to the Quran and ritual prayer. Active interviews helped me understand the intentionality of the educator in engaging in these social practices and the unique pedagogies that each educator brought to them. I used an interpretative framework derived from Vadeboncoeur (2006) and Wertsch (1998) to organize data generated (see Figure 1) and on-going, reflexive, thematic analysis to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
1.5 Chapter 1 Summary

This qualitative study was grounded in sociocultural theory to address two related research questions: What are Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development and how are these perspectives enacted in social practices in the classrooms? In this chapter, I outlined the statement of issue and the rationale behind the study. I outlined the research questions, context and overview, including the theoretical framework, the literature review and the qualitative methodology.

The thesis unfolds as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature in two broad fields: sociocultural theory and Islamic education. Chapter 3 details the research position, this study’s qualitative research methodology—participant observation and active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997)—and reflective, thematic analysis. Chapter 4 presents the first theme identified in this study involving the educators’ perspectives on human learning and development as intertwined with the Islamic system of principles and practices and the objectives of Islamic education. Chapter 5 examines a second theme: the ways in which those perspectives were enacted in social practices. Chapter 6 explores a third theme: the role of the educator and pedagogies used in mediating the Islamic system of principles and practices. This chapter includes ways in which educators used the secular, Western context, in which the school was embedded, as a pedagogical tool to further mediate the Islamic system. Chapter 7 provides implications of these themes, recommendations, contributions to the literature, limitations and questions for further research, and a thesis conclusion.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to ground the concepts that make up the research questions, including a theoretical perspective on human learning and development, and the historical context of Islamic education, including Islamic terminology. This study involved two broad fields of literature: 1. human learning, development and culture from the perspective of sociocultural theory and 2. Islamic education. These fields of literature provide background to exploring learning and development of Muslim children in Islamic educational contexts. This literature review, then, is composed of these two parts. First, I begin by describing sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1994; Wertsch, 1985) as the theoretical framework for this study. Second, I review the literature on Islamic education, as well as the scarce extant literature on human learning and development within Islamic education.

2.1 Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory of Human Learning and Development

The sociocultural theory of human learning and development formulated by Lev Vygotsky (1987, 1994), and extended by those who came after him (Cole, 1998, 2002; Kozulin, 1998, 2003; Wertsch, 1985, 1998), provided the theoretical framework for this study. Further, the theory provided a guiding perspective on human learning and development and analytic methods of studying it, including social practices as units of analysis. As Cole (1998) noted, “[i]t is by analyzing what people do in culturally organized activity, people acting through mediational means in a context, that one comes to understand the process of being human” (p. 292); in this case, the process of being a Muslim human. This focus on what people do, what they do together, is at the heart of this study. Emphasizing the importance of the sociocultural context upon human learning and development, this approach “does not separate individuals from the sociocultural
setting in which they function” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 16). Instead, it recognizes the unity of historical, social, and cultural domains upon the development of both cognition and emotion. Vadeboncoeur and Rahal (2014) noted that: “From a Vygotskian perspective, research that focuses solely on the individual or solely on the environment is inadequate; research that seeks to describe and explain learning and development must include both the individual and the environment as well as the relations between them” (p. 3). By critiquing previous theories that suggested human higher psychological functions are simply more complicated elementary functions, or that higher functions exist preformed in children and arise with maturation alone, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory highlighted the social origins of these higher functions and offered a way of understanding “the mechanisms by which culture becomes a part of each person’s nature” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 6). Vygotsky’s is the first metatheory of human development to include culture; not as one variable amongst others, or as a distraction, but as the very source of human learning and development (Vygotsky, 1994). That individual higher psychological processes originate in social processes is one theme central to sociocultural theory. Another is that psychological processes can only be understood by the tools and signs that mediate them (Wertsch, 1985). Each of these themes was of particular relevance in this study and considered as influences in human learning and development.

Vygotsky’s theory emphasized the significance of understanding development historically and noted multiple histories at work in the development of psychological functions, each with its own set of explanatory principles (Wertsch, 1985). The four developmental histories—phylogenesis, sociocultural history, ontogenesis, and microgenesis—are interrelated and each contributes to the development of psychological functions in distinct and overlapping ways. Phylogenesis is considered the species-specific biological line of development and provides the
“basic psychological prerequisites for the historical development of behavior” (Vygotsky, as quoted in Wertsch, 1985). Sociocultural history, or the historical development of human society and, more specifically, semiotic systems, contributes to a cultural line of development critical for the development of higher psychological functions. The criteria distinguishing these higher, uniquely human, psychological functions are that they become self-regulating and self-stimulating, consciously recognized, socially derived and mediated using signs (Wertsch, 1985).

Vygotsky described higher psychological functions as the ability to use signs in less context-bound ways; the signs retain meaning even when abstracted from the spatiotemporal context in which they originated (Wertsch, 1985). Ontogenesis, or individual development, involves the interweaving of the natural and cultural lines of development within an environmental context in what Wertsch (1985, p. 43) referred to as “emergent interactionism.” Vygotsky defined the natural line of development as elementary psychological functions and the cultural line of development as higher psychological functions and emphasized the importance of both: “Cultural development is superimposed on the processes of growth, maturation, and the organic development of the child. It forms a single whole with these processes” (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 47, as quoted in Wertsch, 1985, p. 41). Recent studies suggested that the interaction of the two lines of development takes place even before birth, with the mother’s culturally-informed social practices having implications for her unborn child (Gregg, 2005). Upon birth, “development becomes a co-constructive process in which both the child and the environment are active agents” (Cole, 2002, pp. 305–306).

The final of Vygotsky’s four developmental histories is microgenesis, the “short-term formation of a psychological process” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 55) that sometimes unfold over seconds. Although small in duration, microgenesis is an aspect of the developmental process
along with the other three histories (Wertsch, 1985). Taken together, these four dynamic developmental histories serve to highlight that a sociocultural perspective on human learning and development is of processes in continual motion, interaction, and change.

A sociocultural approach to human development does not involve universal stages; no single criteria can be used across ages; no single set of explanatory principles can account for all aspects of development (Wertsch, 1985). Instead, development is propelled by the relationship between the individual and the social, the interplay between natural and cultural lines (Vygotsky, 1994). Human learning and development, then, can be defined as a series of revolutionary shifts defined by changes in forms of mediation (Wertsch, 1985) as detailed below. Human learning and development, inspired by Vygotsky’s theory and illustrative of its integration of social, semiotic and psychological phenomena, emerges “through emotional experience, in social relationships, with language and cultural semiotics” (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013, p. 222). This definition unifies the affective and the cognitive, social engagement, language and culture. Sociocultural theory’s dialectical approach to the study of phenomenon as processes in motion and change (Vygotsky, 1978), where participation in social practices contributes to the development of consciousness (Wozniak, 1979), serves to anchor the current study’s examination of learning and development in cultural context.

In this first section of the literature review, I examine primary sociocultural concepts including the sociocultural environment, mediation, internalization, social relationships, cultural tools, and social practices. I conclude with a summary of the section.
2.1.1 Sociocultural Environment

The sociocultural environment consists of cultural and social dimensions that provide both material and psychological contributions to human learning and development (Vygotsky, 1994). Examining the terms social and cultural, there is a nuanced difference between them, although they are related, and each plays a unique role in human learning and development from a sociocultural perspective. Social refers to the practices, interactions and relationships among people—the interpsychological plane—into which a child is born and grows, and that forms a child’s intrapsychological plane (Wertsch, 1985). People exist within and create culture that acts as a medium in which biological factors interact with cultural ones, the natural and cultural lines interweave (Cole, 1998; Wertsch, 1985).

Considering that social relationships and culture are integrated within any given environment, from this point on I will use the term sociocultural environment to refer to the social and cultural worlds that children inhabit. The idea that the environment plays an important role in human development is common to various theorists over the ages, but Vygotsky (1994) went beyond thinking of the environment as just one of many variables affecting human development. Instead, Vygotsky focused upon the relationship between the child and his/her environment as mediated by culture and identified the environment as both the site where children’s development unfolds, as well as the very source of that development. Essentially, a sociocultural approach to interpreting sources of development is to see culture as the medium through which a child’s biology and his/her environment interact indirectly (Cole, 1998). This is particularly important in this study because the research site—the Jamma Mosque School—is intersected by multiple cultures. The school’s reason for being is to teach children a specifically
Islamic system of principles and practices; the people involved in the school—both educators and children—hail from diverse cultures; the school is embedded within secular Western culture.

Vygotsky (1994) provided three distinct ways in which the child’s relationship with the social environment acts a source and a site for that child’s learning and development that involve change, thinking and final forms of engagement in social practices. First is the idea that the social environment must be considered as relative in relation to the child because a child’s relationship with his/her environment is constantly undergoing both social and individual change. Social environments change over time; adults organize environments differently for children as children mature over time; children change and therefore interact differently with environmental factors over time. Thus, the relationship between a child and his/her environment must be considered dynamic and the way a particular environment impacts upon a child depends upon his/her developmental age. In explaining the relationship between environment and child, Vygotsky (1994) considered a fundamental concept, *perezhivanie*, or emotional lived-through experience, as encompassing in unity a child’s individual characteristics and environmental characteristics. In other words, this emotional experience is an essential factor in the influence of the environment upon the development of a child’s psychological functions: environmental factors are “refracted through the prism of the child’s emotional experience [*perezhivanie*]” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 340).

The second way that the environment influences a child’s development is related to the way that children’s thinking develops in relation to the environment. While what exists in the environment forms the basis of children’s thinking, as time goes by, word meanings change and children understand things differently. In this way, the environment affects children’s thinking, and in turn, children’s thinking, as it develops, changes the child’s relationship to the
environment. The relationship between a child and his/her environment is bidirectional and shaped by how s/he emotionally relates to, and makes meaning of, lived experiences over time.

The third way that a child’s relationship with the environment acts a source and a site for that child’s learning and development involves a unique characteristic of child development highlighted by Vygotsky (1994): the ultimate, final form of child development is present in the environment from the beginning and moreover exerts influence from the beginning. Vygotsky (1994) clarified this final form as “refined and perfected by humanity” (p. 352) and described it as follows:

Let us agree to call this developed form, which is supposed to make its appearance at the end of the child’s development, the final or ideal form—ideal in the sense that it acts as a model for that which should be achieved at the end of the developmental period; and final in the sense that it represents what the child is supposed to attain at the end of his development. (p. 348)

In this way, Vygotsky defined final or ideal forms—modeled by teachers and caregivers, for example—as illustrating the end-point of development and as, ideally, interacting with the child as the child develops. The concept that these final and ideal forms exist and differ in different environments underlines the importance of the social environment in human learning and development. Vygotsky used the example of language to illustrate the concept—while a young child speaks in babbles, the caregivers speak in the ideal form of the language—but this concept can be translated across the spectrum of psychological functions. Without exposure and interaction with ideal forms, the form may fail to develop in the child, or may develop in a distorted way. Vygotsky (1994) suggested that, all things being equal, children educated in a nursery setting, where the adult-to-child ratio is low, may learn to speak more slowly than
children educated at home, where they are likely to spend much time engaging with adults who speak in the ideal form of the language.

The social environment can be said to be the source of development and not just its setting for three reasons—the impact of the environment changes depending on a child’s ontogenetic period, the environment contributes to the development of a child’s thinking as the child makes meaning differently over time, and the environment contains final forms of higher psychological functions, including mature forms of social practices and social speech.

2.1.2 Social Relationships

Even more specifically, the environment is the source of development in that the child’s psychological functions are formed within the social relationships situated there. In Vygotsky’s (1994) words:

The child’s higher psychological functions, his higher attributes, which are specific to humans, originally manifest themselves as forms of the child’s collective behavior, as a form of co-operation with other people, and it is only afterwards that they become the internal individual functions of the child himself. (p. 353)

In this quote, Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social practices, and the interactions between people, in the development of individual psychological functions. A law that best captures the importance of the relationship between the social and the individual is Vygotsky’s general genetic law of cultural development (GGLCD):

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between
people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological
category. (Vygotsky, 1981, as quoted in Wertsch, 1985, p. 60)

In this quote, there are three main points to be highlighted. First, this general law is central in
framing Vygotsky’s theoretical approach; the concepts that follow emerge as specific instances
within this larger picture of the social origins of individual functioning (Wertsch & Tulviste,
1992). Second, the law sheds light on group functioning, as well as individual functioning,
namely, that higher psychological functions, including voluntary attention, logical memory and
thinking, are attributable to groups as well as individuals (Wertsch, 1985). Third, this law
highlights that social influences become aspects of individuals; the internalization of social
functions transforms both the person and the social practices in the process (Wertsch, 1985).

2.1.3 Mediation

One of Vygotsky’s unique contributions is his definition of social practices as being
semiotically-mediated (Wertsch, 1985). Human experience is mediated by and through cultural
tools (Vygotsky, 1987). Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller (2003) defined mediation as
emphasizing, “the role played by human and symbolic intermediaries placed between the
individual learner and the material to be learned” (p. 2). Mediation includes symbolic and human
forms (Kozulin, 2003); both the semiotic practice that constitutes a given social environment, as
well as the people acting with meditational means in that environment. An effective human
mediator, like a parent or a teacher, can enhance the learning performance of the learner by
helping the learner pay attention to important details in the social environment, helping the
learner make connections between concepts, drawing deeper meaning out of a situation (Kozulin,
1998). A symbolic mediator enhances children’s learning as a symbolic tool. Ideally, both are
present: “Symbolic tools have a rich educational potential, but they remain ineffective if there is no human mediator to facilitate their appropriation by the learner” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 35). In this way, human mediators help children make meaning through the use of symbolic mediators.

Human mediators can be further considered as more experienced others who interact with the learner in his/her ZPD in ways that enable learning to draw development forward. Human mediators can also be considered as groups of people who share culture into which children are initiated through exposure, participation and mediated learning. Mediated learning with more experienced others potentially offers a variety of developmentally rich conditions including encouragement, feedback, challenge, and feeling of safety and support (Kozulin, 2003). Through mediation, children have opportunities to successfully participate in more challenging tasks than they might be able to do alone and appropriate specific strategies that emerge in the experience of working together (Kozulin, 2003).

The concept of mediation, crucially positioned as central within sociocultural theory, illustrates the integrated nature of the social environment: mediation forms a link between a child and his/her environment through social relationships.

2.1.4 Internalization

From a sociocultural perspective, all individual higher mental functions were once social processes; “internal processes are created as a result of a child’s exposure to mature cultural forms of behavior” (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 63). But the transformation of psychological functions from the social to the individual plane is not a simple matter of an individual participating in social practices. Vygotsky discussed internalization as the process whereby certain patterns of external practices come to exist internally (Wertsch, 1985). Rather
than thinking of social practices simply being transferred or copied to the individual plane, Vygotsky suggested that there is a relationship whereby transformation occurs in the process of internalization. Others extended this idea to suggest that internalization is not just the transferal of social practices to an individual plane, but the formation of that internal plane itself. Wertsch (1985, p. 65) illustrated the phenomenon by saying that “internalization is the process of gaining control over external sign forms” and mastering the rules regarding which external signs must be used when. Vadeboncoeur, Vellos, and Goessling (2011) referred to internalization as the transformative process of individualizing cultural tools and semiotics through participation in social practices. Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Gasser, and Malti (2010) offered an example of internalization in terms of human morality whereby “moral internalization” (p. 14) is the result of an individual’s active reconstruction of socially- and culturally-based language and discourse into new forms of inner speech that become the individual’s own inner moral thought.

Social speech is the most obvious everyday semiotic mediation and, for Vygotsky, social speech was the primary cultural tool as the central means for mediating all psychological functions. Vygotsky (1994) described it as follows:

Originally, for a child, speech represents a means of communication between people, it manifests itself as a social function, in its social role. But gradually a child learns how to use speech to serve himself, his internal processes. Now speech becomes not just a means of communication with other people, but also a means for the child’s own inner thinking processes. (p. 353)

This quote described how communicating with others becomes ways of thinking for oneself and illustrates the internalization of social speech.
Wertsch (1998) extended the ways in which we understand internalization, when referring to social practices mediated using cultural tools, by identifying two meanings within the term: mastery and appropriation. Mastery involves knowing how to use cultural tools with expertise. He pointed out that, “Many forms of mediated action are, and indeed must be, carried out externally” (p. 50). Along with a degree of mastery, the internalization of cultural tools may also be understood in terms of appropriation, which Wertsch (1998) described as “the process of making something one’s own” (p. 53). Mastery and appropriation are not mutually dependent; they are sometimes intertwined and sometimes distinct. This refinement in understanding internalization is important in this study, and in the field of Islamic education generally, where mastery may be sufficient for some social practices but for others, ideally, they must be appropriated in order to be applied authentically in daily life.

This transformation of social to individual practice, through mastery and appropriation, and the formation of an internal plane of consciousness, is particularly effective when it happens in a “dynamic region of sensitivity” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 67), which Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky conceived of the ZPD as jointly determined by the interrelationship between a child’s level of development, which has its own internal dynamic, and the form of instruction used (Vygotsky, 2011; Wertsch, 1985), with interaction in the ZPD potentially beginning on the first day of a child’s life. He pointed out that instruction is most effective in the ZPD because it stimulates and awakens internal development (Wertsch, 1985). This is the source of Vygotsky’s idea that through instruction, learning draws development forward.

In terms of assessment and classroom learning, the ZPD is “the distance between a child’s actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the higher level
of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance in collaboration with more capable peers” (as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 67). It is the child’s potential development with assisted performance. The concept of the ZPD illustrates Vygotsky’s interest in discovering not only how a child came to be, but also how the child can become what he/she not yet is (Wertsch, 1985). In suggesting that the actual and potential levels of development correspond with intra- and intermental functioning, respectively, Wertsch and Tulviste (1992) argued that if we change intermental functioning, we can make changes on the intramental plane. The concept of the ZPD has implications for the assessment of children’s learning, as well as social practices used, and is particularly relevant to this study in that it highlights the important role of instruction and learning in development.

One final point, particularly relevant to this study, is that, given the social origins of higher mental functioning, each child’s ZPD is socially, culturally, and historically specific. Different cultures create and interact with different semiotic systems and forms of mediation (Cole, 1998), which then feature in learning environments. Vygotsky pointed out that sociocultural processes taking place at an institutional level come to bear on interpsychological functioning in the ZPD (Wertsch, 1985), which then has implications for intrapsychological functioning. Griffin and Cole (1984) extended upon this idea to suggest that culturally-specific leading activities are maximally effective in specific ontogentic phases:

As an alternative to internal, individual stage approaches to the study of development, leading activities provide for a notion of societally provided progressions, the sort of context-selection mechanisms that we have considered important for understanding development. (Griffin & Cole, 1984, p. 51)
This means that at particular moments in the trajectory of a child’s development, particular activities hold more interest for the child and, therefore, more developmental potential. This concept is particularly important in this study in thinking about developmentally-generative ways to participate in social practices to optimize their developmental potential. As children engage in socially and historically defined contexts, which change over time, the nature of interactions in zones of proximal development can be expected to change (Griffin & Cole, 1984; Wertsch, 1985). Containing interactions between the four developmental histories, and ontogenetic and sociocultural interaction specifically (Wertsch, 1985), the ZPD is the most effective place for teaching/learning and development to occur.

2.1.5 Cultural Tools

Along with highlighting mediation and social relationships in what people do together within social environments as sources of learning and development, Vygotsky identified cultural tools in social practices as contributing to that process. Cultural tools are both material objects and semiotic systems located in the social environment of a given culture through which that culture mediates and makes sense of human life (Cole, 1998). Created for specific functions, as evolving solutions to problems, cultural tools can be considered materially, as objects, instruments and tools; socially in terms of activities and practices; and psychologically, in terms of forms of knowledge, ideas, ways of thinking (Vågan, 2011)—including signs, symbols, texts, formulae, graphic organizers (Wertsch, 1985). But even material tools have psychological dimensions in the sense that they were formed in human imagination, through human practices and serve to mediate human practices (Cole, 1998).
Over the course of history, societies create systems of cultural tools that change over time and with social and cultural change and, simultaneously, change the individuals who appropriate them (Vygotsky, 1978). The internalization of cultural tools shapes qualitative changes in an individual; cultural tools transform mental functioning by bridging earlier and later forms of development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky offered the example of speech: the introduction of a cultural tool (speech) into a psychological function (memory) causes a fundamental transformation of that function (Wertsch, 1985). “By being included in the process of behavior, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions” (Vygotsky, 1981, as quoted in Wertsch, 1985, p. 79). Kozulin et al. (2003) emphasized this process by describing psychological tools as “those symbolic systems specific for a given culture that when internalized by individual learners become their inner cognitive tools” (Kozulin et al., 2003, p. 3). The qualitative transformations that come about with changes in the way children use psychological tools—new tools and new ways of using existing tools—result in development (Wertsch, 1985). In this study, the ways in which the educators used specifically Islamic cultural tools, material and psychological, are highlighted in social practices.

Individuals have access to specific cultural tools by being part of a sociocultural milieu; in this way, individuals internalize, master and appropriate them as meditational means (Wertsch, 1985). As systems of cultural tools vary with culture, Kozulin (1998) argued that intercultural cognitive differences are a result of these variations in tool systems, the ways in which they are acquired and practiced in different cultures, and the meanings made from them. Problems in a multicultural classroom often stem from lack of necessary cognitive strategies and metacognitive skills; solutions may lie in providing students with new cultural tools (Kozulin et al., 2003). In terms of Western formal schooling, cultural tools valued in developing conceptual literacy
include being able to think in decontextualized abstract ways, use analogical reasoning, transfer cognitive strategies to different contexts, engage in implicit problem solving and use metacognitive functions to plan problem solving (Kozulin, 1998). In the context of teaching/learning math, for example, Clements (2007) referred to problem posing, problem solving, metacognition and a positive disposition as “complementary components of competence” (p. 40). These complimentary components—cultural tools—help students attain mastery of math.

Further, cultural tools are not just products and expressions of human experience, they have the capacity to reorganize human experience (Holland & Cole, 1995). People draw from culture in designing and using the social practices, which then contribute to reconstructing that culture anew. In this way, culture and cultural tools are continuous and changing—larger than the individual, but comprised of spaces for individual expression and alteration—and this tension is what keeps culture dynamic (Erickson, 2002). In this study, the educators used cultural tools specific to the Islamic system of principles and practices, as well as others, to help children learn, master and appropriate that system.

2.1.6 Social Practices

Cultural tools mediate social practices, which are defined as repertoires of actions, including “roles, language and expectations for participation that reflect the culture of an institution, like a school or a context, like a classroom” (Vellos & Vadeboncoeur, 2014, p. 3). In other words, social practices are what people do together in relationships, within sociocultural environments reflecting larger cultural, historic contexts, using cultural tools and mediation. Social practices can be understood as the sites where children internalize aspects of the
surrounding environment in the generation of higher mental functions (Daniels, 1996). They provide the link between “historical, cultural and institutional contexts on the one hand and the mental functioning of the individual on the other” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 67). Transformation from the social to the individual occurs in the ZPD through participation in semiotically-mediated social practices, in light of mature cultural forms of behavior, in the process of internalization. Through mediated participation in social practices, children make sense of their experiences, learn and develop (Vadeboncoeur, 2012). As unified interactions between educator and child containing the social and the individual, the affective and the cognitive, social practices are also sites and sources of learning and development.

Sociocultural theory comes together in social practices. The constituent parts—people in a social environment, interacting in social relationships with cultural tools as mediated action—catalyze human learning and development and allow individuals to both access and alter culture. The idea that social practices are the locus of cultural creation (Cole, 1998) means that social practices are important not only to understand past cultural accumulation, but also to construct the cultural future. “The social, cultural, historical creation of units for research, routines for daily living, positions for interactions and relationships, and pedagogies always already include possibilities and challenges in the structuring of futures that are linked to social values” (Cole, Göncü & Vadeboncoeur, 2014, p. 3). In this quote, social practices are described as central to the development of individual psychological functions within a social, cultural, historical context.

Given their unique role in mediating between that larger context and the psychological functions of an individual, and in preserving unity by including interactions between educator and student, social practices are the unit of analysis in this study.
2.1.7 Summary

Sociocultural theory is composed of various related concepts—including the importance of the social environment, mediation, internalization, the social origins of higher psychological functions and the zone of proximal development, cultural tools, and social practices. Taken together, these concepts form a comprehensive, unified theoretical perspective on how people learn and develop, and provides the theoretical framework for this study.

The concepts of sociocultural theory detailed in this section of the literature review describe learning as participation in social practices that require the use of cognitive and emotive functions in ways that nurture and develop them (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993). Rather than considering learning as individual knowledge accumulation, learning is engaging in and gaining deeper access to social practices (Vågan, 2011). Children learn and develop by participating in social practices that involve “the interaction between a child’s individual maturation and a system of symbolic tools and activities that the child appropriates from his or her sociocultural environment” (Kozulin et al., 2003, p. 5); learning is the force behind development. Development progresses as a series of qualitative transformations and revolutions in the ways that a child interacts with the cultural tools of his/her sociocultural environment through mediated social practices.

In suggesting that human learning and development is a social and cultural, rather than an individual, phenomenon (Kozulin et al., 2003), sociocultural theory empowers educators in a number of profound ways. In terms of this study, Muslim educators, as mediators of the learning experiences that happen in the classroom, have the potential to design optimal social environments, practices and relationships for learning and development, being mindful of the unique final forms of engagement in social practices involving thinking, speaking and acting
within the Islamic system, along with cultural tools and repertoires of social practices aimed at specific ends. Like other social environments, constituted by cultural tools, embedded in social practices and experienced through social relationships (Vågan, 2011), Islamic social environments draw from a rich culture and history.

2.2 Islamic Education

In this section, I provide some background on Islam as it forms the context of this research study. From a sociocultural perspective, Islam—in all its diversity of expressions as a religion, a worldview, a culture—is comprised of collections of final forms, social practices and cultural tools. It is a system of both principles and practices. The desire to share the specifically Islamic cultural tools with the next generation is a common motive propelling Muslims in the West today get involved with Muslim schooling (McCreery et al., 2007). Ensuring that children master the cultural tools specific to their culture, in order to contribute to the construction of their communities (Nyland & Alfayez, 2012), is pressing for Muslim children living in a predominantly non-Muslim culture, comprised of different sets of final forms, social practices, and cultural tools. The continued existence of Islam as part of plural Western cultures depends upon the next generation. Wherever people hold Islam as their worldview, with its diverse nuances of orientation, interpretation and expression, there are educational implications.

In this section, I begin by reviewing some terminology unique to the Islamic system of principles and practices. Next, I examine a brief history of Islamic education including a crisis, which began with the onset of colonialism and continues to this day, and out of which the Islamization of knowledge movement was born. Finally, I describe the growth of Islamic education in Canada as a context for the research site of this particular study.
2.2.1 Terminology

Within the tradition of Muslim scholars and jurists, there is a saying: “Let there be no disputing about terminology” (Jalal al-Mahali, as quoted in Ajem & Memon, 2011, p. 5). I define the primary terms used in this research study beginning with the word *Islam*, which is based on an Arabic root word meaning “to surrender” (Esposito, 2003) and literally means a state of peace achieved through surrender to God (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004). Islam is a religion composed of specific elements including articles of belief, social practices—both acts of worship, as well as social etiquette practices—and moral-ethical principles. These elements originate in the Quran, a recitation considered revealed to Muhammad. (Whenever Muhamad’s name is mentioned, Muslims customarily say, *peace and blessings be upon him.* ) The Quran was illustrated in the words and actions of Muhammad himself over the 23 years of his ministry. Muhammad is considered the last in a long line of prophets, beginning with Adam and including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. *Muslims* are adherents to the Islamic religion. There are more than one billion Muslims worldwide, constituting the majority in 48 countries and a significant minority in many others (Esposito, 2003).

Understanding these terms is of utmost importance in addressing a problem noted by Douglass and Shaikh (2004): the “[p]oorly nuanced use of the term, Islamic, among public commentators often fails to make any distinction between that which pertains directly to Islam and its doctrines, and actions its adherents perform in the cultural or social realm” (p. 1). To avoid the ambiguity that comes with using the word Islam in inappropriate contexts, Douglass and Shaikh’s (2004) suggested using the word *Islam* and *Islamic* for what pertains to the religion
(rooted in the primary sources: the Quran and the Sunnah or way of Muhammad), and to use the word Muslim as an adjective referring to the works, acts and institutions of Muslims.

Islamic education, in its most literal sense, involves “efforts by the Muslim community to educate its own, to pass along the heritage of Islamic knowledge, first and foremost through its primary sources, the Quran and the Sunnah” (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 8). I use the term Islamic education, due to its connection to Islam’s primary sources and its intention, rather than Muslim education. Similarly, for the term, Islamic Studies, which can be understood as the categorization of Islamic education into subjects in order to engage in teaching/learning, I use the term Islamic rather than Muslim in reference to its origin in the primary sources. Historically, Islamic studies has included the following subjects: 1. recitation, memorization and interpretation of the Quran, 2. the sayings and ways of Muhammad (hadith/sunnah) and his life story (sīrah), 3. Islamic law (jurisprudence), 4. articles of faith (beliefs and principles), acts of worship (ʿibādat) and social etiquette (adab), and 5. Muslim history (stories of other prophets and Muslim social history) and social studies (including the cultural and physical geography of the ummah). The ummah is the global Islamic community to which all Muslims, regardless of any differences in orientation, interpretation, and expression, belong. The ummah is a fundamental concept in Islam, reflecting unity in diversity and expressing “the essential unity and theoretical equality of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings” (Esposito, 2003, Ummah).

As this study takes place in an Islamic context in historical period characterized by the related phenomena of extremism in the name of Islam and Islamophobia, there are three final terms to examine: Islam (the religion), Islamism (a political movement) and Islamization (a social movement). The three terms Islam, Islamism, and Islamization, while related to each
other, mean significantly different things and impact upon the Islamic Studies classroom in different ways.

In both a religious and a sociopolitical sense, Islam has undergone a resurgence in the later half of the twentieth century as a response to sociocultural shifts like colonialism and globalization external to Islam, but also resulting from internal social reform (Sadaalah, 2004). The ethical framework of Islam implies certain political values but Islam itself does not presuppose a particular order of government (Tibi, 2012): “Islamism grows out of a specific interpretation of Islam, but it is not Islam; it is a political ideology that is distinct from the teaching of the religion of Islam” (p. 24). With the rise of colonialism, pan-Islamism became a defensive ideology, directed against European political, military, economic, and missionary penetration (Esposito, 2003).

Islamization, in comparison, can be considered a revival of Islamic beliefs, practices, and values (Tibi, 2012). It is socio-religious revival that is happening at some level in every Muslim-majority country, as well as transnationally (Esposito, 2003), grounded in the belief that decline in the Muslim world is due to departure from the straight path of Islam and disconnection from God. Revivalists see the restoration of Islam in personal and public life, in Islamic identity, practices and values, as the way to attain “a just society through the Islamic transformation of individuals at the grassroots level” (Esposito, 2003, Islam: An Overview). The core content and worldview of this revivalism movement is rooted in Islam. When the revivalism movement is expressed in politics, it is called Islamism. When it is expressed in terms of education, it is called the Islamization of knowledge (Al-Attas, 1979).

As an exploration of political Islamism is beyond the scope of this study, I draw upon Tibi’s (2012) distinction that a separation exists between Islamists, who have a religious political
agenda that includes ideas on how children should be educated, and the Islamization of knowledge (Al-Attas, 1979) or the Islamization of education (Esposito, 2003), which, while maturing with similar sociocultural influences as Islamism, is not politically motivated. This Islamization of knowledge has formal and informal dimensions—taking place in schools as well as in homes and mosques—and implications on the climate of the Islamic Studies classroom.

2.2.2 Brief History of Islamic Education

Islamic education began when Muhammad outlined its purpose and content (Niyozov & Memon, 2011) in the Arabian city of Medina in 622 AD and began teaching his companions. Muhammad’s source material was the Quran. Muslims consider the Quran to be the direct speech of God revealed to Muhammad. The Quran exists today in its original form, in Arabic, as well as in translations into numerous other languages. Despite the fact that only a minority of the world’s one billion Muslims speaks Arabic, Muslims the world over learn to recite the Quran in Arabic. Throughout the spread of Islam into non-Arabic speaking lands, preservation of one (Arabic) Quran may account, in part, for the “relative unity of faith and practice among Muslims who are otherwise characterized by an extraordinary diversity of race, language, culture, and social status” (Sannehin, 2004, p. 695).

Muhammad, as the first Muslim educator, taught, modeled and mediated the entire Islamic system to a diverse circle of companions that included both men and women, wealthy and poor, African, Arab, Egyptian and Persian. Although most scholars suggest that Muhammad himself was illiterate, literacy infused this early circle of Muslim educators surrounding Muhammad. Learning sites sprung up in his home and corners of the mosque as dialogic learning circles
The mosque has played an important role in Muslim educational life from the earliest days of Islam:

Mosques were intended by the Prophet to be the places of learning, as well as of prayer and of marriage. They were also centers at which the army was organized and homes for the homeless, and they continue to play some of these roles in modern times (Al-Sadan, 1997).

Memorization of the Quran was proceeded by enactment before new memorization began again; people wrote it down (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004) and a scribe recorded Muhammad’s words (hadith) and actions (sunnah). Muhammad was considered an exemplary educator who would teach people and help them grow in wisdom and in spiritual purification (Rufai, 2010; Quran 3:164; 2:159). His pedagogy was based on dynamic, dialogic relationship whereby in groups and singly, he worked with each of his companions, taking into consideration their individual characteristics, asking questions and soliciting opinions—in this way, he encouraged his companions to develop their critical faculties, express their talents, and mature in his presence (Ramadan, 2007). Muhammad, and other early Muslim educators, used a variety of instructional strategies—teaching by analogy, examples, story-telling, illustrations in nature, and field trips—which scholars suggested originated in the Quran itself (Rufai, 2010). Questioning was another pedagogy used in the early days of Islamic education. A teacher’s ability to use questioning effectively was deemed important because “questions are the tools of communicating between the two agents [teacher and student] in the teaching and learning process” (Sha’ban, 1997, as quoted in Rufai, 2010, p. 202).

Later, when the Islamic Empire spread out of the Arabia Peninsula, the Quran, hadith and other components of Islamic education were standardized, translated, written, and transmitted. New Muslims entering the faith needed authentic instruction. Arabic language study was added
to Muhammad’s initial curriculum. The spread of Islam to new cultures meant that existing information in those places needed to be analyzed from an Islamic perspective. A group of scholars (ulema) emerged to evaluate, reject, accept, or Islamize knowledge—either internally produced or externally acquired from the Greek, Persian, Chinese and Indian empires (Niyozov & Memon, 2011)—“to legitimize the dynasties, judge the appropriateness of the transmitted as well as of the translated and borrowed knowledge” (p. 9). These ulema, or scholars of the Islamic sciences, were held in such high social regard that they were sometimes called the “‘heirs of the prophets’”—that is, as the inheritors (in the absence of the Prophet) of religious authority, the arbiters of the religious tradition” (Berkey, 2004, p. 203). History documents that when a scholar passed away, the whole of creation—even the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea—would mourn his or her passing (Berkey, 2004).

From the 9th to the 13th centuries, as sites of Islamic learning diversified and gained prominence, Islamic scholarship flourished. Two practices amongst ulema in the advanced levels of Islamic sciences stand out as unique: First, the student prepared to participate, “as reader and as writer, in an interlocking nexus of texts and commentaries on those texts—in essence, it trained the student to engage in a ‘conversation’ or ‘discourse’ that constituted the essence of intellectual life for the ulema” (Berkey, 2004, p. 203). Passionate and polarized discussions about sources, quality, and validity of knowledge led to the development of tools and methods to evaluate knowledge including deductive and inductive reasoning, analogy, informed opinion, transmission, and independent interpretation (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). The second prominent practice involved a student forming close personal and intellectual relations with a more experienced scholar to foster the student’s scholarship and growth in social and academic status in the absence of a formal degree system (Berkey, 2004).
Islam is considered by various Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to be a religion based on “reasoning, logic, search for knowledge, and purposeful narrative” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011) perhaps due to the esteemed position that knowledge is given in the primary sources. Seeking knowledge is required of every Muslim, male or female; the first verses of the Quran were: “Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher, who created the human out of a clot of congealed blood: Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful; He Who taught (the use of) the Pen; Taught man that which he knew not” (Asad, 1980, p. 1295; Quran 96:1-5). Some scholars have interpreted the two references to reading in this Quran excerpt as referring to revealed and reflected knowledge, both being important. Nasr (2012) identified two essential components of knowledge from an Islamic perspective. First, that knowledge comes ultimately from God, “[w]ho is the final source and subject of knowledge, and also its supreme Object,” (p. 14) and, second, that ethics is inseparable from the process of learning and knowing. Nasr (2012) evoked two Prophetic commands to point out that the attainment of knowledge it is an end and a virtue in itself, and that the quest for knowledge is a life-long one: “Seek knowledge, even if it be in China” (p. 16) and “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (p. 17). In approaching life as a “one long educational experience” (p. 18), Nasr asserted that seeking knowledge does not end with childhood: educators must be constantly seeking new knowledge themselves over the life course. The importance of knowledge has “given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion” (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 2).

From the early learning circles facilitated by Muhammad to today’s Islamic Studies classes, the Islamic education tradition has “embodied a process and a venue where a careful negotiation between the past (tradition) and innovation and change (modernity) was played out” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 7). These authors suggested that tradition secures a student’s sense
of identity, while modernity promotes a student’s ability to respond flexibly to change. Put another way, based on a saying of Muhammad that the way Islam is practiced will undergo continual renewal, Ramadan (2013) clarified that, “This renewal is only in the way that the religion is understood, implemented, and lived in different times and places rather than in the actual sources, principles, and fundamentals” (p. 106). This point needs to be emphasized. In considering Islam’s evolving and fixed elements as diverse and contested phenomena (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 7) at the intersection of tradition and modernity, Quranic principles need to be understood, interpreted, reinterpreted, and acted upon in each different culture and age, while staying true to their fundamental essence. Understanding deeply the fundamentals of the scriptural sources is prerequisite for reinterpretation.

### 2.2.3 Crisis in Islamic Education

Up until the juncture of colonialism, there were two general educational institutions within Islamic education (Esposito, 2003): elementary Quranic schools, which focused upon memorizing the Quran and reading/writing Arabic, and higher religious schools that taught the range of religious subjects. In the 1800s, Western educational institutions were introduced into Muslim-majority countries and this led to a crisis in Muslim education referred to by Husain and Ashraf (1979) as a dichotomy in educational systems whereby classical traditional Islamic educational institutions provided theological and historical knowledge, but did not equip students with intellectual methods to contribute to modern, technological knowledge construction. Western secular educational institutions failed to nurture in Muslim students awareness of their own cultural, religious and linguistic heritage. Nasr (2012) contributed to the description of this crisis by adding another dimension: the gradual reduction in educational curricula in the Muslim
world some 500 years before the advent of colonialism. When the colonial powers arrived, they easily introduced educational institutions in Muslim lands based on a different worldview than the Islamic one. The colonialist worldview had its roots in Christianity but, over time, became a bastion of secularism that taught against the primacy of God for which Islam stood (Nasr, 2012). Gradually, this dichotomy in educational systems became characterized by a power differential—a weakened classical Islamic system and an empowered Western system—and created a schism in societies across Muslim-majority countries that continues to this day. This bifurcation in education, foreign to an Islamic worldview characterized by unity (tawḥīd), is seen to lead to compartmentalization in the minds of students and a schism in the psyche (Nasr, 2012).

One solution in bridging this schism, identified in agreement by many Muslim theorists (Al-Attas, 1979; Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Nasr, 2012; Tauhidi, 2001), is to integrate Western educational frameworks with Islamic content, ethos, and pedagogy beyond basic topics in Islamic Studies. “If you start accepting atheistic ideologies and paradigms… and then just paste some kind of Islamicity onto it, you are condemned to failure from the Islamic point of view” (Nasr, 2012, p. 15). Instead, the equally-weighted integration of secular and Islamic material means that subjects like literature, fine arts, social and biological sciences are taught from an Islamic point of view (Husain & Ashraf, 1979). This integration goes beyond academic subjects to include the emotional, the aesthetic, and the physical and aims to mirror the education system of the classical Islamic civilization that included a person’s whole being: “In the integral Islamic educational system all levels of human reality are taken into account. We go all the way from physical exercise to contemplation of God, and everything in between” (Nasr, 2012, p. 20). This educational system is an example of one that does not compartmentalize, but integrates knowledge in light of a person’s individual potential, as well as their end, which, according to
Muslims, is the return to God. Nasr (2012) suggested that the first step is teaching children how to evaluate, transform, and/or reject. Critical evaluation is a quality of early Islamic education that has not continued to grow and flourish but is increasingly urgent in modern Islamic education. This Islamic analysis of knowledge—where knowledge, regardless of its origin, is examined in light of Islamic principles and either accepted, rejected, or selectively integrated—is particularly important for Muslim societies the world over today, given the globalization of knowledge and the increase of Muslim communities existing within larger predominantly non-Muslim cultures (Memon, 2012). In this study, attention was paid to the ways in which the educators embarked upon this analysis with the children in the Jamma Mosque School.

2.2.4 Contemporary Islamic Education in North America

In 1977, Islamic scholars and educators met in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to attend the First World Conference on Islamic Education and come to a common understanding and articulation of the goals of Islamic education. The statements that came out of this conference continue to guide educators to this day and there is a growing movement of scholars and educators in various countries who envision an Islamization of knowledge project that reinstitutes the Divine at the center of all educational activities, rather than the individual (Al-Attas, 1979; Harder, 2006; Nasr, 2012; Panjwani, 2012; Shamma, 2000; Tauhidi, 2001; Zine, 2008). Zine (2004) defined the Islamization of knowledge as “a seamless strand of knowledge that intrinsically connects all subjects as they are taught from an Islamic purview” (p. 21). While the Islamization of knowledge is still a work in progress, educators in North America are experimenting with the idea in various ways.
Douglass and Shaikh (2004) identified three types of educational practices happening within Muslim communities in the USA that provides useful background information in this study. First is the education of Muslims in their Islamic faith. Second is education for Muslims, which includes both religious and secular knowledge. Third is education in the Islamic spirit and tradition, which might, perhaps, allow for the fullest expression of the concepts behind the Islamization of knowledge movement. Each of these types of educational practices takes place across diverse age groups, genders and ethnicities within Muslim communities and they happen in schools, universities, mosques, homes and community centers. Scholars in Europe (Ramadan, 2004, 2013) and Canada (Memon, 2012) have contributed ideas on how this typology extends across the Western world.

The first type of educational practices—the education of Muslims in their Islamic faith—includes the subjects contained under the umbrella of Islamic Studies, based on the two Islamic primary sources, the Quran and the Sunnah. Douglass and Shaikh (2004) noted that this is the most basic type of Islamic education. It is also, currently, in North America, the most common (Memon, 2012). Education of Muslims is often taught in supplementary, weekend or after-school programs to Muslim children who attend secular public or private schools. It is often taught out of mosques, which is the context of this study. Al-Sadan (1997) pointed out that, “While formal education has succeeded the mosques as the main focus of Islamic education, it has not displaced them” (p. 54). In the USA, for example, there are some 1200 mosques, most of which provide a program of Islamic instruction for adults and/or children. In the city where this study took place, there were approximately 15 established mosques and many other smaller places of religious gathering. Proponents say that supplementary Islamic education allows Muslims to develop religious identity while still integrating into their local (non-Muslim) community (Ramadan,
They argue that efforts should be made at improving these programs rather than expending efforts to develop full-time Islamic alternatives to secular public schools (Ramadan, 2005). Critics of supplementary Islamic education claim that children need more time spent in Muslim environments and that supplementary programs contribute to the schism whereby children assume one identity during the school week and a different one on weekends (Memon, 2012).

The second type of educational practices is education for Muslims, a broader educational initiative that includes both secular and religious knowledge, fulfilled by full-time Muslim schools for children (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004). These schools are often based upon the secular/public school curriculum of the state or province in which they are located and add Quranic studies, Islamic beliefs, values and practices and Arabic language instruction to the curriculum (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004). The need for these full-time Islamic schools stem from “the nexus of resisting cultural assimilation and engaging cultural survival” (Zine, 2007, p. 72). Supporters of full-time Muslim schools claim that in a Canadian sociocultural context of increasing diversity, full-time Muslim schools take on multiple roles for the Muslim diaspora (Zine, 2007) above and beyond transmission of basic Islam material. They allow for the preservation of the Islamic values and practices in light of dominant cultural values and practices, some of which are antithetical to those of Islam such as the consumption of alcohol and drugs and premarital sexual relations (Zine, 2007). In this sense, independent Muslim schools allow for the continuity of the community based on the moral values upholding that community (McCreery et al., 2007). Critics argue that these schools promote the “ghettoization” of Muslim children—the term itself carrying racialized connotations (Zine, 2007)—and deny children opportunities to engage with the larger community. Other critics (Ramadan, 2005) say
that creating an “artificially Islamic closed space” (p. 6) separates Muslim children from the
surrounding society providing them few opportunities to integrate.

As Muslim communities mature in non-Muslim cultures, the questions of identity and
integration are driving the development of new educational directions for Muslim children.
Memon (2012) summarized the current situation:

Dissatisfied with the inability of public schools to nurture faith consciousness,
disappointed with Islamic schools for being pale imitations, and aware that weekend
programs are inherently limited due to the lack of contact time, many Muslim parents have
begun to seek alternatives… (p. 201)

Here, Memon not only identified a problem but he suggested that alternatives are being created.
Alternatives to both supplementary and full-time Islamic education come under the final type of
educational practices: education in the spirit and tradition of Islam (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004).
This refers to an integrated approach of teaching/learning/living the principles and practices of
the Islamic system. It requires rigorous investigation into the timeless principles of Islam—
including the importance and methods of seeking knowledge—and how to apply them in a
modern age. Homeschooling is one of the ways in which parents and educators are considering
alternative Islamic education (Memon, 2012).

The specific sociocultural contexts of Muslim communities in the West—characterized by
resisting cultural assimilation and engaging cultural survival (Zine, 2007)—frames the way that
Islamic education is understand throughout the Muslim diaspora. Critical issues facing Muslim
school educators in the West today include academic quality, generation, and maintenance of an
Islamic ethos, exploration of modern Islamic identities, gender equality, and effective
engagement with prevailing non-Muslim societies (Niyozov & Memon, 2011).
2.2.5 **Summary**

This study examined Muslim educators’ perspectives and interpretations in practice at a specific weekend Islamic school—balancing the pull of tradition with the momentum of modernity (Niyozov & Memon 2011). Both Muhammad’s inspired dialogic circles and today’s creative pedagogies offer much to the field of Islamic education, which seems to have fallen into educational doldrums: integrated curricula remain elusive, textbooks unstandardized, and heavy reliance on rote memorization are not capturing the hearts of today’s Muslim children (Al-Sadan, 1997; Douglass & Shaikh, 2004; Shamma, 1999). In many Islamic schools in North America, the key components of Islamic Studies are taught as independent subjects, tagged onto otherwise Eurocentric curricula (Zine 2004). One way to understand the Islamization of knowledge movement is as a realization and a protest that Islamic cultural tools are not being used with Muslim children in schools that have a secular, Western curriculum. Instead, another culture’s tools are being used, and the Islamization of knowledge is a way to reclaim the cultural tools of the Islamic system.

2.3 **Chapter 2 Summary**

This literature review provided background on two distinct fields of study—sociocultural theory and Islamic education—required for this research. Sociocultural theory plays a significant role in this study, situated, as it is, in a Sunni Muslim mosque school. First, it offers empirical ways of understanding how humans learn and develop. Second, it offers methods of observation and analysis that illuminate social practices embedded within educational contexts, including
units of analysis that consider the individual, the environment, and the relations between them (Vadeboncoeur & Rahal, 2014).

But grounding analysis of an Islamic educational context in sociocultural theory raises some questions. What is generated when these two perspectives are brought into dialogue? In what ways are they commensurate and in what ways might they contradict each other? It is unclear, at this point, the ways in which sociocultural theory may enable a study of spiritual experiences, for example, and how it might afford and constrain the study of Islam. There are two types of social human behavior that can be observed and that point to the intangible, invisible, and individual nature of consciousness: social practices and culture. Social practices involve the study of activity in relationship to developing consciousness (Wozniak, 1979); consciousness can be studied as “a reflection of objective reality” and as it is “formed in the practical activity of man” (p. 31). Wozniak (1979) elaborated on this by saying, “[S]ince both the real world and man’s actions are objectively existent, they provide the means to an objective (non-introspective) study of consciousness…” (p. 32). In terms of culture, Cole (1998) described culture as “exteriorized mind; mind as interiorized culture” (p. 292). So culture, too—the “artifact-saturated medium of human life” (Cole, 1998, p. 294)—offers a window into the inner workings of a worldview.

In this research, by studying the principles and practices of the Islamic system embedded within the cultural ecology of the Sunni Muslim mosque school, I hoped to get glimpse into the consciousness that was developing there. Social practices are central from a dialectical, sociocultural perspective. How people enact Islamic principles through practices is central to the Islamic system. Al-Attas (2005) emphasized not only the affirmation of the unity of God, at the heart of the Islamic system, but also the manner and form in which Muslims verify that
affirmation. The actualization of knowledge is crucial because, “in Islam there is no worthwhile knowledge without action accompanying it, nor worthwhile action without knowledge guiding it” (Al-Attas, 1980, p. 13). In these ways, this study used sociocultural theory to analyze observable social practices as beginning points for the development of psychological functions. Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development may contribute to informing the ways in which social practices are used in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School.

The sociocultural theoretical framework attracts diverse expressions and research questions to be analyzed in relationship to it. As Nicolopoulou and Weintraub (1995) pointed out, “[T]he scope of Vygotsky’s own research concerns is not necessarily equivalent to the range of possibilities offered by his theoretical framework” (p. 276). He offered the theory in the spirit of transformation and transcendence, and it is in this spirit that I use it in an Islamic educational context. Al-Attas (2005) claimed that Islamic thinkers throughout history have combined in their investigations, and in their own selves, the empirical and the transcendent, the objective and the subjective, the deductive and the inductive, into a creative, unified whole. While this is a noble goal to which I aspire, the remaining chapters—revealing what is generated at the intersection of sociocultural and Islamic perspectives—will testify as to whether or not this research attains to that goal.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Given the specific, sociocultural nature of my research questions, the context of my research and my own positionality as the researcher, this study reflects an interpretivist paradigm within an Islamic ontological worldview. As an investigation into human learning and development, I used a sociocultural framework and employed basic iterative, design methodology composed of qualitative methods—participant observations and active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997)—and reflexive, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This chapter includes four sections. First, I describe my own research position as a convert to Islam and a mother of Muslim children, as well as my desire to contribute to enhancing the quality of Islamic Studies instruction by approaching it through sociocultural theory. Second, I describe the site of my research, an Islamic weekend school in a Sunni Muslim mosque in a city in Western Canada, including how I selected my research participants, entered the research site and established rapport. Third, I describe the qualitative methods I used to gather data, including participant observation and active interviews. Fourth, I describe my approach to analyzing and interpreting the data, including my unit of analysis, analytic tools, and thematic analysis.

3.1 Research Position

The ways in which the teaching/learning of Islamic material may be used to intentionally draw development forward is of vital interest to me as an educator, a mother and a Muslim convert. I first encountered Islam in 1991, as a young adult, visiting family friends in Bangladesh. Now, some 23 years later, and after studying human development, I can see that Islam was attractive to me because the people who presented it embodied a quality of supreme intelligence, or *fatana* in Arabic, and they presented it within an affectively positive context. For
me, this experience illustrated Islam as a positive life system, composed of particular moral-ethical principles and ways of making sense of existential questions. I look back on my first experience in an Islamic context as an example that we learn best through cognition and emotion within warm, human relationships. I studied Islam over the decade that followed, in mentorship with some exemplary Muslim scholars, and came, as all Muslims must, to my own unique understanding of it.

Shortly after I converted to Islam, I married a practicing Muslim man and we moved to Saudi Arabia. There, I was asked to lead a mother–child playgroup composed almost entirely of Saudi mothers and their children; my own three children were born there. The idea of a mother–child playgroup is not a concept indigenous to the Arab world, but I found in Jeddah a small group of Saudi women who had attended playgroups abroad and wanted something similar in their own city. They enthusiastically embraced the idea that the playgroup would contain elements of value to their own culture and religion, which they would help me provide. My community of Saudi Muslim friends became the context in which I learned how to live as a new Muslim. Our little playgroup became the social circle in which my children were raised in the earliest years of their lives.

This experience sparked my interest in human learning and development and raised many related research questions. I became fascinated by the differences in social practices resulting from different cultures—particularly in light of the differences between the Saudi culture in which I was raising my children and the Canadian culture in which I, myself, had been raised. I wondered: in what ways do these different social practices foster different developmental results? Children in Saudi Arabia are embedded within an environment rich in the signs, symbols, cultural tools and forms of engagement in the social practices of the Islamic domain, including
Muslim art and architecture, the call to prayer publically announced five times a day, recitation of the Quran holding explicit social prestige and adults modeling Islamic etiquette (adab). How does this Islamically rich semiotic environment come to bear on the ways in which children internalize the social practices of the Islamic faith? How does this differ for Muslim children embedded in a non-Muslim sociocultural environment, like Canada? Even closer to my heart, how would my own children learn and develop differently in an Islamic environment, like Saudi Arabia, than they would in a secular environment, like Canada?

I lived in Saudi Arabia for six years and a big question, which repeatedly surfaced amongst my Saudi friends, was how to educate their children. The debate went like this: a local Saudi school could give children the language, culture and religion that they would need to thrive in Saudi society, but it might not give them the academic skills needed to function internationally. An international school, on the other hand, might give children an international-standard academic education, but they might lose nuances of the language, culture and religion, thus risking growing up strangers in their own societies, but able to function in the global community. My friends offered examples of both phenomena within their own extended families.

All of these questions have a personal dimension for me given my responsibility of raising Muslim children between cultures: How to nurture faith and the internalization of a spiritual framework when children are embedded within an increasingly secular world? The questions also have a professional, intellectual dimension: As educators, how can we nurture our children to their highest potentials as Muslims and, simultaneously, as engaged global citizens, thriving and contributing in a plural world? When I lived in Saudi Arabia, I had no theoretical framework for exploring these questions. I found such a framework in sociocultural theory. The driving
motivation of this research was to explore these questions, starting with an exploration into how Muslim educators understand human learning and development.

Islam is not only where I have come from, it is also where I am going. The goal of my life is to enrich the Islamic dimensions of it, deepening my consciousness of Divinity and the framework supporting that consciousness. Similar to Vygotsky’s (1967) suggestion that children respect the rules of play because adhering to them prolongs the pleasure of play, for me, adhering to the rules of Islam deepens my pleasure learning the Islamic way of life to which the rules provide access. As the American–Egyptian Muslim scholar, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, said, “First the heart falls in love. Then the mind becomes interested in the rules” (personal communication, 2002). And, from my perspective, this is one of the goals of Islamic education: to engage both the heart and the mind in the exploration of Islamic material. It is an ongoing goal for me in terms of raising my own children.

In terms of this study, my identity as a visibly-identifiable Muslim (I wear a headscarf), familiar with the material being taught, helped me gain access to the research site and build confidence, trust and rapport with my participants. But the fact that I am a convert of Western origin may have been a source of some bias in at least three ways. First, my research participants might have viewed me through a particular lens given this Western identity—positive or negative—that might have distorted either the way they enacted their role as educator in the classroom and/or their responses in the interviews.

Second, questions of power in the research site may have contributed to how the educators interacted with me. As a convert, I often feel that my knowledge is less than people who were born Muslim, especially those who are teaching Islam. Yet, the educators may not have felt that my knowledge was less simply because I was coming to them as a researcher from a university.
Given that none of the four had teaching certificates, they may have felt that their knowledge was less.

Third, while my Islamic worldview was similar to the worldviews held by the educators, my views of pedagogy, in some cases, differed. I am aware of my biases against some forms of teaching/learning that I have seen in other Islamic studies classrooms, such as the copious use of rote memorization. I, myself, was not taught in this way and my academic studies have tended to privilege pedagogies other than memorization and didactic instruction. There are many ways to teach and learn Islamic material and the way that attracted me—in books and through Muslims I met in person—was a subtle, nuanced approach, rich in metaphor and analogy, the results of higher-order thinking. I personally do not resonate with certain styles of literal interpretation, although I understand that other people do. I came to Islam through a process of rigorous inquiry, therefore I honor Lipman’s (1996) statement that “[c]hildren need to inquire for themselves and not simply learn by heart the results of the inquiries of others” (p. 19). I see that holding Islamic principles while maintaining epistemic openness is not only possible, but also crucial in our current age of diversity and globalization. A key role of Muslim educators, I believe, is helping children come to their own understandings of Islam, and ways of living Islam in their own particular contexts, while staying true to Islamic principles.

Keeping these possible biases in mind throughout my research, I continually reflected on my position in the sociocultural context of the Jamma Mosque School classrooms, my role in conducting the analysis, and interpreting the data. I am aware of the fact that my own psychological functions are likely to be shaped by Islamic cultural tools, as well as those privileged by the formal Western education and culture that has scaffolded my life.
3.2 Research Site

This study was conducted in a weekend school within a Sunni Muslim mosque in a metropolitan city in Canada. The mosque was called the Jamma Mosque (all place and people names are pseudonyms). Painted white, with a dome and a minaret, the mosque sat on a corner plot encircled by a fence in a quiet residential neighborhood. The mosque was surrounded on two sides by a grassy lawn, a parking lot on the third side and bushes on the fourth. There was a small playground at the front with a sign bearing the name of the mosque. Along with offering congregational prayers five times daily, the mosque provided educational activities, including Quran and Arabic classes for adults and children, lectures, social events and a weekend Islamic school for children.

I came to know about the mosque during the month of Ramadan, 2013, when I went to break the day’s fast with a meal called iftar. During Ramadan, many mosques in the city host these meals for members of the community. I found the Jamma Mosque distinctive for several reasons. First, the imam (leader) gave a short, profound lecture just before it was time to break the fast. Second, the Quranic recitation during the congregational prayer was particularly heartfelt. Third, I noticed a close-knit community camaraderie when the women of the community served the fast-breaking meal to the people who came to break their fasts. Here, I met the daughters of the head of the mosque. The women were warm and welcoming as they served food to the people. They were both pursuing advanced degrees, neither was married, and both expressed devotion to Islam.

Later, when I was considering possible research sites for my study, I was looking for a weekend Islamic school that was not only mainstream in its ideology and mission in educating Muslim children, but also effective. The Jamma Mosque came to mind, particularly because of
the impression these daughters had made upon me as inspiring Muslim women who were advancing their own development. My access to the Jamma Mosque as a research site came through one of these women: I called her and described my research. She put me in touch with her father, the head of the mosque, who immediately granted me access with these words:

As you know, the Jamma Mosque’s aim is to serve and support the Muslim community. From the first verses of the Quran, Allāh subḥanahū wa ta‘ālā (above, beyond, and exalted) emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge: “Read. Read in the name of thy Lord who created; [He] created the human being from blood clot. Read in the name of thy Lord who taught by the pen: [He] taught the human being what he did not know.” (Quran, 96: 1-5). Education is the cornerstone of all Jamma Mosque divisions. We will be more than happy to support students and scholars in any way possible and we wish you all the best in your thesis, in shā’a Allāh (God willing). I’ll pass your email to the managing committee of the mosque and they will contact you soon to see how we can help you to fulfill your objectives and goals in shā’a Allāh. (personal communication, 9/12/14)

This communication assured me that the people in charge of this mosque valued knowledge and education, which, for me, was an important criteria for a research site. The mosque’s community-building activities, like the Ramadan meals and activities for children, illustrated their commitment to the community. The Jamma Mosque seemed an ideal research site.

3.2.1 Entering the Site

The head of the mosque, Sheikh Faisal, put me in touch with the spiritual leader of the mosque, Imam Rayan. Along with being the imam of the mosque, Rayan was also one of several educators teaching in the mosque. He arranged for me to meet the other educators so that I could
present information about my research to them, along with a consent letter. I first encountered the methodological challenge of how to present myself in preparing to enter the mosque and meet the educators—my potential participants—for the first time. While I wanted to be authentic to myself, I was aware that what I chose to wear might determine whether or not educators would participate and it could, later, affect the way that they interacted with me. It was important from the outset for me to estimate the approximate ideological orientation of the mosque in order to know how to best present myself.

There are many ways to get a sense of the ideology of a mosque. Here, I examine four ways that include the physical layout, the clothing practices of its members, the literature adorning the walls and shelves of the mosque, and the mosque’s commitment to community engagement. Since I had attended the mosque previous to my research, as an attendee, I knew that the layout of Jamma Mosque segregates men and women almost completely. There are separate entrances on opposite sides of the building; the men’s prayer area is on one side of the mosque, the women’s on the other. From each gender’s prayer area, stairs descend to the classrooms in the basement—girls’ classes on one side and boys’ on the other—separated by a movable wooden barrier. The second sign of a mosque’s ideology is the clothing practices of its participants. In the Jamma Mosque, many of the men wear long beards; women wear headscarves and abayas, or long flowing robes worn over regular clothes. Third, I had seen the posters on the walls prohibiting the Shia practice of laying the forehead on an earthen tablet when praying and those regarding women in the mosque. These posters detailed the conditions by which women must abide in order to be permitted to pray in the mosque: “that there is no risk of tempting others or being tempted,” that her “attendance will not lead to anything that is
forbidden,” and that she will “not jostle with men in the street or in the mosque” (Jamma Mosque flyer). The poster also included several conditions of “proper hijab” or covering up.

A fourth way to understand a mosque’s ideology is its commitment to civic engagement. In an analysis of the commitments of various groups of Canadian Muslims to civic engagement, Memon (2012) drew upon the work of Mattson (2003) who presented a framework of resistance, embrace and selective engagement to offer deeper understanding on how ideology shapes Islamic institutions. Acknowledging diversity in interpretation and degree of commitment to religious practice, this framework presented resistance as rejection of Western culture and society resulting in self-imposed cultural isolation into Muslim enclaves. Embrace ran a spectrum from the adoption of liberal democratic values and less adherence to Islamic ones, to deep commitment to the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence, but also accommodation to religious pluralism. Selective engagement was presented as civic activism and contribution to societal growth motivated by religious conviction (Memon, 2012). Considering these four indicators, it seemed fairly safe to say that the ideology of the Jamma Mosque was conservative and likely situated somewhere between resistance and the second type of embrace: deep commitment to the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence along with some accommodation to religious pluralism.

Bearing all of this in mind, and building on Mandell’s (1988) concept of a least-adult identity and Pascoe’s (2011) concept of a least-gendered identity, whereby the researcher diminishes what is actually part of his/her identity (adult, female), I adopted an abaya during my research time at the Jamma Mosque to diminish my Western identity and foregrounding my least-Western one. Further, wearing an abaya would show respect for what I deemed to be the mosque’s ideological stance, including their segregation rules, and to highlight the seriousness
with which I intended to conduct my research. Although I normally wear the headscarf, I do not
normally wear an abaya over my clothes. But, after living for six years in Saudi Arabia, I did
own an abaya and was comfortable wearing it. So my researcher identity at the Jamma Mosque
was not so much about building a totally new identity as it was enhancing an aspect of an already
existing identity: my most visibly Muslim identity; my most conservative Muslim identity.
Wearing an abaya was for me the perfect liminal stance, in the middle between wearing Western
clothes and wearing the *niqab*, a full face cover. Neither of these would have accurately
expressed the wide scope of my identity and both of which would have put me too far from the
female educators in the mosque who wore abayas.

### 3.2.2 Research Participants

As my participant sample was defined by the active contribution to the Islamic
teaching/learning taking place in the school, I invited eight educators to participate in my
research, including a woman who was considering becoming an educator and a woman who was
proposing to run a library as part of the school. Neither of those two women actually embarked
upon teaching at the school, and, as such, they were not part of the study. So I ended up with four
participants in all (see Table 1): two female educators (Tala and Amira), two male educators
(Rayan and Imran). The owner of the mosque, Sheikh Faisal, was not actively teaching in the
mosque, so I did not observe him; nor did I interview him in person. Due to his busy travel
schedule, I emailed him a list of interview questions and he responded by email. I did not invite
to participate in the study any other people involved in the functioning of the mosque who were
not directly involved in the teaching/learning of Islamic material. Each educator taught between
six and ten children in a classroom in the basement of the mosque, and the day’s classes
concluded with a congregational prayer in the mosque above. The research site was composed of four classrooms, two communal prayer-spaces (one for boys/men and one for girls/women), and the playground, where I observed the educators interacting with the children during class breaks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role at the school</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teacher &amp; Islamic Education</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Data Sources**&lt;br&gt;(in hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Educator of the Level 3 (advanced) female students</td>
<td>4 years teaching experience, children &amp; adults, Islamic studies, in mosques</td>
<td>— No formal Western teacher education. — At time of study, pursuing an undergraduate degree in Islamic Studies and an Islamic-teacher education program, both online</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>9 years in Canada 12.5 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Educator of the Level 3 (advanced) male students; Imam of the mosque</td>
<td>1 year teaching experience at Jamma Mosque</td>
<td>— No formal Western teacher or Islamic-teacher education. — Studied Arabic in the Middle East for two years</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>16 years in Canada Attended high school in Canada 11 3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tala</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Educator of Level 2 (intermediate) female students</td>
<td>2 years teaching experience at Jamma Mosque; some experience teaching in Yemen</td>
<td>— No formal Western teacher, Islamic-teacher or Islamic education</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>4.5 years in Canada Arrived after graduating high school 11 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imran</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Educator of Level 1 (beginner) mixed-gender students</td>
<td>1 year experience teaching Quran to adults</td>
<td>— No formal Western teacher, Islamic-teacher or Islamic education — Authorized by a sheikh to teach Quran</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>8 years in Canada Arrived after graduating high school 11 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faisal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Owner of mosque</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>0 By email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PO = participant observation in the classroom, AI = active interviews**
3.3 Data Gathering: Iterative Qualitative Methods

In order to answer my research questions, I selected the qualitative methods of participant observation and active interviewing as modes of systematic social inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) that would enable me to make meaning and co-construct data with my participants. While my participation varied in each of the classrooms I observed—in one, I observed from behind a barrier; in another, I was once asked to help teach—I was clear about both the purpose of my presence in the classroom and the fact that I would follow the wishes of each particular educator. My interviews were active in the sense that I approached them as jointly-constructed social practices for the co-construction of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). I used these methods in an iterative fashion, interweaving them with each other and with on-going analysis from the outset: what I learned from method contributed to informing the next step of my research and use of another method (see Table 2).

Table 2. Observation and Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field work</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Rayan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/12/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 1</td>
<td>11/2/14</td>
<td>11/23/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 2</td>
<td>11/9/14</td>
<td>11/29/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 3</td>
<td>11/16/14</td>
<td>12/7/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>12/16/14</td>
<td>12/17/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra observations</td>
<td>12/14/14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/1/15 parents/students/teachers meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/12/15 book club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5/30/15: mosque BBQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit visit</td>
<td></td>
<td>6/7/15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data-gathering sequence proceeded as follows for each educator: observation of three consecutive classes in the classroom, the communal prayer space and the playground, followed by an initial active interview (see Appendix A). Holding the interview protocol constant in a general sense, I shaped the protocol based on what I had seen in my first three observations. After the initial interview, I resumed observations of the classrooms/prayer-space/playground for another class, after which I drafted a set of questions and elaborations for a second interview and member check (Active Interview 2). This Active Interview 2 took place after I had transcribed Active Interview 1 and the educators had read it. Active Interview 2 was specific to each educator based upon both my observations in their classroom and their first interview. It was intended to clarify any ambiguity in Active Interview 1 and to elaborate on certain points specific to each educator.

Given my research questions involving the enactment of perspectives in social practices, I expected to find some contradictions. Perspectives not enacted, for example, or different perspectives enacted. I also imagined finding different social practices used by different educators. I hoped that through the iterative use of these qualitative methods, with each phase of research clarifying the one preceding it, I might be able to examine the contradicting elements and bring them into dialectical unity. I also expected to come up with a couple of key assertions rather than a single overarching theory (Saldaña, 2013).

3.3.1 Participant Observation

Observations took place in four classrooms in the mosque basement, the men’s and women’s formal prayer rooms, and the playground of the Jamma Mosque’s weekend school over seven months of the academic school year—from the beginning of November, 2014, until the
end of May, 2015. As my research questions could have been posed at any time during the school year, I waited until the educators had settled the students into their appropriate classes at the beginning of the academic year before I commenced observation. I conducted observations in the school each Sunday, except national holiday weekends. Class began at 10 am until the midday call to prayer, which marked the end of class, and shifted over the five months from approximately 1:20 pm to 12:30 pm, in the deepest winter months, and back again. The Islamic calendar is based on cycles of the moon and the five daily prayers are spread out across varying day lengths. I observed each educator for an average of 11 hours (2.5 hours in classroom/playground; 20 minutes in the mosque, four visits, four educators; total: 44 hours). The bulk of my time was spent observing in the classrooms. Occasionally, the children went outside to the playground and I observed the ways in which the educators supported their play.

A secondary site was the prayer room of the mosque, where the educators and children spent the last 20 minutes of every session. The male educators and boys inhabited the main prayer hall; the female educators and girls were in the largest classroom downstairs, initially, and later upstairs in the women’s prayer hall. The girls and women could observe the boys, men, and the imam, on a large screen on the side of the room. Each class ended here. After the lessons in the classrooms, everyone convened for the noon congregational prayer. During this congregational prayer, I participated, thus adding a dimension of reflexivity to my research.

In conducting participant observation, I greeted the educator and the children when I arrived, then I sat near the back of the classroom for the duration of the class. I audio recorded the class and took field notes on my computer. I typed dialogue quickly, watching the class, not the keyboard, and aiming to stay as true to what I heard as possible. During periods of Quran recitation, I silently observed, typing notes. I did not type the Arabic words of the Quran because
I did not think that would add to my observations. The same was true during the Islamic studies portion of the class, when children were using their textbooks. More useful during those times was to watch how the educator engaged the students and the social practices s/he conducted. During break time, if the girls were indoors, I remained in the classroom chatting with them and the female educators. If the girls went outside, I joined them. During the boy’s break time, if they stayed indoors, I remained at my observation post at the back of the room. It was not appropriate to chat with the male educators. If the boys went outside, I observed them through the glass doors on the ground floor of the mosque. During congregational prayer, I participated. With the girls and female educators, this meant getting in line with them and praying, shoulder to shoulder, then sitting with them afterward for the du’ā’ (an appeal, invocation, or supplicatory prayer; Esposito, 2004). With the boys, this meant entering the men’s prayer hall and praying behind a partition in the back corner. Before and immediately after prayer, I could observe all the boys and men through the cracks in the partition.

I was mindful of Fontana and Frey’s (1994) assertion that participant observation is about “gathering a store of ‘tacit knowledge’ about the people and the culture being studied” (p. 371). I immersed myself in the weekend school culture, engaged in informal conversation, established rapport, participated in congregational acts of worship and listened without taking notes. In addition to the four observations of each educator, I often stopped by the two female educators’ classrooms to talk before or after school. They were often happy to share some new thought, idea or teaching approach. One of them, for example, came up with a new initiative during my time at the site—a book club aimed at building on the interests of the students—which I observed. I also attended a parent/child/educator meeting held by Imam Rayan and the annual mosque barbeque
held at a nearby park. All of these additional interactions helped me construct a richer understanding of the goals of the educators in their teaching with children in the weekend school.

3.3.2 Active Interviews

Holstein and Gubrium (1997) described active interviews as “interactional narrative procedures of knowledge production” (p. 114), social encounters whereby an interviewer and a respondent construct knowledge together in conversation. Both the interviewer and the respondent actively participate in this construction within the interview. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) stated that “[a]n interview question can be evaluated with respect to both a thematic and a dynamic dimension” (p. 131). The thematic dimension involves producing knowledge in light of the research questions. The dynamic dimension refers to the relationship between the participant and the researcher.

My aim in conducting active interviews was to make further meaning of the social practices I was observing in the classroom. By talking through each educator’s perspectives on human learning and development, I hoped to clarify the meanings I had made during the observations and, simultaneously, build rapport with them to deepen mutual understanding. Some of these social practices were so commonplace within the Islamic system of principles and practices that they were likely to be found in every Islamic studies classroom the world over, for example, reciting the Quran and ritual prayer. I hoped that active interviews would help me understand the educator’s intentions in engaging in these social practices, the unique pedagogies that each educator brought to the timeless practices. In conducting active interviews, and considering them as sites of knowledge production and meaning making, I intended to stimulate
the educators’ thinking and articulation about life factors that contributed to their perspectives of human learning and development and how they engaged the students in social practices.

Active interviews with each of the four educators spanned 2.5 to 3.5 hours (active interview and member-checking interview combined; see Table 1). I interviewed Amira first in a public library and second in her classroom at the mosque. I interviewed Rayan first at his home, with his wife and baby present, and second in his office at the mosque, with a mosque board member present. I interviewed both Tala and Imran at their homes, with spouses present, for both interviews.

The interview protocol for Active Interview 1 was structured around the two research questions. The first group of questions focused on my first research question: what are Muslim educators perspectives on human learning and development? The second research question was: how are these perspectives enacted in educators’ *social practices* in the classroom? This research question was translated into interview questions that were unique to each educator based on what I had seen during the first three observations. These questions were specifically directed at what appeared to be social practices, and I was trying to understand: What are they? Why are they being used? Where do they come from? I included a third category of general questions aiming to understand some of the influences on educators’ perspectives: how they learned, what inspired them to want to make a career out of teaching children Islam, and what connections between past learning and current teaching might exist.

After transcribing Interview 1, I printed a copy for the educator to read. The interview protocol for Active Interview 2, the member-checking interview, was unique for each educator, based on questions that arose from Interview 1, as well as comments that they had on their own transcripts. Inviting each educator to amend or elaborate on what they said in the initial
interview, member checking allowed me to ensure that I had accurately captured their unique perspectives. Further, each educator elaborated on different aspects of my research questions, which contributed to filling out my understanding of what was going on in the school.

After I had completed data collection, I went to the Jamma Mosque to thank each educator for their participation in my study and give them each a small token of my appreciation. I intend to maintain relationships with the female educators into the future.

3.3.3 Honoraria

I had not originally planned to give honoraria, in fact, I stated explicitly in the letter of consent that participants would not be paid. “Although you will not be paid for participating in this study, there may be other benefits for you…” (see Appendix B). However, for several reasons, I had a change of heart. First, on the consent letter, I stated that I would interview them two times for one hour. The first interview alone for each of them was well over 90 minutes. The second, member-checking, interviews ranged between 30 and 75 minutes. I wanted to honor the fact that each person gave so generously of his/her time and thoughts. Second, honoraria contribute to reciprocity in research relations by providing immediate and tangible benefit (Salmon, 2007). As my study developed, it became more collaborative and reciprocal in the sense that the participants became increasingly invested. I decided to give honoraria in the spirit of reciprocity. Finally, gift giving is highly valued in Muslim communities based on a saying of Muhammad: “Exchange gifts, as that will lead to increasing your love to one another” (Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 53, Number 373). While honoraria alone are not enough to ensure that respectful research is being done (Salmon, 2007), honoraria contribute to the establishment of a respectful research framework, especially in a community where gift giving is held as important.
I gave each of my participants a gift certificate to a local mall in recognition of their participation.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In describing my analytic approach, I first discuss how I operationalized reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003) throughout my study to enrich my analysis. Second, I describe how I adapted an interpretative framework to aid in organizing the data (Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Wertsch, 1998). This framework features the role that social practices play in the development of intramental functioning, and as a unit of analysis in this study. Third, I detail the method of ongoing, thematic analysis that I used to analyze the data.

#### 3.4.1 Reflexivity

I employed reflexivity as an analytic tool throughout the research process—during data collection, analysis and interpretation—where “meanings are made rather than found” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 414). In active interviews, I made meaning in concert with my research participants, and later, in the quiet moments alone reviewing the transcript. In participant observations, practices caught my attention based on my own perspectives on how we learn and develop, my own epistemologies, my own experiences—all formed through participation in social practices across the range environments that have comprised my own life. This attention informed my field notes, my analysis, my interpretation. I was so intimately interwoven into the entire process—as the instrument of research itself—that many of my past experiences were awakened and summoned and, of course, the outcomes of this research process will contribute to shaping and directing my future. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) raised several issues related to
qualitative researchers in terms of reflexivity, two of which I address here. The first is the need for clarity in *operationalizing* reflexivity and the second is how to use reflexivity as an analytic, meaning-making tool *throughout* the research process. First, I outline two ways in which I operationalize reflexivity. Second, I discuss some reflexive questions that remained alive across the research process and that specifically helped me make meaning throughout the research process.

### 3.4.1.1 Operationalizing Reflexivity

There are two main ways in which I operationalized reflexivity in this study. The first was a mostly solo process; the second was a social, dialogic one. The first way was consciously creating spaces for deliberate reflexivity. Specifically, this involved engaging in acts of contemplation with a research problem in mind, but not directly focusing on the research problem. While academics talk of temporal distance to the research in order to increase degrees of reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), deliberate acts of mindfulness and contemplation lend a similar sense of distance and often clarify intellectual confusion, making increasing degrees of reflexivity attainable. In my particular case, reflexivity was operationalized, in part, through the Islamic ritual practices of worship. These contemplative practices, where the brain just floats, open up room for insights to appear; they stimulate reflexivity. In the data collection phases of my research, I engaged in the acts of worship that occurred while I was onsite. When my research participants offered the fruits of their own contemplation, worship and reflection, I accepted them as data. Finally, these fruits of reflection played a role in my data analysis when we discussed them in the member checking interviews.
The second way in which I operationalized reflexivity in this study was by reflecting together, through social, dialogic interaction and the sharing of research problems with my university colleagues and with my research participants. Here, sharing reflexivity allowed me to juxtapose my own reflections with the literature and the research site, and to verbalize them in community—opening up my ideas for critique and culling, inspiration and innovation, within my community of thinkers.

3.4.1.2 Reflexive Questions

In terms of making meaning of reflexivity, I identified three questions that I returned to in each phase of the research process. The first question was: Who am I (as a researcher)? I identified myself as a critical researcher in this study not only by virtue of the fact that that I was working with a minority Muslim educational community and I myself am a Muslim, but I was examining Islamic education in light of its marginalization by Western schooling, culture and hegemony. I was not directly examining “hidden and oppressive infrastructures” (Lincoln, 2010, p. 4) in schools. Instead, I was looking for hidden, positive, educative, developmentally generative social practices in the Islamic studies classroom using the lens of sociocultural theory in order to highlight these, bring them to the fore, and use them to guide new pedagogies in children’s learning and development.

The second reflexive question was: Who is in power here? In acknowledging that multilayered power differentials exist in all research sites and that I cannot always equalize power (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), I needed to be ever more mindful of these power differentials, working to acknowledge them. Writing and researching as a minority Muslim in an overarching non-Muslim academic culture has its challenges and the reception of my research
may test the multicultural claims of both the university and the society in which it is embedded.

Being a Muslim in our current climate of interrelated Islamic extremism and Islamophobia adds a degree of difficulty that can, and should, be considered a power differential. More difficult is my power as a privileged, educated, middle-class, able-bodied, white researcher, because it is an identity I was born with and, therefore, cannot see as clearly as one I consciously chose later in life. Complicating matters at my research site was the fact that some of my participants hold more power than others, in different ways, at different times. The imam was male and powerful, but younger and less experienced than his co-educators, who were female and wise. How did the imam’s power compare with my own?

Recognizing that each of us held power differentially in different phases of research was key. In the classroom, in the observation phase, the educator was the expert from my perspective, although I am mindful that they may not have felt powerful but rather examined. In the interviews, with the researcher framing the discussion, the researcher holds power, maybe even influencing what the participant says and how s/he says it. In the analysis, the researcher holds power, but this was partially mitigated during the member-checking phase and informally throughout the study, in asking educators to elaborate on their previous answers to interview questions. In order to safeguard their power, and in keeping with the Behavioral Research Ethics Board, I kept all participants’ identities anonymous and I chose to use a voice recorder rather than video recorder.

The third and final reflexive question was: How can I say this to others? Mauthner and Doucet (2003) encouraged researchers to “reflect on and record their interpretations, and they are reminded that the validity of their interpretations is dependent on being able to demonstrate how they were reached” (p. 418). I arrived at interpretations deep within an Islamic worldview, deep
within myself as a Muslim researcher, conducting research in an Islamic educational context, with Muslim participants. Demonstrating how I reached my interpretations to people who may know little about Islam is an ongoing challenge in my research. If the production of research is a culturally, socially, historically embedded social practice (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), and this embedding means that the knowledge produced is situated, the challenge is making one’s research relevant to a circle of people wider than the participants themselves, or only those who understand the contextual situatedness of the research. Taking seriously the idea that “facts are only facts within some theoretical framework” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998 as cited in Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 424), I remain mindful that facts to Muslims are not necessarily facts to non-Muslims. Facts to sociocultural theorists may not be facts to Muslims. Moreover, facts to some Muslims might not be facts to other Muslims! But they might be. In the chapters that follow, I face this challenge as I elaborate the three main themes from the data, aiming to describe a clear intellectual trace from research site to data chunk through analysis to interpretation.

3.4.2 Conceptual Framework

In order to examine how social practices act to bridge between a locally-situated cultural and historical whole and the development of psychological functioning, I used a conceptual framework to organize my data. I adapted this conceptual framework from Vadeboncoeur’s (2006) participation framework and I incorporated concepts from Wertsch (1998). Assembled using sensitizing concepts from sociocultural theory and presented in Figure 1, this conceptual framework enabled me to see, organize, and understand my data. The framework is composed of three components. The first is the cultural, historical context, which I refer to throughout this study as the Islamic system of principles and practices as situated in a contemporary Canadian
cultural context. The Islamic system is the simultaneous a source of the cultural context of the school, the curricular content and the learning outcomes. It is the motivation and often, but not in every case, the cultural and educational background of the educators. The Islamic system is also what parents send their children to the school to learn. It is, ultimately, the purpose for the existence of this particular weekend school. As Wertsch (1998) described, *purpose* derives from the cultural, historical context. Purpose can be implicit or explicit in educators, cultural tools and actions, and made visible through the social practices. Purpose can also be expanded or restricted depending upon analytic perspective and on the particular social context at hand (Wertsch, 1998). In this particular conceptual framework, purpose is a distinct element—expanded and explicit. The purpose of the Jamma Mosque School is to impart to children the Islamic system principles and practices. This purpose is visible in every aspect of every social practice and clearly defined in the school mission, as I discuss below.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Composed of sensitizing concepts drawn from sociocultural theory, this framework enabled me to see, organize, and understand my data.

The second component of the conceptual framework is the development of *psychological functions*, or consciousness. The context is mediated through social practices that lay the foundation for psychological functioning, or consciousness. This dialectic of social practices and the development of consciousness has been identified in the sociocultural literature: “Knowledge, consciousness, act to guide and direct the activity by which man [sic] alters his surroundings. Activity in the surround acts to correct and develop man’s consciousness”
In this way, actions in social practices (that reflect the context) are dialectically related to consciousness.

Social practices form the third component of the conceptual framework. They are the link between the cultural, historical context and the development of intermental functions. Social practices are distinct examples of mediated action, whereby educators in relationships with students use cultural tools within a social environment to mediate the cultural, historical context. Each of the social practices identified in this study is oriented toward the context, the Islamic system of principles and practices. Educators mediated the Islamic system with the students through social practices and these practices made up the unit of analysis in this study. As unified interactions between educator and child containing the social and the individual, the affective and the cognitive, social practices are the sites and sources of learning and development. In preserving unity, the interactions that take place in social practices are examined as a unity, irreducible to the words/actions of the educator, alone, or the student alone (Vadeboncoeur & Rahal, 2014) and the richness lies in the interaction between the two.

Educators create opportunities for learning through these social practices embedded in learning contexts (Vadeboncoeur & Rahal, 2014). Their perspectives of human learning and development within the social environment shape social practices. This was particularly important in this study, given research participants diverse cultural backgrounds, where one educator’s descriptions of a concept may be different than another’s; where what one person says may be different from what they actually do. In this case, observing social practices becomes an important way of understanding what educators say about human development in their interviews. I entered the research site, mindful of the possibility of contradiction between
educators’ perspectives and their interpretations of those perspectives in classroom social practices, as well as diversity amongst educators’ perspectives.

The conceptual framework illustrates the heterogeneous elements at work within social practices, including relationships between educators and students, the sociocultural environment, and cultural tools including content. In this study, the content of the social practices date back to the earliest days of Islamic education, where more experienced others engaged younger members of the community in order to teach and learn the Islamic system. History has illustrated (Menocal, 2002) that these social practices can be developmentally generative, moving with dialectic power toward expanded consciousness, or they can be the opposite, depending on how educators interpret and mediate the content of the whole Islamic system and how they configure the elements of the social practices including relationships, cultural tools and pedagogies. The mission statement of the Jamma Mosque School reveals a sense how the organizers of the mosque interpret the principles and practices. The school’s mission statement, containing four points, was to:

— Nurture students according to the belief and moral principles of Islam—code of conduct—good character and Islamic social manners.

— Learn the aspects of Islam and how the children can apply it in their everyday lives.

— Reinforce their connection to the Quran, which is our ultimate source of guidance by studying its explanation and the Quranic Arabic.

— Honoring the house of Allāh by practicing the noble manners in the Masjid. (Jamma Mosque Flyer)

These four points of the mission statement contain some of the conceptual themes identified in this study; each of them surfaced in each of the four social practices observed in the classrooms;
and they can be considered as outlining the content of the social practices that characterize the Jamma Mosque School. In the words of the research participants, Amira noted the Islamic system is a “life methodology… a divine way” (Amira, A11, 12/16/14, line 1474). Rayan said: “What we try to offer them [the children] are the principles of Islam so that they can take them out of the mosque and use them” (FN, Rayan, first meeting, 10/12/14).

Educators also mediated the Islamic system using Islamic cultural tools. Psychological cultural tool use is discussed in chapters 5 and 6. Here, I briefly mention the physical cultural tools that featured in the Jamma Mosque School and simultaneously served practical, historical, and ideological functions during engagement in the social practices. The Quran is one of the most important cultural tools and functions as both a physical and psychological cultural tool. It is a central social practice, as well as featuring as a cultural tool across other social practices. During congregational prayer, for example, verses of the Quran are recited as part of the prayer sequence. Prayer rugs serve a functional purpose; the color green, a decorative purpose, signaling that this is an Islamic space, along with the dome and the minaret as components of the mosque’s architecture. The clothes that the educators and students wear—headscarves for females, long beards and sometimes small white hats for males—are ideological markers signaling, “We are Muslims,” as well as serving deeper religious functions.

3.4.3 Ongoing Thematic Analysis

By the time I finished gathering my data, I had already written several analytic memos, which are preliminary analyses on the data (Saldaña, 2013). I had drawn some analytic memo sketches that attempted to note the relationships between ideas in Venn diagrams. I had read and re-read the transcripts and started jotting preliminary codes the data. Saldaña (2013) defined a
code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). My codes were driven by sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2002) in both the sociocultural and the Islamic education literature. Glaser’s (1965) constant comparative method of qualitative analysis is characterized by explicit coding and constantly redesigning the analysis to generate theory in a purposeful, systematic analytic fashion that stays close to the data. My analytic approach in this study cannot be considered as constant comparative analysis, because I did not redesign my interview, research or analytic questions as my study progressed. But I drew inspiration from Glaser’s (1965) description of the constant comparative method and wove together an ongoing analysis throughout my study. Thus, I started my analysis with the first observation and continued analysis through the data gathering, analysis, interpretation and writing phases of the research. This ongoing nature of my analysis meant that the analysis of extant material at each stage contributed to the next stage of the research in an iterative process as laid out in Table 3 below. Braun and Clark (2006) provided a comprehensive overview of thematic analysis, which guided my thematic analysis from this point forward. In this section, I review my thematic analysis starting with some initial analytic decisions. Then, I describe the process of analysis. I end with some thoughts about saturation in a dialectical study on social practices.
Table 3. Research Steps and Products

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<tr>
<th>Research Step</th>
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<td>Participant observations (1–3)</td>
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<td>Fieldnotes (FN)</td>
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<td>Analysis of fieldnotes</td>
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<td>Active Interview 1 Protocol</td>
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<td>Active Interview 1</td>
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<td>Transcript 1</td>
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<td>Observation 4 + Analysis (Phase 1)</td>
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<td>Active Interview 2 Protocol</td>
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<td>Analytic memo</td>
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<td>Active Interview 2 (member checking)</td>
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<td>Active Interview 2 Transcript</td>
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<td>Analysis (Phases 2–6)</td>
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<td>Thematic map</td>
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3.4.3.1 Analytic Decisions

In approaching the analysis of my data, I made three analytic decisions. First, I decided how I would define a theme. In this study, a theme is a recurring idea or code that relates to my research questions, the literature, or both, and that comes up across different interviews and field notes across the data set. Second, I considered whether I would describe my entire data set—generated by three research questions—or focus upon one aspect of it. Braun and Clark (2006) pointed out that rich description of a whole data set is useful when the topic under investigation is under-researched or participants’ perspectives on the topic are not known. Because the general topic of this study, human learning and development in the context of Islamic education, as well as Muslim educators’ voices and perspectives, was underrepresented in the literature, I decided to provide a rich description of the entire data set. I present findings and analysis of the research questions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Third, my research is clearly theoretically driven in the sense that I started with a theoretical understanding of human learning and development that I
examined against what I found in my research site in the words and social practices of my research participants. I locate myself in a middle position between explicit engagement with literature (theory) prior to initial analysis and absolutely no engagement at all. I began gathering data after having read the literature, written a draft of my literature review and considered sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2002). Then, I immersed myself in the data and did not go back to the literature until I was well into the analysis, coding and starting to see themes.

3.4.3.2 Analytic Process

Braun and Clark (2006) outlined six steps in the analytic process that I kept back-of-mind as I began my analysis. Over time, and the ongoing nature of my analysis, the steps blended into each other, their borders blurred rather than strict.

1. Familiarization. The first step involved becoming familiar with the data, transcribing, checking transcriptions and noting points of interest. I did this with my field notes before I conducted my first active interviews and with my field notes and interview transcripts before I conducted a final observation and second interview (elaboration and member checking) with each educator. One of the first tasks in familiarization involved making sure that participants had answered the interview questions. The interview questions were divided into three sections based on my three research questions, but sometimes, a participant offered information related to one research question while I was actually asking about another. So the task of mapping was important not only analytically, but also to ensure that the responses generated by the interview questions actually contributed to answering the research questions.

While I was doing this work, I started to highlight words and sentences that jumped out at me: ideas relevant to my research questions. This constituted preliminary coding, which was then
followed by coding (Saldaña, 2013): examining the data in relation to other transcripts and considering some sensitizing concepts drawn from the literature. From this preliminary look at the data, I started to see that teaching Islam involves not only teaching the system of Islam, but also how that system relates to the overarching secular culture in which the school is embedded. This first step of the analysis began during data collection and continued until I had transcribed, checked and become familiar with every interview and observation field note. At this point my second member checking interviews and final observations had been done and transcribed and I was ready to begin the second step of the analysis: coding.

2 Coding. Saldaña (2013) referred to coding as an interpretive act, a critical link between the data collected and the meanings made of the data, whereby the researcher is looking for consistencies and patterns across the data. In the act of coding, we bring to bear our theories, experiences, biases and passions. Braun and Clarke (2006) said, “Researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). With these words in mind, and my theory-driven research questions, I stayed close to the data itself. This phase involved going through my data in a fine-grained way and generating initial codes. I made use of my mapping work that divided the data into RQ1 and 2, and I coded within each research question. I identified some of the codes a priori from the theoretical concepts driving my research. Others were identified in light of my research focus on learning and development. Others I identified only within the data itself.

I employed the use of simultaneous coding, when one piece of data is coded twice. At this point, rather than seeing theory as limiting, I saw it as expansive, with room to be enriched by emic perspectives. Indeed, Vygotsky (1994) himself considered his theory as something that would evolve, change and expand over time and place. In this phase of the research, educators
explicitly described their work as developing a domain of the human being that secular social scientists, psychologists and educators have traditionally ignored—the spiritual domain—and that they were working on a timeline of human development that starts before conception and continues beyond death.

3. Searching for Themes. The next step of the analysis involved the search for themes and collating my codes into themes, which consisted of creating a superordinate category for a group of related codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) described a theme as capturing something important “about the data in relation to the research question” (p. 82) and they emphasized the importance of both a patterns in the data and consistency on the part of the researcher in defining a theme. Saldaña (2013) pointed out that a theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent, patterned experience and its manifestations may be observed at a superficial, surface or latent level. Constructed and applied by the researcher, a theme actually says more about the researcher than it does about the research participant.

In this study, I considered a theme to be a piece of data that related to my research questions, or the literature, or both. This was where theory and data merged. The theoretically-driven interpretative framework helped make visible action in the field notes. Ideally, a theme surfaced across the interviews and field notes of the different participants. Here, I spent more time on analytic memo sketching and collated the codes into four themes: those related to Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development; those related to social practices; those related to reconciling the Islamic system with the secular system in which the mosque school was embedded; and pedagogical practices that characterize the social practices in the classroom. Figure 2 presents a map of this initial phase of thematic analysis. This step of the analysis also involved careful revision of the themes and checking to see if the themes worked in
relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I later combined the last two themes into one because of the way that educators used the secular context as a pedagogical tool to mediate the Islamic system. I was left with three themes: Perspectives, Social Practices and Pedagogies. These three themes are developed in chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

Figure 2. Initial Themes

4. Reviewing and Naming the Themes. I continued collate the codes into themes and, throughout this process, I referred to the conceptual framework, which helped me make sense of what I was seeing in the data. As each of the three themes was large and complex, I started to sub-themes within each theme. Braun and Clark (2006) described sub-themes as “themes-within-themes” (p. 92); they provided structure and hierarchy of meaning within a theme. Here, I describe how I further analyzed the codes into themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1 was named, Perspectives. The codes that made up this theme involved educator’s perspectives on human learning and development. Analysis within the theme of Perspectives led
to the identification of four sub-themes: Unity, Contexts, We Act Islam, and Heritage of Etiquettes (social practices in relation to development). These sub-themes of Perspectives were not directly mapped to the social practices. Instead, they ran across the social practices taking place in the classrooms and surfaced in different ways in each one (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Sub-Themes within the Theme of Perspectives**

Theme 2 was named, Social Practices. I initially had another separate theme named Discursive Practices, but as I noticed how social practices contained discursive practices, and the difficulty of coding the two separately, I combined the two themes into one: Social Practices. This theme was a category for codes that described, defined, or involved social practices (see Figure 4). This theme was originally separated into two sub-themes: a) distinct social practices, whose boundaries set each one apart as a unique practice and b) the various social/spiritual/discursive *etiquettes* that were integrated throughout all of the social practices in the mosque school. Later, I collected them all under the term Social Practices: Heritage of
Etiquettes and, as a theme, make up the topic examined in Chapter 5. The phrase “Heritage of Etiquettes” came from a quote by Amira, describing what she would say before memorizing the Quran: “Oh God, give us the power to memorize it and give us the heritage of etiquettes of this Quran in our hearts” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 494–6). The term “heritage” evoked the deep historical roots of the Islamic social etiquette practices. The fact that Amira aimed for these etiquettes to be “in our hearts” located them as important cultural tools in social practice of Quran Work and other social practices. Therefore, it offered itself as an appropriate title encompassing the range of social practices in the Jamma Mosque.

Figure 4. Sub-Themes within the Theme of Social Practices

The third theme was named Reconciliations and it included codes that illustrated reconciliations between cultures, ages, and worldviews. The more time I spent at the research site, the more frequently I began to see evidence that there were actually two major categories of teaching/learning happening in the school. I first noticed signs of these categories during my
participant observations—educators seemed to be attempting to reconcile two distinct worldviews, two systems—and they became clearer in the coding phase of my analysis (see Figure 5).

The first category was mediation of the Islamic system of principles and practices. As mediators and interpreters of the Islamic system, the educators were drawing from a cultural, historical body of Islamic content, choosing what to share and elaborate with the students, and what to hold until the students were older. Educators were also drawing on historical repertoires of cultural tools, pedagogies and patterns of relationships that they supplemented with new tools. This parsing for children of a culturally- and historically-rooted system, intended for people of all ages, not only requires developmental knowledge, but also sensitivity to the needs and interests of the specific group of children who attend the Jamma Mosque School.

But the educators were also mediating a second category: that of the secular culture in which the mosque school was embedded, and how to negotiate that secular culture as a Muslim. Through the questions of the students, through the examples educators offered, through the way that the school approached Arabic language instruction, I found the educators mediating secular culture. Moreover, the educators were using the secular, Western culture as a foil in teaching Islam. It was this last point that motivated me to combine the theme of Reconciliation with the next theme, Pedagogies. For these educators, the purpose of mediating the secular context was, primarily, a pedagogical approach to explicating the Islamic system. A secondary purpose was to reconcile aspects of the secular, Western context with the Islamic system. Some of the sub-themes within Reconciliations were nuances within the Islamic system that I decided were beyond the scope of this analysis and so I did not analyze them further.
Theme 6 was named Pedagogies. These were codes concerning pedagogy, relationships and role of the educator. The educators’ passions for teaching Islam to Muslim children translated into data on pedagogy, relationships in the classroom and the role of the educator (see Figure 6). Given the fixed nature of Islamic educational material that dates back 1400 years, and the simultaneous need to re-interpret that content in every new culture and age, pedagogy holds perhaps the most promise in making Islamic principles and practices optimally relevant in today’s global, technological world. Therefore, Chapter 6 is dedicated to exploring both reconciliation and the pedagogies needed for that process.
5. Writing the interpretive sociocultural analysis. This final phase of the research involved interpreting the analysis and writing it into an analytic narrative, a story of the data, to be shared with the world at large. This phase involved six steps. First, I started by examining writing a framework of the thesis based upon the themes and subthemes. The three main themes—Perspectives, Social Practices, and Pedagogies—formed chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively. Second, I examined all of the data excerpts that I had collated into themes, looking for exemplars. After identifying one or two, I wrote around them: introducing them and then interpreting them. Third, I went back to the literature and re-read many of the key articles aiming to link my interpretations to the literature. This phase was a synthesis between my data and the literature that served a common goal: to make as clear and relevant as possible the themes of my research.
3.5 Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology used to answer the two research questions. Starting with my own positionality, the first section explored aspects of possible researcher bias. I also reported how I found the Jamma Mosque and approached it as a research site, and the criteria I used to invite research participants. In the second section of this chapter, I described the two qualitative methods that I used to gather data: participant observation and active interviewing. In the third section, I provided detail on the method of ongoing thematic analysis that I used to create codes and themes. This analytic process included reflexivity as a research tool.

Using participant observation and active interviews, the goal of this study was to gather Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development, and examine how these conceptions were enacted in social practices in the classroom. Through ongoing thematic analysis, three main findings were highlighted. The first finding, involving educators’ perspectives on human learning and development, is explored in Chapter 4. The second finding relates to the social practices through which the educators engaged the children toward specific learning and developmental objectives. In Muslim phraseology, the pursuit of excellence in social practices (iḥsān) leads to the expansion of a specifically Islamic consciousness (taqwá). This idea is examined in Chapter 5. The third finding is pedagogical. It points to the fact that the educators were not only mediating the Islamic system of principles and practices, but they were mediating the secular cultural context in which the mosque school is embedded. They used this context in both positive and negative ways to clarify the Islamic system of principles and practices. The ways in which educators approached the secular context had implications on the pedagogies they used. Chapter 6 explores this pedagogical finding along with the idea that
pedagogies, as components of social practices and vehicles for cognitive, social-emotional and spiritual transformation, hold potential for fostering developmentally generative practices in the classroom.
Chapter 4: Perspectives on Learning and Developing in the Islamic “Life Methodology”

In the first part of this chapter, I provide an overview of my research time at the Jamma Mosque weekend school, describing the general flow of the day in the school, and introducing the four educators. The second part of this chapter examines the first theme identified in this study, which also involves the first research question: What are Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development? Within the theme of Perspectives, I describe three sub-themes: Unity, Contexts of Development, and We Act Islam. I offer evidence that, for these educators, the learning and development of Muslim children was intrinsically interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices—containing content, pedagogies and learning goals intrinsic to itself.

Thematic analysis of the data highlighted a purpose behind the social practices and a goal in mediating the Islamic system, which lay at the heart of all that occurred at the Jamma Mosque School: nurturance of a specifically Islamic consciousness, or taqwá, which Amira described as follows:

When they [the children] understand their relationship with God, they will LOVE it…they cannot ever leave this amazing connection, this friendship. This is why we are doing the whole curriculum. There is Quran, there is Islamic Studies, [and Arabic]…so we have actually, we have three big, huge sections in here and all are related to that connection with God. That’s the thing. That’s the key. …[W]e need to love God otherwise it doesn’t make sense. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 283–290)
In this statement, Amira identified both a developmental goal and a pedagogical purpose underlying the social practices that feature at the Jamma Mosque School: nurturing an awareness of, and emotional connection to, God.

4.1 Research Time at the Jamma Mosque School

Passing by the Jamma Mosque on any given Sunday, children’s voices reciting the Quran floated out of the windows lining the ground floor of the mosque. With one small dome and a minaret pointing to the sky, the little white building vibrated with the practices happening inside. A parking lot lined the north side of the mosque and provided access to the women’s entrance. The women’s prayer room, spread with green carpets angled to point worshippers towards Mecca, was on the ground floor of the mosque. A spacious room for doing ritual ablution (wuḍū’) was next door, tiled from floor to ceiling, small stools face facets protruding from the wall. Next to the wuḍū’ room was a regular bathroom. Stairs led down to the basement, which housed all of the classrooms. A shelf standing at the entrance to this basement classroom section was lined with girls and women’s shoes.

A corridor ran the length of the basement with five classrooms branching from it—four small ones on the right-hand side and a large classroom on the left-hand side. This large classroom was Tala’s; she taught intermediate Level 2 girls (ages 8 to 10). Amira’s small classroom was across the corridor; she taught the advanced Level 3 girls (ages 9 to 12). A wooden partition bisected the corridor after Amira’s classroom and the male teachers’ classrooms were beyond the partition. First was Imran’s classroom. He taught the only mixed-gender class in the school: the beginner Level 1 (ages 7 to 9). Finally came Rayan’s classroom; he taught the advanced Level 3 boys (ages 8 to 12). The age ranges are approximate and
overlapping because classes are divided taking ability into account. The youngest boy in Rayan’s advanced class, for example, was seven years old and the oldest was 12. Although the age range was narrow—given the fact that the school technically serves the whole community—Rayan said that this was all the mosque school could handle at that time (Parents/students/teachers meeting, 2/1/15).

The Jamma Mosque school’s general routine began at 9:50AM, with children filtering in up to about 10:15AM. By that time, most of the children were in their particular classrooms, doors shut, and the mosque seemed mostly empty except for the mosque caretaker: a young man with a bushy red beard, who walked around the mosque grounds and headquartered at a desk in the reception of the men’s prayer area. Classes ran for approximately 50 minutes and then the children took a 20-minute break: snack and playtime. The male and female teachers coordinated with each other as to which classes used the outdoor playground; the classes that did not use the playground in the first break were often able to go out for the second break. Although this sharing of the playground was informal, it seemed that boys went outside more often than the girls, who played indoors, doing art or gymnastics in their large classroom. As the two girls classes came together, meeting in Tala’s room, Amira announced: “No outside today, just enjoy here and there” (FN, Amira PO4, 12/14/14).

In the short winter months, classes resumed for another hour (from approximately 11:20AM to 12:20PM) before the caretaker called the midday prayer over the loudspeaker, marking the final event of the day. During the longer days of fall and spring, classes would resume for another 40 minutes, from 12:20PM to 1:20PM, before the call to prayer. The day’s classes ended when the teachers and children heard the call to prayer (adhān). Then they would start to prepare for the prayer by practicing wudu’ (ritual ablution): everyone washed hands, face,
arms and feet in the tiled ablution room. The girls were supposed to already be wearing the headscarves, but many of them discarded their headscarves over the course of the class, much to Amira’s irritation: “It’s amazing how fast they take off their scarves when they get the chance” (FN, Tala PO1, 1/18/15). The girls put the scarves back on for prayer time.

By the time the second call to prayer was heard (iqama), about 15 minutes after the first call, the children were aligned for prayer. The boys and male teachers went upstairs to the men’s prayer space; the girls and female teachers were in the women’s prayer hall. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder in straight lines, facing Mecca. The female teachers were interspersed with the girls and they could see the men on a large screen TV in the corner of the room. The male teachers were also interspersed with the boys, with the imam standing in front, leading the prayer. They performed four cycles of prayer (rak‘āt) together as a group, including the sequence of standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting and standing together. The midday prayer was traditionally done silently: each person recited the words of the prayer, including verses of the Quran, individually. After the four rak‘āt, the group recited some verses from the Quran together and some supplications (du’ā’) out loud that are customarily recited after the prayer.

This post-prayer recitation happened in both the men’s and the women’s prayer halls, but it happened differently. Amira and Tala ensured that a different girl led the group each week and they assisted her if she made a mistake. In the men’s prayer hall, one of the male educators led the group and they practiced it briskly. Rayan emphasized that the group was not doing dhikr, which literally means remembrance of God and is associated with Sufi practices; rather, the educators led by example to show the children how to do it on their own. Rayan noted, “And to clarify to them that we are only doing this for teaching purposes, this is not what we do religiously. We don’t get together to do dhikr—that is not established in the sunnah (the way of
Muhammad)” (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 364–6). The end of the congregational prayer marked the end of the school day.

4.1.1 The Educators

The four educators who participated in this study at the Jamma Mosque School (see Table 1) shared three commonalities. First, each educator conducted his or her own class within this overall flow of the day. Second, each one was working with a curriculum that included the three major subject areas of Quran, Islamic Studies and Arabic. Third, each educator had key qualifications as identified by Rayan:

They have to know Arabic. They have to know Quran properly—*tajwīd*. They have to be a good English speaker—that’s a preference, you can’t always get it [laughs]. To have good Islamic foundations. They understand the deen, right? Not just coming to teach Arabic cause I know Arabic. No. They take Islam seriously and they want to practice it. And I would say, good Islamic knowledge—proper Islamic knowledge. If they have some experience, it would be an asset—especially with kids. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 831–842)

These were the qualifications that Rayan deemed important in being able to teach Islam. Beyond these commonalities, each educator had his or her own routines in the classroom, where they expressed individual nuances in teaching style and pedagogy and emphasized different things in the classroom. In the following section, I describe in more detail each of the four educators and how they organized the day in their classroom.
4.1.1.1 Amira

Amira was a small woman who wore a colorful abaya (flowing robe) and favored textured headscarves, like lace. She moved around the classrooms in a lively way, exuding positive, happy energy, and expressing passion for teaching Islam. Every time I entered her classroom, she greeted me enthusiastically with a hug and shared something she had recently learned. She often directed me to a You Tube clip to watch or a book to read. Her happy energy and laughter combined with firmness created a positive and collaborative atmosphere in the class. She had two daughters in her class. One participated as a student; the other as a “guest” because she was not yet seven years old. Deeply religious, Amira’s main message was that teaching Islamic studies is a parallel process between teacher and students as they deepened awareness of God, through the social practices contained in the curriculum rooted in Islam as a faith tradition. She was the only educator of the four in this study to be pursuing an educator certification program.

A light and joyful feeling pervaded the classrooms of both Amira and Tala. Their classrooms were right across the corridor from each other; Amira was in the small classroom and Tala was in the larger one. The two educators communicated closely with each other and brought their classes together at break time. Both of them seemed happy to be teaching at this mosque and Amira in particular. When the girls arrived in the morning, Amira greeted each girl with hugs, kisses, and compliments about many things including clothing: “Turkish style, I love it; so beautiful” (FN, Amira PO2, 1/19/14). Before class started, most of the girls went to the women’s prayer area to offer two rak‘āt of prayer. This is customary upon entering a mosque. Amira reminded the girls to do these prayers and also to put on their headscarves. She balanced between building rapport with them, using jokes, laughter, and banter, while reminding them of the
seriousness of the acts that they were learning: prayer, Quran and du‘ā’, as well as their attendant cultural tools, like headscarves:

Amira: Scarves, girls! All the time in the mosque!

She handed out headscarves to the girls who didn’t have them.

Karima: I don’t need two!

Amira: No, you put this one on first, and then the second one.

Karima: How do I look?

Amira: You look like mummy!

Sahar: My scarves smell like bananas! I will not wear it.

Sahar went to the rack where extra scarves and clothes for prayer were kept.

Amira: I told you that everyone needs to bring her own scarf!

Sahar: But mine smells like bananas! (FN, Amira PO4, 12/14/14)

Humorous dialogue, as illustrated in this data excerpt, characterized much of what happened in Amira’s classroom.

As some girls were doing their prayers, other girls were getting settled at their desks. Amira kept up light conversation with all of the children in turn. Cala arranged a Vente hot chocolate, a stuffed penguin called Ice Cube and a plastic squeaky octopus on her desk in front of her. Amira said al-salam ‘alaykum to Ice Cube as she passed by the desk. With the girls milling around, Amira said: “The du‘ā’ for entering the mosque: Only four words! Very important!” They said it together, first in Arabic and then in English: Allaahumma iftah lee 'abwaaba rahmatika. O Allāh, open the doors of your mercy.

Amira: And when I’m going to leave the masjid, what do I say?
Dalal said it: *Allaahumma 'innee 'as'aluka min fadhlika, Allaahumma'simnee minash-Shaytaanir-rajeem.* O Allāh, I ask for Your favor, O Allāh, protect me from Satan the rejected.

They repeated it together.

Amira: If you understand it and you *feel* it, you will never ever forget it!

Amira repeats: If you understand it and you feel it—

Jazmin: —you’ll never *get* it!

They all laughed, including Amira. Then they said it again.

Amira: And I have something to do with my feet!

Jazmin: I enter with my right and I leave with my left. (FN, Amira PO4, 12/14/14)

This data excerpt illustrates the way that Amira built rapport with the girls using banter and humor as a way to frame important principles and practices, like the du‘ā’ and etiquette for entering and leaving the mosque.

Amira’s room had plain white walls, a white board at the front, folding chairs, and tables as desks that held two or three children each. A window at the top of the front wall looked out onto the pavement of the parking lot. The cream-colored curtains were often drawn, with the winter sunlight filtering in, giving the room a cosy, yellow glow. If you could see out, you might see feet walking by the window. And car tires. Amira’s desk was at the front of the classroom, next to the whiteboard. The rest of the tables were often askew when we arrived. One day, as Amira went to straighten the tables into two parallel lines facing each other, she said to everyone in the room, “You know we are like a family, sharing knowledge” (FN, Amira PO2, 11/9/15). This statement revealed something of Amira’s perspective on learning and the climate she strived to create in her classroom.
Amira maintained her position as the focal point of knowledge through the class, and she regularly tapped the desk saying “Focus!” She was also warm, approachable and sometimes changed the course of her class based on the children’s additions or based on how she perceived the children’s energy level. She ran a brisk, disciplined class, reminding children to raise hands if they want to speak, and not speak out of turn. Although Amira often used questioning, her questions were usually in search of one answer. Sometimes a student arrived at the answer or the teacher provided it or built upon what the student said. Sometimes, the question was left for the kids to research on their own to return with the answer later.

Amira often started with Quran for the first part of the class, moving on to Islamic Studies and Arabic after the break, but it depended on the children:
When they are in a good mood—I start with the Quran... Islamic studies needs to be in a kind of lecture way—I ask them to read, answering questions, sharing thoughts etc. When they are in a very low mood—very low energy—I ask them to work altogether. Drawing on the board—it gives them a good feeling. So they are teaching themselves, supervising, you know, and enjoying, instead of sitting and listening. These are two different teaching methodologies that I am using with the girls. (Amira AI1, 12/16/14, line 392-404)

In this way, Amira was sensitive and responsive to the children’s changing needs and tried to meet them where they were on any particular day. Sometimes, I saw her shift the direction of the lesson based on something that came up or was presented by one of the students.

One day, it was raining outside and, during the break, a girl had written on the whiteboard: “Rain, rain go away!” When Amira saw it, she asked the girls, “Are you really asking the rain to go away?” Amira pretended to cry. One of the girls said quickly: “But we say, ‘Come again another day!’” Amira said, “Oh, ok.” The day’s lessons continued but, later, Amira returned to this topic.

Amira: Rain is a blessing from Allāh. Guess what? Every drop of the rain comes with an angel.

The room went quiet.

Amira: When it starts raining, there are a lot of angels around. It means it’s time to do a special du‘ā’. It’s time to do our own du‘ā’: you know the du‘ā’ of rain.

Dalia: “It was raining for a week!”

Amira: Alḥamd li’llāh (thanks to God)! We are so lucky that Allāh gives us the water and a clean place. What is the du‘ā’ of rain?

Sahar: Allaahumma ṣayyiban naafi’aa.
Amira translated it: Please Allāh make this rain a blessing and beneficial for us.

Amira: Then you can do your own du‘ā’: Allāh I am struggling with this surah, so please help me memorize it. (FN, Amira PO1, 11/2/14)

In this way, Amira seized upon something the girls expressed interest in (rain) and used it to teach them an Islamic practice.

Like the other educators, Amira emphasized manners in general, as well as specific manners in the mosque. In every class, she reminded the girls:

We start with the du‘ā’ of the masjid. Then we do our two rak‘āt. Then the third part is this: our manners in the masjid. I am here, but I am not alone. There are angels everywhere and they do not like loud voices. You can have fun with your friends, but you need to maintain the etiquette of the masjid in the way of the Prophet, peace be upon him. (FN, Amira PO4, 12/14/14)

The du‘ā’ and the rak‘āt were part of practicing the acts of worship that made up a distinct social practice in Amria’s class. The etiquette of the mosque is an example of how social etiquettes comprised an important aspect of the acts of worship. In the above data excerpt, Amira emphasized the social practices du‘ā’ and rak‘āt using the presence of angels and the example of Muhammad as unseen heuristics, evoking the girls’ imaginations to help modify their behavior in the mosque.

A short trip to the library illustrated Amira’s emphasis on manners. Before the trip, Amira said to the class: “Now we have a very special thing: We have 10 minutes to do our library quiz and then we will walk with the most excellent behavior to the library.” After the quiz, as the children were preparing to move from the classroom to the library, Amira asked, “What are our manners?” Two girls pretended to walk in slow motion. Then, all the children walked quietly to
the library. At the library, they discussed their quizzes and checked out books. When it was time to go back to the classroom, Amira said, “Say, ‘Jazākum allāh khayran’ when you leave. Line up girls.” When the girls got back to the classroom, Amira said, “Thank you for your good manners” (FM, Amira PO1, 11/2/14). These examples of the ways in which Amira engaged her students illustrated what she deemed important to emphasize, some of the pedagogical approaches she choose, and her methods of encouraging compliance through encouragement, humor, building rapport, and respectful communication with the girls.

4.1.1.2 Rayan

Rayan was a young man with a medium-length beard who alternated between wearing Western clothes and the traditional thobes of the Middle East. He was the only educator in the group who was not born and raised in an Arab–Muslim country. Being Albanian, he grew up in southeastern Europe and immigrated to Canada with his family as an adolescent. Despite his serious demeanor, he easily engaged in dialogue, joking, and laughing with the boys in his class.

Rayan’s classroom was like Amira’s and Imran’s: small, north-facing, with windows looking on to the parking lot at ground level. It was deeper into the men’s area and slightly smaller. Rayan always set up his room with the desks in rows, facing forward toward where he sat at the front of the class. He wore a winter coat, most classes, and stroked his beard as he listened to the students going through the material. There were seven boys in the class between the ages of 7 and 10 years old. I started to recognize the boys by their voices because I was observing from behind a wooden partition at the back of the classroom. One had a high-pitched voice and trouble reading English; another spoke very fast; two had a slight South Asian accents; another a thick Arabic accent.
Rayan usually started with Quran recitation, reviewing the previously-memorized material first, then having each child recite individually the new material he was working on. After Quran, the class did Islamic Studies from the textbook, ending with Arabic. During two of my observations, Rayan had a combined class because one of the other male teachers was traveling. This made things more difficult, as the children were at different levels. Rayan managed the differentiated class by telling lengthy stories about the prophets and then, later, quizzing the children on the information contained. In every class, Rayan engaged in dialogue with the children, welcoming their thoughts and contributions, asking them to clarify and encouraging them with comments like, “Good point, mā shā’a allāh” (FN, Rayan PO4, 3/15/15). Although his storytelling captivated everyone in the room, including me, he sometimes seemed more excited about his role as imam than educator. He said, traditionally, the imam always taught members of the community: “The Imam has always been the teacher—especially for Quran. Everywhere you go, that’s been the case. If he’s the imam of the masjid, he’s usually the one who taught them Quran, or the Arabic letters” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/2014, line 993–995).

To this end, towards the end of class, Rayan would take the boys up to the prayer hall early, right after the first call to prayer. He would then spend the next 15 minutes moving between individual children and small groups of children, directing and modifying their behavior in the mosque. This was another unique aspect of Rayan’s class: practice in a real mosque with a real imam.

In holding the position of the imam in the mosque, Rayan had to deal with complicated issues in the community that sometimes made their way into the weekend school. These issues included how to enforce the conservative practices of the mosque while still welcoming Muslims of heterogeneous backgrounds and how to ensure that ethnic groups did not cluster into cliques,
including amongst the children: “You can’t play with us because you are Arab and we are Pakistani” (FN, Mosque BBQ, 05/30/15). Another issue was how to respectfully handle Shia Muslims in the Sunni mosque. Rayan related a story about a Shia Muslim family who came to pray in the mosque, one day, and they brought small pallets of clay upon which to lay their foreheads. Rayan approached them with a friendly attitude and encouraged them to pray at the mosque, but he told them that their stones were not allowed:

How could we allow that in the masjid when Allāh says: \( \text{wa annā al-masājid lillāh} \)—that the mosques are for Allāh? For worshipping Allāh; for calling on Allāh? So nothing else that is not legislated should be allowed there. That’s the way we are looking at it. So they should respect that. They already know it’s a Sunni mosque. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 1399–1403)

In this way, Rayan had a complicated task of upholding the rules of the conservative Sunni mosque, and imparting these rules to the children in the weekend school, while balancing the needs of a heterogeneous congregation embedded within a secular, Western context. Rayan seemed to embrace this task, however, and was dedicated to presenting Islam as a system of principles and practices to be imparted to the students through the united efforts of home/school/mosque in the most orthodox way possible.

This was one of the reasons that he asked me to observe his classroom from behind a partition, a folding, portable partition. Before my first observation in this class, he said in an email, “I will bring in a divider to act as a barrier during our sessions” (personal communication, 11/16/14). I was not sure whether this was because I was a woman in a male teacher’s classroom, or if the partition was to prevent me from distracting the children and disrupting the class. When
I asked Amira what she thought, she suggested that maybe Rayan was using the situation to model male/female relations for the students. “Modesty in Islam is so important. The children need to know how to conduct their way and never compromise their faith with anything that happens in this life” (FN, Rayan, PO1, 11/23/14). But, later, when I asked Rayan about it, during our first interview, he expressed simply respecting and upholding mosque norms: “So to respect that, we put [the partition]. Because different people come in and say, ‘What’s going on?’ They get confused. Don’t let them get confused” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 1252-1255). In this way, he described the partition as part of the Islamic system of social etiquette that segregates men and women in public space. In using the partition, Rayan was simply respecting and enacting Islamic social etiquette. If he didn’t use it, members of the mosque community might get confused.

4.1.1.3 Tala

Tala was a young woman who wore mostly black flowing abayas with black or colored headscarves and moved in a slow, deliberate fashion. Her face retained a calm, serene expression no matter what was going on in her classroom. She was the mother of five children, two of whom attended her class. Despite the fact that she had been in Canada for the least amount of time, 4.5 years, and retained a strong connection to her home country of Yemen, she spoke English with only the slightest trace of an Arabic accent. She seemed both excited to use aspects of the non-Muslim culture in teaching Islam and eager to help her children thrive in that culture.

My first day in Tala’s classroom was her first day back to the Jamma Mosque School after delivering her fifth baby. Everyone greeted Tala, who taught the Level 2, intermediate, class: six girls between the ages of 8 and 10. There were high windows along the south wall. The winter sunshine filtered in through the window and I could see bare tree branches outside. The large
size and the view made this the most lovely classroom in the school. Tala often set up her classroom with three gray plastic desks in a semicircle facing her, desk at the front of the room, and a whiteboard, but she seemed ambivalent about desk arrangement. For my first three observations, the plastic grey desks were set up in a semicircle with everyone facing each other; on my fourth observation, the desks were set up in rows (FN, Tala PO2, 1/25/15).

For the first four months of this study, the back part of Tala’s room was the female prayer area (later, the main female hall opened upstairs). It had dark green rugs on the floor on an angle facing the Qibla, the geographical direction of Mecca to which Muslims pray. The girls enjoyed doing gymnastics on the rugs during break time. There was a bookshelf on the back wall, holding Qurans and other Islamic books. There were also some wooden Quran holders scattered about the prayer area, as well as some meter-by-meter wooden squares with cut-out handles that were used for putting in front of a person praying so that the line between them and the Qibla would not be broken by someone passing by. These wooden squares were used for a variety of purposes over the four classes I observed. Once, after learning some Arabic with Tala, one of her daughters made a little house of three wooden squares and sat inside to review her Arabic. This was her idea, and Tala gave her the space to make this little study space for herself.
Gradually, before class started, each girl made her way to the prayer area and offered two rakʿāt of prayer to greet the mosque. I joined them. Tala prayed too, finished and went to set up at front of the class. Amira came in with a bag of scarves and encouraged the girls to put them on. She consulted with Tala for a moment about what the girls would be learning that day. Then Amira went to pray her two rakʿāt. Both Amira and Tala prayed two rakʿāt upon entering the mosque. In doing so, they were simultaneously role modeling and being authentic as teachers: they do this because it is part of their own religious practice. When Amira finished her prayers, she returned to talk with Tala about the day’s lesson: “We’ll do one hour and then a tiny break!” She backed out of the door blowing kisses and closed it (FN, Tala PO1, 1/18/15).
There was no indicator marking the starting point of class, like a du‘ā’ in Amira’s class. Tala launched straight into Quran recitation. She usually began with whole group recitation as review before moving on to individual recitation; each girl recited what she was currently working on. They spent the first hour on Quran and the second hour on Islamic Studies, saving Arabic grammar to the end. But like the other educators’ classes, impromptu Arabic grammar lessons punctuated every class. At break time, the girls usually played in the back of the large room. One day, they had a long skipping rope. They all got in a line and waited their turn to jump. They also took turns swinging the rope. It was harmony; collaboration organized by the children themselves. An 8-year-old girl, Bayan, was crawling around the floor on her hands and knees, pretending to be a cat. She wore white mittens with fingers exposed (FN, Tala PO4, 04/05/15).

Tala was gentle and spoke in a quiet way to the girls, engaging them in dialogue. She used questioning, listened to them and honored their contributions. One day, when she was teaching about one of the main Islamic practices of zakat, or obligatory charity, one of the girls offered an idea:

Tala: Hemma just said something important, what did you say Hemma?

Hemma: Kindness!

Tala: Yes! Giving advice, help, kindness, a smile… this is all charity. (FN Tala PO1, 01/18/15)

Actively honoring the girls’ contributions was something that Tala did often and it served to build rapport in the classroom. Another day, one of the girls, Karima, arrived late. Tala asked her to pray her two rak‘āt to greet the mosque. Karima took time getting her headscarf on. She
prayed and then joined the group. She was dressed in a red party dress. “I have to leave early today…” she said.

Tala: Because you’re going to a party?
Karima: Yes [smiling].

Tala: Well, you look beautiful. (FN, Tala PO2, 01/25/15)

In ways like this, Tala affirmed the girls and built relationships with them by giving importance to the ideas they offered and expressing interest in their lives outside the mosque, which they brought into the classroom.

Tala’s discipline strategies were also gentle, consisting mostly of subtle threats of negative consequences, as in the example below, and they didn’t appear to have much affect upon her relationships with the children, or whether or not the children liked her. This example features Yara, a particularly energetic student, who would often talk to the other children while Tala was trying to teach. One day, Yara was being disruptive. She announced to the class, “I’m biking to the aquarium today.”

Tala: I’m going to tell your mum not to take you today.
Yara: My mum is working.
Tala: Your dad…
Yara: My dad is working…
Tala: I will tell whoever is taking you to the aquarium not to take you today—because you are not focusing in class.
Karima: You can’t tell her parents!
Tala: I can tell her parents!
Yara: I am going to focus.
Tala looks calmly at her: You’re going to focus?

Conversation broke out amongst the girls as they shared discipline strategies from their respective schools: a naughty sheet that the student has to take home for parents to sign; number of marks on the board representing the number of minutes the student has to stay after school. Yara did focus on this conversation and Tala gave them the space to discuss discipline strategies for a minute or so before one girl changed the subject and asked Tala if they could play the reading game, which was one of Tala’s strategies for learning Arabic. All the children started chanting: The reading game! The reading game! The reading game!

Tala: The reading game is after we read from the green book [The green book was an Arabic textbook with Quranic vocabulary]! Now it’s break time.

Girls: We don’t want a break!

All the girls crowded around Tala. They were all clutching their green books. They all wanted to go first. Yara was hugging Tala, with her head on her chest.

Tala turned to me: They don’t want a break! I want a break!

Karima screamed, standing on her chair.

Tala: We don’t scream in the masjid.

Tala collected all the green books from the girls: I’m going to mix them up and then I will pick them and that’s the order. No complaining.

Tala picked a book and it was Sarah’s turn first.

Each girl went up to Tala, one-by-one, to read with her. (FN, Tala PO4, 04/05/15)

Although all the other children in the school were on break, this class decided to pursue Arabic grammar instead. This data excerpt illustrates the ways that Tala related to the students. She communicated with them, even when it came to disruptive behavior. Although she threatened to
tell Yara’s care givers not to take her to the aquarium, and lost control of the class as they discussed discipline strategies from school, she gave the children the space to do that and then she altered her teaching plan for the day to accommodate their wishes. They wanted to play the reading game, so Tala accommodated them. The fact that the girls were excited about Arabic grammar and even chose it over a break is testimony to the fact that some of Tala’s pedagogies were working.

4.1.1.4 Imran

Imran was the youngest teacher, a small and energetic man. He was clean-shaven and wore neat Western clothing. He was one of the more recent arrivals in Canada and he spoke with a heavy Arabic accent. He didn’t ask me to sit behind a screen; not even in the mosque, when we went up there for the children to take a test. Imran’s classroom was one of the smaller, north-facing classrooms, in between Amira’s and Rayan’s. The room was always set up in the traditional way: tables in rows, facing forward, teacher at the front of the room. During one of the observations, Imran entered in a friendly way, saying “Al-salām ‘alaykum!” as he walked through the door. He took off his jacket. The students sat in three rows, two to a table: there were six in all. A seventh, a large boy named Mir, entered and stared at Imran.

Imran: What do you say?

Mir: Al-salām ‘alaykum!

A child made space for him at one of the tables, and Mir whispered, “Jazākum allāh khayran (may God reward you with the best).”

Imran: Did you hear what he said? What did you say? Loud voice!

Mir [louder]: Jazākum allāh khayran! (FN, Imran PO1, 2/15/15)
This focus on Islamic discursive practices was characteristic of Imran’s class. He emphasized the Arabic expressions and even had the children act them out in order to practice them. He would then correct pronunciation. Like the other educators, Imran started every class with a review of the Quran that the children had previously memorized. He had each child recite individually, first, and he was encouraging to the group: “So we did it, right? Faiz, I need you to be a little more focused about sūrat al-nās (a chapter of the Quran). But we did it, and with tajwīd (grammar rules specific to Quran) too, mā sha’a allāh! (FN, Imran PO1, 02/15/15). Also like the other educators, Imran interjected Arabic grammar throughout his class.

For the most part, Imran was gentle and caring, asking the children questions like, “How are you feeling today? You were sick last week” with a kind face, smiling face (FN, PO1, 02/15/15). He put his arm around each child as he led him individually up to the mosque to do a verbal test. Imran was proud of their performance on their first test; I saw him in the hall, after class, relating the results to Rayan (FN, Imran PO1, 02/15/15).

Yet he was simultaneously very strict. He emphasized that the children should sit during the whole lesson with their hands on the desks, facing forward. When they lined up to move around the school, they had to be perfectly aligned. When he spoke, no one else did. He used reward and punishment in terms of saying things like: “Listen! If you don’t listen, no test! Do you want me to take two marks away right now?!” (FN, Imran, PO2, 02/22/15).

He also seemed to be drawing upon pedagogy imported directly from his home cultural context. In this example, the children were working on a lesson when he suddenly said, “Ok, line up!” The children get into a line.

Mido: Are we going to do stretches?

Imran: Yes.
Children: Yipee!

Imran called out a word in Arabic, the children raised their arms above their heads. He called the next word, their arms moved to the side; to the front; down—like a military exercise. After the stretches, the children remained in line. They were facing the white board. Imran called out an Arabic letter and its placement in the word: “Ba, in the beginning!”

The first child in line went up to write it on the board. When the child finished, he moved to the end of the line.

Imran: Ba, in the middle!

The next child went up, wrote the letter on the board.

Imran: Ba, in the end!

The children jigged in line. When Imran saw them jigging, he called out for them to stop. When they were finished, he celebrated the children’s efforts collectively by counting the number of letters that they knew and could do: seven. (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15)

In this way, Imran used group work to make learning Arabic letters more interesting for the children. They seemed to enjoy the exercises, which looked like a military exercise in Arabic and culturally different from what one might find in a Western classroom. He was passionate about teaching Islam to children, motivated to develop relationships with them and their families, and interested in teaching Islamic Studies in creative ways. He was the only educator that I observed using acting as a pedagogical tool to teach Islamic social etiquette and Arabic (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15).

Imran came to Canada several years ago with a mission to save money to send back home, learn English, and start a career. Once in Canada, he became involved in the local Islamic
institutions, started learning the Quran and, eventually, learned how to teach the Quran. He was passionate about teaching Quran and Islam; throughout my interviews with him, and again in my observations, I saw him highlight the importance of consistency in Islamic education across home/school/mosque contexts for Muslim children.

Two months after my study was over, I ran into Imran at a community event and he told me that the owner of the mosque, Sheikh Faisal, was sending him to Malaysia to study Islamic fiqh (personal communication, 07/17/15). Traditionally, in terms of Islamic learning and development, Muslims traveled to learn from more experienced others. Rayan, who himself spent two years in Egypt learning Arabic and Islam, referred to this traveling for knowledge as ideal: “Whomever can do that, I would still recommend that. It’s the best way” (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 127). This is clearly what Imran was doing, with the support of Sheikh Faisal, who was nurturing a person who had passion for Islam and leadership skills. While I was happy for Imran to have this chance to further his knowledge, I wondered how the experience in Malaysia might translate into the kind of teacher for Canadian Muslim children that Imran would become.

4.1.2 The Jamma Mosque as Outpost of Islam

Dean of the Cambridge Muslim College, Timothy Winter referred to British mosques as outposts of global Islam (Winter, 2015), and the same goes for all mosques, anywhere. What was striking about the Jamma Mosque as well as its geographical location in Canada, was its ideological location; it spanned continents. Sheikh Faisal sent Imran to Malaysia for further education. Sheikh Faisal, himself, divided his time between Canada and the Arabian Gulf. None of the educators in the mosque school were born in Canada—Amira was from Algeria, Rayan was from Kosovo, Tala was from Yemen, and Imran was from Palestine—and they were all
ideologically connected to these places. Regardless of the number of years they have been living in Canada, which ranged from 4.5 (Tala) to 16 years (Rayan), each educator referenced their particular country of origin in the interview and three of the four educators—Amira, Rayan and Imran—mentioned their countries of origin initially when asked about how they learned Islam. Although Tala didn’t immediately reference her home country when asked how she learned Islam, she made perhaps the most references of all the educators to her home country of Yemen, referring to it as “back home” (AI1, 02/03/15, lines 315, 1057, 1086, 1096, 1117). She said: “Back home, we would be told, ‘You have to pray, you have to pray, you have to pray!’” (line 849–850). In talking about the early days at the Jamma Mosque when she was one of the only teachers and had to come up with her own curriculum, she described drawing from “how I learned from back home” (line 644). And, most pointedly, when asked about the objectives of Islamic education, she said: “Trying to keep up with whatever the people back home are doing” (AI1, 02/03/15, line 569; emphasis added).

A further point on ethnic diversity in the Jamma Mosque was the diversity of its community members. In Rayan’s class one day, the boys were having their break inside the classroom because it was raining outside. They were asking each other about the places they have traveled. Then Rayan said, “Ok stop!” and the following dialogue took place:

Rayan: Abudi, where do you come from originally?

Abudi: India.

Rayan: Muhammad?

Muhammad: Egypt

Rayan: Abdullah?

Abdullah: Pakistan
Rayan: Hamed?

Hamed: Palestine. (FN, Rayan PO1, 11/23/14)

The ethnic diversity of its members was a distinct quality of the Jamma Mosque, as it is a distinct quality the global Muslim community. Islam has always been interpreted through the lens of the cultures in which it is practiced: “In history, Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal clear river. Its waters… reflect the bedrock (indigenous culture) over which they flow” (Abd-Allah, 2004, p. 1). This means that while the Islamic system of principles and practices has its own distinct cultural practices, it also takes on new practices in different cultural contexts. This is significant when considering the ways in which to mediate the Islamic system of principles and practices, itself a cultural system, in a secular, Western cultural system, like Canada. This is further explored in Chapter 6.

4.1.3 Summary

Within the overall routine and curriculum of the Jamma Mosque School, the educators had considerable freedom to teach the material according to their own unique styles. All of them nurtured close relationships with the students, participated with the students in the acts of worship and led by example. The particular pedagogies that each one used in the classroom, and discipline strategies, varied amongst them. This will be examined in the chapters to come.

The degree to which I participated in each educator’s classroom also varied. Part of that variation was based on gender. For example, I joined the line of women and girls during congregational prayer when I was observing in the women’s section. But I prayed in the corner of the mosque behind a barrier when I was observing in the men’s section. During break time in the women’s section, I spent time with Amira and Tala and their female students. But during
break time in the men’s section, I either observed the educators and boys playing outside from
behind a glass door or, if it was raining, I stayed in the back of the classroom. I was most
participatory in Amira’s classroom—she once asked me to teach half the class while she taught
the other class—and least participatory in Rayan’s class, where I sat hidden behind a partition.
The heterogeneous nature of my research time in the Jamma Mosque School, and the differences
amongst the educators, made for rich data, which I analyzed into three themes: Perspectives,
Social Practices, and Pedagogies. Perspectives are described next and Social Practices and
Pedagogies are explored in the chapters to come.

4.2 Perspectives on Learning and Development

The first theme in this study involves Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning
and development. Within this theme, I identified three sub-themes that are discussed in this
chapter: Unity, Contexts of Development, and We Act Islam. I constructed these three sub-
themes out of data from the two active interviews of each educator and from observing the social
practices educators used to mediate Islam in the classrooms. The first sub-theme is Unity, the
idea that the learning and development of Muslim children is intrinsically tied to the Islamic
system of principles and practices. The second and third sub-themes involve aspects of social
practices that the educators identified as important in Muslim children’s learning and
development. The sub-theme Contexts of Development highlights the importance of social
environments, or contexts; the sub-theme We Act Islam foregrounds the role of more
experienced others in authentically role modeling final forms of Islamic social practices.
Together, these three sub-themes serve to answer my first research question: what are Muslim
educators’ perspectives on human learning and development?
4.2.1 Unity

This first sub-theme can be seen in across the data set in each social practice and almost every utterance an educator made: Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development are intrinsically interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices and cannot be understood outside of that system. None of the educators referenced any theories of human learning and development, Western or otherwise. Looking a little bit closer at the data around this sub-theme of Unity, there are two aspects to consider. First, the integrated nature of learning and development within the Islamic system itself means that learning Islamic principles and practices is intended for a specifically Islamic development, which takes places across the domains of a person, across the lifespan.

The second aspect of the sub-theme of Unity is that the Islamic system contains learning and developmental objectives unique to itself, which the entire Islamic system is intended to nurture. At the heart of these objectives is taqwá, or consciousness of God. The expansion of taqwá is both a quality of the end-point of human learning and development and the ultimate objective of Islamic education. Further, taqwá is dialectally related to iḥsān or refinement toward excellence of behavior, which is one of the reasons behind the emphasis on etiquette and behavior in the school. Now I examine these aspects in turn.

4.2.1.1 The Integrated Nature of Islamic Learning and Domains of Development

Learning and development were integrated within the Islamic system of principles and practices, with God at the center, and could be understood outside of it. Amira said:
God asks us to have the both [secular and spiritual knowledge]. But… the way, the easiest way, to get the secular knowledge, it starts with the spiritual knowledge first. Because the wisdom … comes from God, not from something else, someone else. He’s giving us neurons and food to think; do our math; to do everything. (Amira, AI1 12/16/14, line 209–212)

In this data excerpt, Amira set awareness of God at the center of all knowledge and suggested that the best ways to grow secular knowledge is to pursue spiritual knowledge, which, in this context, involved the knowledge of the Islamic system of principles and practices.

Both Rayan and Sheikh Faisal made reference to the concept of fitrah (essential nature), which, according to the Quran, is the original theistic human state, and which derives its common meaning from one of the saying of Muhammad whereby God creates children according to fitrah, and then their parents later make them Jews or Christians (Esposito, 2014). Rayan referenced this hadith, as did Sheikh Faisal:

Islam is a religion of the human’s natural disposition and inclination, wherein our Prophet may Allāh exalt his mention and grant him peace said, ‘There isn’t a newborn except that he’s born on the fitrah, but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.’ Related in the Collection of Saheeh al-Bukhari. (Faisal, email interview, 01/22/15, line 39–42; Bukhari, Volume 6, Book 60, Number 298)

Here, Rayan and Faisal are referring to this essential human state called the fitrah, a state of optimal human functioning in which all domains of human development—cognition, emotion, spirit, body—are integrated. In an elliptical way, these educators are saying that human learning and development is a return to this de facto state and that it is the job of educators to nurture this
fitrah in children. The process of learning within Islamic education is the process of integrating these domains in light of fitrah and toward the development of taqwá.

The educators in this study referred to elements of our human selves, such as spirit, that do not often surface in secular definitions of human learning and development. In Amira’s description of human learning and development, she was explicit: “We have to purify our hearts. So knowledge and heart and spirituality are connected all together” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 179–180). Tala also emphasized the importance of balancing the inner (spiritual) with the outer (practical) when she was speaking about Muslim exemplars:

- They do the actions on the outside and they work on the inside too. That’s the best part.
- Because you can’t just leave the outside and keep the inside; and you can’t just leave the inside and keep the outside. You have to be always balanced. (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 362-366)

In sharing this balanced quality of exemplary Muslim leaders, Tala raised an important point that Muslim educators should consider across their classrooms. Critiques of Muslim educational practices focus on an imbalance in the inner and outer work; most emphasis in Muslim classrooms is put upon outer work, the rules and prohibitions of the religion, rather than its soul (Ramadan, 2005).

Along with identifying spirit, the educators emphasized heart; Amira, perhaps, most of all: “God changes the heart first. What does this mean? In human development, I have to touch the heart first. When the heart is touched, the thought comes. And the action is there” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 139–14). She also referred to teaching children Quran as, “To stick the āyat on their hearts” (line 675–6). This sentence brings to mind the way that cultural tools, when integrated into a person’s cognitive structure, change psychological functioning (Vygotsky,
Sticking *āyat* on the heart—or the appropriation of *āyat*—would result in qualitative changes in a person.

Imran spoke of awareness, insight, being rooted in the heart and when speaking about using affection in his dealings with the students, Imran identified the source of that affection as coming from his heart: “Maybe it developed from my heart, from feeling. I have to be friends with them [the students]. When I am friends with them, they will be more peaceful. They will have more open heart to get knowledge from me” (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, ln 1194–1197). In this quote, he evoked the importance of both educator’s and students’ hearts, identifying that children learn better when their hearts are open, essentially, when the learning environment is affectively-positive.

Tala mentioned that children learn and develop faster when they are emotionally invested: “What I see is that some kids develop depending on what they want to do.” (Tala, AI1, 02/05/15, line 67). She also described teaching/learning the Islamic system with children as planting it in their hearts:

You have to plant Islam in their hearts first… for them to go with it. So that you don’t have to worry about them later. Whatever changes they see, whatever changes they get to do, they know they have to go back to the real thing. Whatever was planted from the very beginning. We have a saying: *Al-‘ilm fī al-ṣīghr ka al-naqsh ‘alá al-ḥajar*. Learning when you are young is like a carving on a rock. (Tala, AI1, 02/5/15, line 573–579)

In speaking of planting Islam in the hearts of children so that it grows with them, Tala emphasized the important role of emotion in learning and development. Each of the educators was speaking of the same concept using different words.
For his part, Rayan rooted the importance of emotion and affection in illustrations from the life of Muhammad, who said, “Whoever is not merciful to our young ones, he is not from us.” Rayan was drawing upon a hadith (saying of Muhammad) stating: “He is not of us who does not have mercy on young children, nor honor the elderly” (related in Al Tirmidhi). Rayan elaborated Muhammad’s quote with a story from his life:

Once the Prophet, ‘alayhi al-ṣalāh wa-al-salām, he was hugging his grandchildren, kissing them. Another man walked by and said, ‘You do that? You hug and kiss your kids?’ [Rayan laughs] And what did he [Muhammad] do, a firm and harsh reply? He said, ‘What can I do if Allāh has removed mercy from your heart?’” (Rayan, Al1, 12/17/14, line 97–101)

Rayan, like the other educators, used stories from Muhammad’s life to illustrate important guidelines for Muslim teachers today. Muhammad is considered by Muslims to be the ultimate educator. Here, in describing how Muhammad was affectionate with his grandchildren, Rayan was highlighting the importance of kindness, mercy and affection in the Islamic classroom. In other words, creating an affectively positive social environment was a precedence set by Muhammad.

Considering the role of the heart in Islamic education, and to understand the ways in which the educators used the term, I turned to Al-Ghazzali, a sixth-century religious scholar and architect of the Islamic educational principles that have echoed across history, including the idea of education as guidance of the young (Gunther, 2006). Al-Ghazzali considered the heart as a spiritual subtly, connected to the physical heart, and the essence of a person. The heart can move towards perfection only through knowledge, education, and good morals. True knowledge, according to Al-Ghazzali, is “not simply a memorized accumulation of facts but rather ‘a light
which floods the heart”’ (as quoted in Gunther, 2006, p. 382). The necessary involvement of the heart, and emotion, in learning and development—and its connection to cognition and action—seems to be consistent with Vygotsky’s (1994) concept of perezhivanie, or emotional experience, as framing the unified interactions between a child and the environment.

Imran was the only educator to mention physical aspects of development:

Omar, raḍiyā allāhu ‘anhu (God be pleased with him), said, ‘Teach them [children] swimming, archery and horseback riding.’ But for the second one—archery—in that time [at the time of the Prophet], all they had was a bow and arrow. But now we have lots of things. Like the golf and the baseball… (Imran, Al2, 05/15/15, line 392–396)

The fact that Imran here updated archery to golf and baseball has a couple of implications. First, it revealed something that the educators implicitly engaged in often, but rarely described explicitly: their own interpretations and applications of Islamic principles in varied, diverse and nuanced ways. Imran stated explicitly that there is only one Islam and yet he naturally interpreted and applied the principles differently, minute by minute, depending upon the situation at hand. Ramadan (2013) explained this as follows: “[Th]ere is one Islam with various interpretations and many ways of dealing with each interpretation” (p. 109). Second, Imran’s quote speaks to a larger idea about teaching, learning, and living the Islamic system in a modern age: the principles need to be adapted given contemporary time and place. While this is a crucially important process to help children learn how to do, none of the educators in this study explicitly articulated it with the children. This concept is further explored in Chapter 6.
4.2.1.2 Objectives of Islamic Education, Objectives of Development

The second aspect of Unity as a sub-theme of Islamic learning and development is that the Islamic system contains goals and objectives unique to itself. According to these educators, the objectives of Islamic education and human development are one and the same: a well-developed person is a Muslim person. This was explicitly evidenced in the responses of two of the educators when asked to describe a well-developed person. For Amira, she answered both questions with one answer: “There are two keys here: respect and peace. We should reflect that in our character. No matter what our position is—mother, teacher, student. That is the goal of Islamic education—for me” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 238–240). She went on to describe peace as:

…beauty in the heart and believing on all the pillars of iman (faith). Anything that happens to me—whatever, I am ten or 60 years old, whatever happens to me—I have to be happy. This happiness brings me peace in my life because I know that Allah is controlling everything—this doesn’t mean that He is controlling my actions—but He is educating me to be in a very good attitude. (line 242–248)

Here, Amira is describing the peace that comes from believing that the events of her life are divinely sequenced and intended for her own betterment and education. Anything that happens, then, she accepts as being educative. This acceptance is what leads to being “in a very good attitude,” which is the attitude of acceptance, positive thinking and, ultimately, peace. Amira went on to describe the second component—respect—as patience and as knowing how to deal with others, including siblings and parents. She concluded by saying: “Peace and respect, they are the brilliant components. We can have as final products, not physical products, but attitudes,
in these kids” (line 257–258). Both of these attitudes are constructed upon a foundation of faith
in God as orchestrating and educating, as Amira will later describe.

Rayan started his description of a well-developed person as going back to the parents, who
seek “means and goals, which are appropriate to Islam” to manage their children’s growth
properly (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 69–74). When he described a well-developed child, he said:

   And to describe a well-developed child, it would be at 7 years old, he is already praying—
five times a day—he knows how to pray and he know what to say. At 10 years old, the
parents don’t need to remind him. And then he goes on into puberty and he is firm.
Because the parents, they applied the proper steps from the beginning … and cultivated
him upon that. So he doesn’t even need to be reminded, for example, that he has to pray.
He already does it by himself. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 81–90)

This description of a well-developing child was almost verbatim to his description of the
objectives of Islamic education and contained the same age markers:

   Based on the āyah in the Quran, where Allāh says, ‘Oh you who believe, protect
yourselves and your families from the Fire,’ the companions who interpreted this verse
said to, ‘Teach them the deen; teach them the religion.’ This is how you protect them,
right? So you follow the steps from up to 7 years old, then you order them to pray and you
keep up on that. At 10, if they are not praying, then you discipline them. And after puberty,
you keep encouraging them, and then when they have reached puberty, they are adults,
really. And then they accountable for what they are doing. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line
237–244)

Looking at these two quotes side by side it is clear that, for Rayan, the objectives of human
development and the objectives of Islamic education were one and the same. Moreover, the way
to attain to the objectives was also the same: learning the principles and practices of the Islamic system.

In describing both a well-developed person and the objectives of Islamic education, both Rayan and Amira were describing external or social actions that pointed to something internal or individual. After describing the qualities of peace and respect that she sees as qualities of a well-developed person, Amira explained in detail the source of these qualities:

Only God can give us the peace in the heart. When they understand their relationship with God, they will \textit{LOVE it}…they cannot ever leave this amazing connection, this friendship. This is why we are doing the whole curriculum… all are related to that connection with God. That’s the thing. That’s the key. To have peace and be respectful we need to love God otherwise it doesn’t make sense. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 283–290)

This quote is so important that it lies at the heart of this study: the purpose of Islamic education is to nurture connection with God, after which all of the principles and practices of the Islamic system make sense and can be appropriated. Then learning and development are complete. All of the social practices, therefore, must work together toward successful appropriation of this connection that Amira described. This connection is called \textit{taqwá}. It is the third and final aspect of the integrated nature of Islamic learning and development, and its goal.

4.2.1.3 \textit{Taqwá}

Esposito (2014) described \textit{taqwá} as the basic Islamic principle of God-consciousness, an inner vision that helps people reach their ultimate human potential, and “perhaps the most important single concept in the \textit{Quran}” (Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), as quoted in Esposito, 2014, \textit{Taqwá}). Amira’s description above of “connecting to God” is at the heart of the social practices
at the school: the point of teaching and learning the Islamic principles and practices is to develop taqwá. Amira continued with her description, saying, “If they know God, they know the power of God, they know, so far, why He is setting us here—they will get this connection” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 771–772). She then elaborated how the teacher can facilitate this connection: “So what we do, as a teacher, I just flirt or touch the heart of a student, but only God can take this piece and put it inside the heart and change the thought, change the action as well” (line 774–776). Amira is talking about taqwá here as if it were a cultural tool; the introduction of taqwá into a child’s cognitive structure leads to a fundamental transformation of that structure that can be evidenced in action. Understanding taqwá in this way, as a cultural tool, has implications how educators might approach it in the classroom. Tying together what the educators have said so far, they can stimulate emotion and cognition through the Islamic social practices in ways that help children appropriate taqwá.

Where Amira’s discussions of taqwá were esoteric, Rayan and Imran described taqwá in more instrumental ways. Rayan said, “Taqwá means … to do what Allāh told you to do; to stay away from what Allāh told you to stay away from” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 283–286). He continued by saying, “What you do, will come back to you, in a way. Ok, so you do good, Allāh will reward you with good—that is expected” (line 297–298). This instrumental way of understanding taqwá is both a function of a person’s level of understanding, which has implications upon their social practices with children, and one of the root causes of critiques of Muslim education. Ramadan (2005) stated that what we call Islamic education is actually “an ill-administered ‘instruction,’ simply a handing on of knowledge based on principles, rules, obligations, and prohibitions, often presented in a cold, rigid, and austere manner, without soul or humanity” (p. 127-8). While Rayan’s quote cannot be called cold, rigid, or austere, it can be
called a simple handing on of principles and rules; in this case, a more superficial understanding of taqwá. And it could be said to lack soul. But how can an educator stimulate children to function psychologically at a level higher than where they currently exist? In some ways, the Islamic system of principles and practices prevents against the deficits of the educator in the sense that the social practices themselves actually lead an individual to their own connections with God and their own expansion of taqwá. Rayan mediated those social practices with the boys in ways that were attractive to them: he built relationships and rapport, he told compelling stories from Islamic history, he lyrically recited the Quran, he led the entire congregation in prayer. In role modeling Islam in this attractive way, maybe this was enough to generate interest in Islam in the boys that he taught, who had mastery of the social practices to use in their own lives.

Imran offered an elaborate description of taqwá, involving a quote by Ali, Muhammad’s cousin: Al-khawf min al jalīl wa al ‘amal bi al tanẓīl wa al qinā‘ah bi al qalīl wa al isti’dād li yawm al rahīl (Fearing God, living by the revealed [word of God], being content with little, and preparing for the day of [one’s] departure [or death]; Imran, Al2, 05/15/15, line 200). Imran unpacked this quote, which illustrated how people do the Islamic practices, which then become their own. The quote involved four parts: being afraid of Allāh in the sense of wanting to please Him, working in the way of Islam, being content with a little bit, and being ready for the last day of your life. Imran explained how each of the four parts built upon the one before it such that by the time a person’s last day came, they were ready. He said:

How are you going to be ready for your last day? Subḥān allāh, if you go with the four sentences what he [Ali] said, they relate to each other, they connect to each other. First, you should listen to Allāh, afraid from Allāh ‘azza wa jalla. If you do what He wants, that means you already did the second sentence—doing what is in the Quran and the sunnah.
And if you did that, from your heart with sincerity, then for sure you will have contentment with whatever comes. And then if you have all the three things, you already made your life ready for the last day of your life! (line 200–241)

As such, Imran described how by going step by step, from cultivating an awareness of God, to working to perfect actions, contentment will come, and so will being ready for the last day of life.

The first theme of this study, Unity, established that learning and development cannot be considered outside the Islamic system of principles and practices, and that expanding taqwá is at the heart of both human development and Islamic education.

### 4.2.2 Contexts of Development

All of the educators identified the Islamic quality of the home, school, and mosque as social contexts—and consistency *across* them—as important in supporting children’s learning and development. Amira said, “You get connected with a social background, which makes our belief a little bit up and down” (AI1, 12/16/14, line 131–132). Given that this belief, or consciousness, is at the heart of Islamic learning and development, social context is an important aspect in nurturing Muslim children.

Rayan and Imran were explicit in describing the importance of these three contexts. Amira and Tala were less direct, but each made reference to the importance of an Islamic home environment and connection to a mosque, and expressed concern about secular school environments. In the following quote, Imran described the importance of the three contexts and consistency across them:
For all children, three things have to be pushing them to development. First, home. Second, school. Third, the place for prayer: a mosque, a temple or a church. These three things, they have to connect together. If one of them missing, it’s not going to work… it’s not going to be completed. (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, Ln 53–58)

In this quote, Imran shared what he identified as three contexts crucial for children’s development and he emphasized the importance of consistency across them, saying: “These three things are so important. At the same time, there has to be a relationship between all of them.” (line 127–129). The reason for consistency, or relationship, between all of them is so that there were no holes in the material being taught and learned. Here, he drew on his own experience growing up in Palestine, a majority-Muslim population, but where Islam was taught as only one subject in schools that used Jordanian textbooks. He lamented not learning more about Islam in schools, saying:

And this all in the school, it’s not Islam [whispering]. It is not Islam. It is all mathematics, Arabic…King Hussein. Hellen Keller—the blind lady…And then chemistry, French, British, America—this is all what we learned! And it’s good if we know it—I’m not saying we don’t have to know it—we should know. But after we know about Islam; after we know about Muhammad, ṣallá allâhu ‘alayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings be upon him), after we know about the sahbas! (Line 453–466)

He identified that Muslim children need knowledge about the world but only after they have learned about Islam.

Imran grew up in schools where Islam was not taught in a comprehensive way and where the academic material used was not relevant to his own culture. This contributed to his vision of consistency in Islamic education across contexts in contributing to human development. He
offered an example of a girl in his class called Tassy to illustrate how he brought the three contexts together in his classroom by working with the parents:

Tassy… now she is just growing, growing! Why? Because I tried to make the three things a success. They are in the masjid (mosque), I am a teacher in the school, and I talk to the parents. I told them, ‘Tassy, she doesn’t know anything—please help her!’ The mum emailed and said, ‘Thank you so much and we are going to work closely with Tassy.’ So the three things got connected now! So Tassy, she is getting better mā shā’a allāh. (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 674-682)

In this way, he described how the interrelated contexts of the home, school, and mosque work together to support a child’s development and how he actively tried to unite the three within his classroom at the Jamma Mosque School.

Rayan also highlighted the importance of the same three contexts: home, school, and mosque. He started his description of how children develop by identifying the home first:

How the child develops. It has to do a lot with the home—that plays the major role … the Muslim family. So the parents… that’s where it starts, the first thing. And with that, to be more specific: it is the mother. As they say, you educate a woman you educate the world, right? So she has a big influence because she is always with the child, especially in the early years. So that will affect a lot of the human development in that child. And then it has to do with the religious aspects, of course, of both parents and the environment they are living in. Then it is the school… the school and the social aspects of the school. So these three things will have a big impact on the development of that person… we are trying to raise Muslim kids, right? So that is the goal for us and the objective is through these three institutions. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/15, line 20–47)
In this quote, Rayan, like Imran, emphasized the importance of learning in the home, thus underlying the importance of family values in Islam, especially the importance of the mother. But he maintained that learning in the home was not enough for the development of Muslim children. He emphasized consistency between the three social contexts of home, school, and mosque: “[T]he family is not enough. To be attached to the masjid, and a school—a proper school I’m talking about—these three things together, they will protect the child. And then you can do so much” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 439–441).

In talking about one of her students who was homeschooled, Amira referenced the importance of the home in children’s learning and development and described how “a bright and stable believing, and very clear vision” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 130–134). Tala, Imran and Rayan all spoke about reinforcing school learning with help from home. Tala, referring to learning the Quran, said, “They [the parents] have to do something at home or they [the children] can’t do anything” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 105–106). Rayan was even more explicit: “I always take it back to the family. If the parents are not trying at home, how can you expect them [the children] to come for two hours a week while they are spending five days a week at public school? [laughs]… (Rayan, AI1, 17/12/14, line 156–158).

The educators mentioned the importance of children being connected to a mosque, primarily because it a place that contains the Islamic social practices that are so important for Muslim children’s development. Rayan said: “They should be attached to the masjid—prayer, attendance, durūs (lectures), meeting with people—with other kids—very important to build that relationship” (Rayan AI1, 17/12/14, line 224–226). He emphasized the importance of building social relationships there and Imran said a similar thing:
The mosque, you can say, is the system of Islam. They are not going to feel Islam in the home more than in the masjid. Why we go to the masjid? This is what we should teach them. The parents, they have to go with the kids and teach them: ‘This is the masjid. We need to go to pray there. We have to go to have a speech about Islam and we have to make a friend there!’ (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 77–82)

In this way, Imran emphasized the importance of the mosque as the heart of the Islamic system and also that children need to be involved in a variety of activities there, especially social ones.

Tala described her own children feeling safe and supported at the mosque:

When they go back here [to the mosque], they feel like: ‘Ahh! I have somewhere where they are the same as us, can understand us; never ask questions…’ It’s good for them. To see that and be around that… They know more people, they get to feel like it’s a bigger community. It’s not just… we’re only six people in the house, six people in the whole community. It’s very good…They feel more confident, who they are and what their religion is. (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 516–524)

With this quote, Tala illustrated a second reason why the mosque is important for Muslim children growing up in a non-Muslim culture: it offers a safe place for them to be Muslim together.

Within these three, ideally overlapping, social contexts of home, school, and mosque, the educators identified the importance of forming relationships there with people who can mediate the Islamic system. Imran said:

You can read a nice book, you can read it from the first page to the end page but if there is no one explaining it for you and giving you what is going on there, it is totally different. Maybe you can get some information but it is not like when you are hearing it from
someone or when a scholar or scientist, he is talking to you! (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 413)

In this description he identified that for children and adults alike, deeper learning happens with a human teacher. Tala mentioned the same concept in reference to the development of small children learning to talk: “If you talk to them so much, they will be happy and they will be talking. If you leave them alone, they will just grow slowly. Their minds are not…nobody is talking to them!” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 82–87). Rayan, too, spoke about the importance of more experienced others in terms of shaping a child’s development in specific ways, particularly in terms of parents helping nurturing positive character traits in children: “I believe that these are traits Allāh gave them… But—they are changeable. You can change them… And of course what comes in is the effort” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 55–67). In this way, people can change the traits they were born with through the help of other people.

Clearly, the educators’ shared the perspective that the Islamic qualities of the three interrelated contexts of home/school/mosque are developmentally important for Muslim children—as well as consistency between those contexts. Imran rooted this perspective in the example of Muhammad:

This is what the Prophet Muhammad, ʿallāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings be upon him), he taught us! He was in each field: he was the father, he was the husband, he was the leader, he was loving of his wife, cleaning the house…the educator, everything! He was the imam in the masjid, he’s the friend for the older, he’s the friend for the younger, he was making jokes with different ones just to make him happy … subhān Allāh! (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 248–257)
In identifying Muhammad as an exemplar in various fields, Imran suggested that other Muslims should strive for excellence in various fields also. Illustrations from life of Muhammad characterized much of what occurred in the Jamma Mosque. Ultimately, each educator is a successor of Muhammad, in teaching the content that Muhammad taught. Imran identified Muhammad as embodying the qualities that the teachers are aiming for, saying:

If you ask about the top teacher, the qualified teacher, I can say, he has to be like the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ. Not a hundred percent—it’s hard to be like Muhammad, ﷺ, a hundred percent but we should try. Be nice with your wife. Be nice with your neighbors. Be nice with your relatives. Be nice with your teachers. Parents — everything. With your boss in the work; with your friends. Because if he [the teacher] misses one of these things, that is going to go to his children, his students. (Imran, AI1, 03/6/15, ln 776–788)

The point here is not only Muhammad’s qualities, but also the teachers’ role in helping nurture Muhammad’s qualities in children and students. This sense of responsibility of the teacher to the students, was echoed by Amira, who spoke of it in the context of being a parent and changing to become more serious about practicing Islam upon having her own children: “Being parents is not a joke. If I do a mistake and they [children] got this mistake from me, what should I say to God? For generations and generations, all the lineage, they have my faults?” [laughs] (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 998–100). She followed this up by whispering, “That’s the point. The point of changing… being more in it [Islam] than being half-half. You cannot” (line 101). Along with relaying a sense of responsibility to future generations, this quote suggested that, for Amira, her own learning and development was co-requisite to the children’s learning and development.
In this section, the educators clearly described consistency across home, school, and mosque contexts in the teaching/learning of Islamic principles and practices as scaffolding Muslim children’s learning and development. But Imran offered additional insight by describing how the Muslim community in this city is currently experiencing a crisis in each context. On the home front, Imran said: “The home is X. Nobody teaches them at home” (AI1, 03/06/15, line 201). He furthered this statement by describing another weekend school where he taught, saying that some parents use the school “as a daycare” (line 88). His proof was that when it was time to pray the obligatory ritual prayer, some parents wanted to take their children home:

Now, the parents they come and start shouting or calling the kids, ‘Come, I’m waiting you downstairs!’ How come? Even if you don’t come to make ṣalāh (ritual prayer), how you want your children to learn? Unfortunately, it’s like, they think, ‘Because I just finished my work, I need to sleep for these two hours. Just take him to the sheikh. Leave him in the masjid.’ And this one, absolutely, I refuse it. (line 94–100)

Imran was incensed that not only would the parents themselves not enter the mosque to pray the obligatory prayer, they would pull their children out. He suggested that some parents leave their children at the mosque, with “the sheikh,” so that they can get a couple of hours sleep. This attitude infuriated Imran, as did the crisis he described happening within mosques.

Imran pointed out that most of the mosques in this Canadian city do not have full-time imams. On Fridays, a member of the community would give the weekly sermon. During Ramadan, some mosques import imams from abroad. Imran summarized:

We have a lot of youth here. Instead of teaching them and educating them, we just keep the masjid empty? And we bring a scholar from another country in Ramadan, just because I need to hear a nice voice? And in Ramadan only? (AI1, 03/06/15, line 298–304)
Imran here pointed out that instead of educating the community’s youth, who he later described as ignorant of some of the most basic practices of the Islamic system, the mosques stood empty. His final description involved the Islamic schools in the city, which, for Imran, were simply a name: “I don’t need the name of the school, that’s it: Islamic School, right?” (line 171). He described an incident where his friend’s son came home from an Islamic school, one day, with an injured hand. When the father approached the principal of the school to ask what had happened, the principal said, “You should teach your child how he can take his right.” Imran was incredulous:

“What you mean, take his right? You want him to fight other children? That’s why I bring him to this Islamic school? ’Wa’llāhi (by God), this is killing us. The principal he said that! That means the whole school is damaged. For me, I know that everything comes from the top. If the principal is good, we can go on. If there are some teachers good, some teachers, not good—it’s ok. If the principal is good he can make changes. But if the principal is not good—forget it, forget it! (line 361–372)

In this data excerpt, Imran described how a principal at an Islamic school encouraged a child to “take his right” by fighting in the school. For Imran, this was an indication that the entire school was damaged; further, that there is a larger crisis at hand in Islamic education. Building upon the challenges facing Islamic education in the literature, Imran not only alluded to these challenges but also contributed dimensionality in understanding what is going on in this particular Muslim community in Canada. Children are undereducated in the Islamic system and the community is doing little to further their education in homes, schools, and mosques. Despite Imran’s blistering critique, the passion that each of the four educators in this study brought to teaching Islam to the next generation, the creative pedagogies with which they enacted the social practices with the
children, and the potential offered by aspects of the secular culture in which the mosque was embedded, contributed to providing hope.

4.2.3 “We Act Islam”—Imran

Considering the embodied ways in which educators enact the teachings of Islam in the classrooms, three aspects arose across the active interviews and the observations: the first involves role modeling Islam, the second involves authenticity within that role modeling, and the third involves the fact that the educators are simultaneously learning the Islamic system of principles and practices as they teach it to the students: Islamic learning and development is a life-long path.

4.2.3.1 Role Modeling

In the educators’ perspectives, a well-developed person is a Muslim person and Muhammad is considered to be the ideal Muslim person. When Sheikh Faisal was asked to describe a well-developed person, he replied, “The Messenger of Almighty Allāh, Muhammad (may Allāh exalt his mention)” (Faisal, email interview, 01/20/15, line 8). After identifying the goal for teachers as being as close to the example of Muhammad as possible, Imran explicitly described role modeling in the context of considering the objectives of Islamic education with children. He said:

[T]he Prophet Muhammad, what is he acting, actually? Islam! So when I follow Muhammad, ṣallā allāhu ‘alayhi wassallam, I’m not following Muhammad for his personality! I’m following him because of Islam and what Allāh ‘azza wa jalla (God, mighty and glorious) has commanded him. Now what the children are doing, they are
acting like what I am acting. The teacher, what is he acting? He is acting Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Muhammad is acting Islam! And in the end, we act Islam!

(Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 811–821)

In other words, the students follow the teacher, who follows Muhammad, who follows God. In enacting Islam, then, the educator is a living link between the students and Muhammad, who perfected the enactment of Islam. The other educators identified the importance of role modeling, too. Rayan spoke about it in terms of a mother to a child as one of the most potent forms of Islamic instruction: “And you have to be an example. So again I go back to the Muslim woman. [laughs]. Every time. Because you need it. It’s the most important aspect” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 218–221). Tala spoke about role modeling in relation to parents being examples for children: “Some kids in the school, some of them don’t develop because they don’t have extra help in the house. Kids, they have to have either an example in front of them or the mum and dad has to do something to help them develop” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 74–76). In this way, she identified more experienced others, as examples or final forms, and as catalyzing development.

Elaborating on the function of role modeling from the standpoint of the educator, Imran pointed out that an important aspect of teaching and learning is to show rather than tell:

The reason I don’t say ‘Islam, Islam, Islam…’ to the children is because they will say, ‘This is Islam? Why I am going to follow Islam, it is so hard! But when they see in front of them an example—he is doing that and acting that—they will say, ‘Oh, easy! I can do it because this teacher is doing it already, so I can do it too!’ (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 826–830)
In this way, Islam may appear difficult when presented theoretically, or as a set of rules. But in illustrating Islam through his or her actions, the educator makes Islam accessible to the children through living it.

Imran also identified a problem in role modeling a subject at which educators themselves are not proficient. First, he gave the example of non-native-Arabic-speaking teachers at Muslim schools in Canada trying to teach children the Arabic language:

If you don’t know Arabic, how are you going to teach them [the students] Arabic? If the teacher of the school does not know the letter *alif* [the first letter of the Arabic alphabet], how is she going to teach it to the kids? …And about Islam. If I am not *acting* Islam, how do you want me to teach Islam to the kids? (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 174–196)

Here, Imran most clearly identified the importance of the educator’s authentic actions as educative for children. In the interview, we related this to child development in the sense that if children are not exposed to the true and correct form of someone acting in an Islamic way, how can that child develop as a Muslim? H/she will either not develop, or develop in the wrong way.

Similar to the example of final or ideal forms of language, offered by Vygotsky (1994), which are present in a child’s environment and, moreover, exert influence on the child’s development, final or ideal forms of Islamic social practices should exist in a Muslim child’s environment. The Islamic system is composed of social practices that have ideal forms, which each Muslim spends a lifetime pursuing, as well as principles that need to be reinterpreted and reapplied in every culture and age (Ramadan, 2013). In Chapter 5, I describe some of these social practices. A crucial aspect of both role modeling and the three interrelated contexts in which children develop, as identified by the educators in this study, is that Muslim children need final or ideal forms in their environments with which to interact. Further, final or ideal forms are
less about perfection, which is solely a divine attribute, than they are about authenticity and human attainability, which Imran noted above.

4.2.3.2 Authenticity

Integrity, authenticity and humility are three Islamic principles that came up across the data set. Authenticity, as an aspect of role modeling on the part of the educator who is him/herself and pursuing their own Islamic learning and development was expressed by two of the educators as crucial in terms of one’s own life, learning and teaching. Amira articulated authenticity at many points across her interviews, for example:

If I want to change something in my children, I have to change myself first! If I’m asking them to memorize such surah (a chapter of the Quran), I have to memorize it first! How can I ask them to do it if I am not doing it? This is the rule of life and Allāh said so. He said, human being, if you would like to change the world, change yourself first! That is the key, actually. (Amira, AI1, 16/12/14, line 142–146)

While this quote reflects the importance of the educator being a role model for the child, it also illustrates both authenticity in practice and self-change or self-development, which is further explored below.

Imran asserted that the authentic actions of an educator are powerfully educative in teaching and learning the Islamic system. For him, this authenticity lies in living Islam in his life and facing difficult questions posed by non-Muslim people. To this end, he offered an elaborate explanation. At the time of the study, Imran was enrolled in English classes and had been faced with difficult questions about Islam from his classmates, as well as the teacher: “I am not going to say that she hates Islam or anything, but she has something hard about Islam” (Imran, AI1,
The teacher expressed bias against Islam in the classroom. Once, a Japanese classmate told the class that she was scared of ISIS. Imran replied: “I am scared more than you. They [ISIS] say they are Muslims but wa’llāhi (by God), this is not Islam at all. Islam is…” Imran paused, and then he offered an example that, in his eyes, summarized the essence of what Islam is, which is the opposite of ISIS. Imran’s example involved Omar Ibn Farouk, the second Muslim leader after Muhammad, arriving in Jerusalem as the head of the Islamic Empire that was expanding out of the Arabian Peninsula. Imran said:

When he came, the Christians, they gave him the key for their church. He said, ‘No, I’m not going to take it, because if I take it, all the Muslims afterwards will say, ‘This is for us [Christian places of worship] because Omar he took the key.’ Omar gave it back to them.

Lakum deenakum wa lia deen! [to you, your way; to me, mine]” (Imran AI1, 03/06/15, line 873-887)

In this example, Omar sets precedence in respecting other religions and ways of life—a principle that many Muslims see as integral to Islam (Menocal, 2002). For Imran, authentically living Islam means facing and responding to difficult questions. Imran’s classmates went on to express interest in Islam. The Japanese classmate said, “I love Islam because of Imran… Because his acting shows me how Islam is totally different” (line 895–899), totally different from what ISIS illustrates. Another classmate asked him to bring her reading material about Islam. And another actually converted to Islam. Imran reflected upon the difficult questions, the examples he offered, and the evolutions in his classmates thinking by saying, “And you know at that time, I didn’t think about it. But now, I am thinking: Because of my act [actions]—just because of my act?! Subḥān Allāh (above and beyond is God)! Because I act Islam? That is really important!” (line 911–913). He realized that in simply living Islam with authenticity in the world, other
people’s lives were touched or changed. Then he referenced the authentic enactment of Islam as a pedagogical tool that Muslim educators can use in the classroom by concluding: “So when we act all this, we will be deep and we can teach it to our students or our children” (line 921-922).

4.2.3.3 Life-Long Learning

Unlike disciplines whereby the teacher masters a body of material with minor updates over time, the more time I spent with these educators, the more I realized that they conceived of their own development unfolding in parallel with the students. Tala said, “I have some kids that develop with me” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 60). She continued: “We never stop learning. We always learn and develop ourselves through the learning. Change ourselves, how we live from what we discover in life” (line 285–286).

Rayan described how perfecting the acts of worship requires ongoing effort for everyone:

It’s not easy. The nia, the intention, when you do things: why are you doing them? Subhān Allāh. We all struggle with that—not just to teach the kids—to do things only for Allāh. Everybody struggles with that, I believe. Because you pray, then your head goes somewhere else. It’s a struggle for everybody... (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 329–331)

In this data extract, Rayan identified the fact that just as children struggle to learn the material, adults struggle to perfect it. He gave examples of two acts of worship that adults struggle with: staying true to one’s nia, or intention to do something “only for Allāh” and praying mindfully.

When Amira was first describing the du‘ā’ that she does at the beginning of every class—asking God to give her wisdom in speech—she said, “It’s a very interactive classroom—they are going to talk and me too… So we need to do that du‘ā’” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 25–26; emphasis added). Later in the interview, I was suggesting that there are ideal things that children
need to develop and she interrupted: “And we do as well, at the same time” (line 53). Next she said, “If I’d like to do *tafsir* (Quranic interpretation) or I’d like to do hadith, for myself or to teach it for the others—it’s the same actually, *it’s the same thing*—what we do, we start with the basic and concise foundations” (line 419–421; emphasis added). The more time I spent with the educators, the more I realized that their perceptions of human learning and development included their own development as well as that of the children. Actually, the flow of development went in the other direction, too, with children leading educators and educators deferring to wisdom coming from the mouths of students. Amira identified this when she said:

> And you know leading, you can lead at a very young age—five, six, seven! You see many times in Youtube videos, they show us a boy of seven years old leading the prayer!...
>
> Leading is possible at a very early age in our deen, whatever—a prayer or a lecture—whatever the capacity is, going very far. Yeah, based on the capacity of the child. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/15, line 447–453)

Implicit in Amira’s quote is the fact that Muslim children not only have the capacity to lead adults in prayer or lectures, but they are sometimes given the chance to do so. This would have implications upon their own learning and development.

In regard to these references that all the educators made to their own development unfolding in parallel with the students, it was only during the analysis phase of this study that I came across the source of these sentiments of simultaneous and ongoing development with educators and students. Amira said, “God is our *Rabb*, and Rabb means He is our *educator*. He is educating us to be in a better attitude” (Amira, AI1, 12/16, line 201–2). The implications of this statement are multiple; educators will always also be students, thus holding potential for leveling the power dynamic in the classroom—at least when it comes to the humility of seeking and
receiving knowledge; educators are always role modeling semi-final forms of development. As students of Al Rabb, educators are all and always embodying what Cazden (1981) called performance before competence, or the ability to participate and perform, given social supports, before we actually know how. I then started to see elaborations on this: “God is the Source of light. And He’s the Source of knowledge, too” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 171–173). Having identified the source of knowledge, the Islamic practices became metacognitive methods of tapping into that source of knowledge. Amira continued:

   Even if we are struggling with someone very difficult in our family, we have to say, ‘Oh, Allāh sent me this—for what?’ There is something there … I have to deal with. I have to change myself first to deal with this situation. See how Allāh is educating us? (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 1468–1472)

In this example, Amira described how difficult life situations are sources of personal learning and transformation, orchestrated by an educating God.

4.2.4 Islamic Social Practices

   The final sub-theme in the educators’ perspectives involved the role of social practices in mediating the Islamic system toward the goals of both Islamic education and human development. Amira and Rayan directly articulated this perspective; Imran and Tala alluded to it through descriptions of how they used social practices. When describing how people learn about Islam from more experienced others, Amira said:

   The era of the three best generations [directly following the time of Muhammad], until now, people who were looking for the spiritual part in this life, not the material one, they traveled to meet pious people—why? It was not for knowledge, it was for etiquette. For
etiquette—*adab*. They way how they are talking, the way how they are sitting. The way how they are dealing with the books, the books of deen. See this book right here? I am not allowed to put my hand on top of it. See the sensitivity of dealing with knowledge even though this is only a book? So how to get this message through is meeting. Mutual, physical *meeting* with people—pious people, righteous people. (Amira, A11, 12/16/14, line 838–846)

Here, Amira introduced the concept of adab, which means etiquette and proper conduct (Esposito, 2003). She described people traveling not only seeking knowledge and information, but etiquette and ways of acting, thus acknowledging that both are needed for development. This is an example how, for a practicing Muslim, expression of faith in perfected practice is an integral part of the system of principles and practices.

Al-Attas (2005) described how religious practices and faith work together:

Religion consists not only of affirmation of the Unity of God (*al-tawhid*), but also of the *manner* and *form* in which we verify that affirmation as shown by His last Prophet... The test of true affirmation of the Unity of God, then, is the *form of submission* to that God. (p. 23)

In this quote, the emphasis on form is a way of describing how, from a Muslim perspective, practices are dialectically related to consciousness. It is not enough to simply be conscious of God. The Islamic system provides protocol for practices to enact and expand that consciousness, which, in turn, serves to refine practices. This might be considered an Islamic iteration of the dialectic identified in the sociocultural literature: “Knowledge, consciousness, act to guide and direct the activity by which man [sic] alters his surroundings. Activity in the surround acts to correct and develop man’s consciousness” (Wozniak, 1975, p. 31).
While of the educators emphasized the importance of Islamic social practices in their words and their actions, Rayan and Amira made the clearest connections between social practices and the development of taqwá. Here, Rayan discussed social etiquette and spirituality as flip sides of a coin:

[Muhammad said]: “I was only sent to perfect the noble manners.” It’s a very big statement. Manners! So a person who has taqwá will have manners—with his parents, with his mother; he knows to respect her because paradise lies under the feet of the mother.

(Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 491–500)

Rayan identified here that Muhammad, who enacted the principles of the Quran, illustrated noble manners. This statement not only underlines the importance of manners and social etiquette in Islam but also connects it to taqwá in saying person who has taqwá will necessarily have manners. Also significant is that Rayan foregrounded respect for the mother, as Amira did previously, which is a primary Islamic principle.

While Rayan’s comment illustrated the generation of noble manners from taqwá, Amira illustrated the dialectic going the other way: the generation of taqwá from noble manners, saying:

If our heart is black, we cannot absorb the knowledge Allāh is giving us! Why is it that I am having such difficulty learning this āyah (a unit or verse of the Quran)? Because I’m sinning somewhere. Maybe I have forgotten to call my mother. Or I forgot to do something for my family, or I missed my prayer. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 196–200)

This quote is key to understanding the connection between social practices and taqwá. Along with directly connecting her worldly actions to how much knowledge from God she might possibly gain, Amira puts missing her prayer (a religious practice) and forgetting to call her mother (a social practice) on par with each other in regards to her relationship with God. Her
quote suggests that these two types of practice, religious and social, are *equally important* in expanding taqwá.

Active interviewing and participant observation in this study established that, for the educators, human learning and development cannot be considered outside the Islamic system of principles and practices, and that expanding taqwá (God-consciousness) is at the heart of both human development and Islamic education. The second theme of this study involved social practices, in which educators enacted their perspectives and mediated the Islamic system towards the goals of both Islamic education and human development. As such, this chapter addresses the second research question: How are educators’ perspectives enacted in social practices in the classroom? First, I describe how I identified and defined what constituted a social practice in this study. Next, I examine four social practices observed in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque: Quran Work, Practicing the Acts of Worship, Performing the Ritual Congregational Prayer, and Speaking with God. I look at how educators’ perspectives were enacted within them. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

5.1 What Constitutes a Social Practice?

Amira’s quote linking prayer and calling her mother to her connection with God, mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, led me to reconsider social practices in the Jamma Mosque School. The social practices I observed were actually of four kinds: social practices as organized and repeated patterns of culturally-specific human behavior (Cole, 1998); social etiquette practices, like manners in the mosque, how to treat one’s parents, gratitude, and humility; religious practices, like ritual prayer; and contemplative practices, like quiet moments within prayer. Further, the educators emphasized a fifth kind of social practice—specifically discursive
practices, like du‘ā’, which they modeled and taught directly. All these types of social practices overlapped and informed each other in this study and cannot be considered distinct. Instead, I named them *social practices* on the understanding that they overlap, occur together and are emphasized differently in different moments and environments.

In the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque weekend school, four main social practices were identified: Quran Work, Practicing the Acts of Worship, Performing the Ritual Congregational Prayer, and Speaking with God. All of the educators engaged in these social practices and much of what went on in any of the classrooms included learning how to do these social practices, practicing them and then participating in them with other members of the school community. Each social practice was made distinct by its unique composition of educators, students, and cultural tools.

First, each educator was individually ideologically located within the Islamic system as a whole, which shaped how s/he mediated of the content of the system. In the previous chapter, differences surfaced in terms of educators’ understandings and interpretations of Islamic principles and practices. Educators also brought their lived experiences, including past educational, religious, and cultural experiences, into the classroom and the ways in which they engaged children in social practices. Second, the particular students in each class—their personal nuances, and how the educator worked in relationship with those students—influenced the social practices in which they participated together. Third, the cultural tools and pedagogies the educator chose to use varied widely. Some pedagogies were ancient and intrinsic to the social practice itself, and all the educators used them, like using repetition when memorizing the Quran. Some pedagogies were new and unique to the educator, like the apple spectrum that only Rayan used as a disciplinary tool. On a board, he had images of apples in four different colors: green,
yellow, brown, and red. All of the children started class with their names under the green apple. If a child misbehaved, Rayan moved the child’s name down the spectrum, through yellow, brown, and to red.

Ultimately, the ways in which educators engaged children in the four social practices were unique to each educator because of his/her own unique perspectives on human learning and development assembled over a lifetime. In other words, despite the fixed nature of much of the content, and the intrinsic nature of some of the social practices’ pedagogies, the educators brought rich heterogeneity into the ways they conducted the social practices. Each educator interpreted the cultural, historical whole a bit differently, and mediated it differently as well.

Each social practice identified in this chapter looked and felt qualitatively distinct from the other things happening in the weekend school, and each social practice looked and felt similar across the educator’s classrooms. Quran Work, for example, involved particular configurations of relationships, pedagogies and cultural tools resulting in mediated action that set it qualitatively apart from the other social practices, like Performing the Ritual Congregational Prayer—even though they shared many of the same elements, including educators, students, content and social speech.

Arabic language was one of three major content areas at the school, along with Quran and Islamic Studies. It was not considered a social practice in this study, but because Arabic was interwoven into everything that the educators and students did together, it was a primary cultural tool. During Quran recitation, entirely in Arabic, most of the teachers injected some explanation of Arabic vocabulary; the same was true in the social practices of Practicing the Acts of Worship and Performing the Congregational Prayer, conducted entirely in Arabic. Essentially, the Arabic language was a means by which educators and students engaged in social practices.
5.2 The Social Practices

In order to best illustrate each of the four social practices identified at the Jamma Mosque School—Quran Work, Practicing the Acts of Worship, Performing the Congregational Prayer, and Speaking with God—I start with a brief overview of each social practice and how it played out in the educators’ classrooms. Then I present one or two exemplary pieces of data as examples.

5.2.1 1. Quran Work

The Quran occupies a particularly important position in Islamic education because it is considered by Muslims to have been revealed by God to Muhammad as a message for humankind: “Quran is the words of God” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 292). It outlines the principles and practices of the religion of Islam and it was illustrated in the way that Muhammad lived his life, which fills in its details. In this study, Quran Work was characterized by the central practice of memorizing the Quran, which included the attendant practices of learning the correct pronunciation of the Quran (tajwīd), learning to read the Quran, and starting to learn the word meanings of the Quran (interpretation). These last two practices—reading the Quran and learning the meanings—overlapped with the curricular areas of Arabic and Islamic Studies. But memorizing the Quran and learning the correct rules of pronunciation (tajwīd) was a qualitatively distinct social practice that occupied a central role in each class.

As for Quranic pronunciation, the teachers differed in their emphasis on its importance for children of this age. Tala was relaxed about pronunciation, especially for the girls in her class who were non-native Arabic speakers. Describing one girl in particular, Tala said:
Overall her tongue is a little... heavy. But I just excuse her because I know that sometimes it’s her tongue—she can’t do it. I’m not going to force her to do it right now. As long as you know the surah, that’s enough. The way to pronounce it... you pronounce it the way you want. But, you know, we read all the time? They get better! (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 178–189)

In describing her approach to dealing with mispronunciation, Tala also revealed something of her perspectives on how children learn: improvement happens through participation with more experienced others and performing before competent.

Amira had a different approach. After assigning Quran memorization homework to one of the students who was a non-native Arabic speaker, Amira added: “And you are making mistakes with pronunciation.”

Bayan: I do it differently, because my mum doesn’t make those sounds.

Amira: But you have to—to do it perfectly. So as we go, concentrate on the sounds and making them perfectly. (FN, Amira PO3, 11/16/14)

Unlike Tala, Amira insisted that the girls work towards perfect pronunciation regardless of their first language. “Those sounds” that Bayan says her mother doesn’t make are the letters unique to Arabic—those sounds do not exist in the English language. They are difficult for a non-native Arabic speaker to enunciate. But Amira’s insistence that Bayan learn to pronounce those sounds perfectly is not only because she herself is a native Arabic speaker; for Amira, perfecting the Arabic language of the Quran is itself an act of worship. This sentiment supports Amira’s emphasis on perfecting social practices for the expansion of taqwá.

Quran work as a social practice included the participation of the educator in relationship with the students as agents and the Quran itself as a cultural tool that has remained unchanged in
1,400 years. While Arabic as a spoken language has changed and evolved into regional dialects, the Arabic of the Quran remains crystalized in its original form. Detailed diacritical marks on the Arabic letters, describing precise pronunciation, means that the Quran contains its own intrinsic standard for assessment of pronunciation. Assessment also takes place regarding the amount memorized. Amira described:

We have to assess them, evaluate the progress of memorization. As a teacher I have to know: who is memorizing, who is not? Why there is difficulty here? Is it lack of focus? Is it lack of reading? Or of motivation? So I have to change a little bit the strategy of doing things. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 659–673)

For Amira, the rate at which children memorized was important in determining not only the students’ levels, but also how effective her teaching was and a directive for strategy change.

Rayan described children’s breadth of knowledge of Quran as crucial in positioning their class level in the school:

Assessment is important… And the priority here is Quran: if they memorize a lot, or if they know how to read—already and properly. If they don’t, we might take them back a level, even if they have more knowledge or expertise in different areas. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 165–171)

In this way, Rayan determined a child’s class level in the Jamma Mosque School being determined by their performance on two practices associated with the Quran: amount memorized and ability to read.

Social relationships surrounding Quran Work as a social practice—particularly the relationship between educator and student—were crucial: good social relationships contributed to making the experience of Quran Work affectively positive. All of the educators in the Jamma
Mosque School seemed to successfully nurture good feelings around Quran Work through a combination of role modeling the semi-final form of the social practice (beautiful, lyrical recitations) and affection and encouragement. The fact that memorization and recitation of the Quran is a highly valued social practice in Muslim communities in general—and the children were likely getting positive encouragement from home, for example—may have helped build their enthusiasm for learning to memorize. All of the educators illustrated moments of affection over the duration of the class, but they were particularly encouraging when children showed enthusiasm for the Quran. Here, Amira extended on a child’s own motivation for the Quran by giving her more to memorize:

Bayan: My brother memorized this surah and I thought, ‘How dare he learn it before I?’ So I spent hours and I memorized it.

Amira: Hours or days?

Bayan: Hours. I learnt it in a day. I have plans to be a hafiz of Quran [someone who has memorized the entire Quran].

Amira: Mā shā’a allāh!

Amira proceeded to give her a new memorization plan: the last three ayas of the first surah of the Quran. Amira hugged and kissed her and said, “Congratulations, habibati.” Bayan left the room smiling. (FN, Amira PO2, 11/09/14)

This data excerpt illustrates the connection between the home and the mosque, as well as the social value of the Quran. Amira capitalized upon all of these and gave Bayan more to memorize. Also illustrated here is the close relationship between Bayan and Amira, and Amira’s use of affection.
Although the content of the Quran, the Arabic words, has remained unchanged over time, the interpretation changes, as do the ways in which Muslims access them. Presentation of the Quran began as an oral recitation. It was written down during the lifetime of Muhammad and compiled into a standard text within 20 years of his death. Today presentations of the Quran take interactive digital forms. Students can listen to audio or video recitations while reading the Arabic script, or the translations of the script in multiple languages. They can track the amount they have memorized using special Apps. Amira mentioned using digital devices to help younger children memorize—“I’m using this Ipad to get them to memorize. It’s [an app] called ‘Memorize.’ You can track their progress” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 523–4). But for the older children, she preferred to have them read the actual text of the Quran in book form, and only used digital devices for review.

Pedagogy is an aspect of Quran Work, a social practice, which requires analysis in isolation while keeping in mind the whole. Repetition for memorization is a consistent pedagogy dating back to the origins of the Quran: “There is no other methodology to get the Quran” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 462). She elaborated on this point by providing an example of her own experience in memorizing the entire Quran:

I’ll go to the conclusion, then give all the details. So the conclusion is: it’s a unique experience. But—with repetition. Repetition is there. So who told us to repeat the Quran? Actually it’s God. Why? Because He did it like it is. If I memorize the whole Quran and I don’t read it again, and repeat it and repeat it, I will FORGET it [whispering]. So the notion of repeating is there—initially. (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 552–559)

In this case, Amira came to pedagogy through personal experience. After memorizing the entire Quran, which is approximately 600 pages, depending upon the particular copy, she realized that
she was forgetting the parts that she was not repeating. She pointed out that repetition is a common method for memorizing Quran across the span of the Muslim majority countries, although there are regional differences.

If you go, for example, to the north of Africa—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia—they have their own methodology. They repeat and they write the Quran. Writing fixes the listening, the reading—fixes everything. If you go to the Middle East, they don’t have writing, only repetition. If you go to Sudan—amazing—they repeat more than 500 times instead of ten times! (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 560–566)

The reasons Amira gave for describing the experience of memorizing the entire Quran as a unique experience are related to the amount of time that each person dedicates to the process, as well as individual capacity for memorization. Sometimes a person commits an āyah (verse) to memory after hearing it five times; sometimes it takes longer. The way that Amira translated this sentiment into classroom practice was in telling the children, “The Quran needs review!” She made sweeping motions with her hands and she said, “The Quran we memorized before needs to be reviewed and new material built on top. So let’s review together from Al Fatiha and enjoy! Enjoy these beautiful words!” (FN, Amira PO3, 11/16/14). Amira’s passion for the Quran was expressed in the ways in which she engaged in this social practice with the children. In fact, all of the educators’ personal relationships with the Quran informed the ways that they approached Quran Work.

5.2.1.1 The Educators’ Unique Pedagogies

Each of the four educators differed in the ways they negotiated teaching the meanings of the Quranic verses that the children were memorizing, and it even varied within a particular
educators’ methods. Commonalities in the ways that the educators in this study embarked upon Qur...other stuff” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, Line 1000–1001). For Amira, it depended on the children’s moods: if they were high energy she would start with Quran; if they were low energy, she would engage them in group work on Islamic Studies topics. All four educators shared two methods of teaching Quran. The first was a whole group recitation: for both revision of Quran already memorized, as well as for new verses to be memorized. The second method was to have each child recite individually. Beyond these common forms of pedagogy, each educator embellished them in unique ways.

Imran’s unique method of Quran work was to have the children recite individually but sequentially. The first child recited āyah 1, the next child recited āyah 2, a third child recited āyah 3, and so it went on, one-by-one around the room in a circular fashion until the surah was finished. In this way, the children had to be ready because, with only seven students in the class, their turn quickly came up. Imran elaborated,

If I gave the first kid the whole surah to recite alone, the last kid, he would be playing around. He would say, ‘Oh, still, long time in front of me!’ [laughs]. But if we do it this way, he will keep focused: ‘Oh, next āyah coming to me! I need to be ready!’ (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 1392–1397)

So Imran’s particular pedagogical tool served various functions. It was a way of memorizing Quran whereby each child had a chance to recite to the group and also had a chance to listen to others. It was also a tool for class management. Keeping the group engaged, with each child
prepared for when his or her turn came up, meant that the children were less likely to get distracted.

Tala started with the common, whole-group method of reciting the surahs they already knew, as review. She went around the room, making sure that children were actually reciting, patting shoulders and giving hugs. Then, after the children finished the group recitation and review, Tala asked each girl to recite what she was specifically working on. If that girl faltered in her recitation, Tala employed her unique third method: having the whole group recite for that girl.

Tala: Who knows Surah Kawthar?

Yara: I do!

Tala: Can you do it?

Yara stumbled through it.

Tala: Let’s recite it three times for Yara.

The girls recited it together, including Yara, whose voice merged with her classmates. (FN, Tala PO3, 02/01/15)

In this way, the whole class remained engaged in the process of individual Quran work. Reciting for someone else created an atmosphere of care about each person’s progress. Further, no matter how well the other children knew that surah, they got a chance to practice it and act, in some sense, as a more experienced other.

Another pedagogical approach unique to Tala was her detailed mediation of Quranic word meanings in age-appropriate ways. One day, the class was working on memorizing a new surah, reciting it together. Finally Tala said, “Ok, enough reciting. Let’s do some meanings.” She said an Arabic word and asked Dalal for the English translation.
Dalal: Temperature?

Tala nodded: It’s from the word *mizan*—balance, scale.

Tala drew a scale on the whiteboard with the word “good” on one side and “bad” on the other. Then she talked about the concept of balance using the scale that she drew.

Tala: What happens when someone’s balance is heavy?

Sarah: They have more good deeds.

Tala: And then what happens…

Dalal: They go to Jennah?

Tala: And what happens when your scale is light?

Yara: You have more bad deeds than good?

Tala: It’s more like your good deeds are light. And, if this is the case, then what happens?

Fayrouz: You go to the fire?

After confirming that, Tala reoriented the girls back toward the positive: We want to do good deeds all the time. What are they, good deeds?

The girls offer some examples: Forgive your friends; don’t roll your eyes; always listen to your parents…

Tala: Why can good deeds never balance the bad deeds?

Dalal gives a garbled answer.

Tala: Organize the thoughts in your own head and then talk. You guys know this! We learned it in Islamic studies…

Tala reiterates the question.

Sarah: Because they are different?

Tala: Yes, they are different. But how?
The children call out various answers.

Tala explains: Ok, if you do one good deed and one bad deed.

She writes on the board:

1 G = 10

1 B = 1

Tala: This is why the good deeds can never balance the bad deeds! Remember Islamic studies? Good deeds and bad deeds: if you do one good deed Allāh will reward you how many times?

Children in unison: Ten times!

Tala: One good deed equals ten! One bad deed, Allāh is merciful, He gives you one. That’s why it can never be balanced. That’s why you should do as many good deeds and take advantage of this deal! (FN, Tala PO4, 04/05/15)

This data excerpt illustrates some of Tala’s perspectives on child development. The most obvious is her mediation of the concept of balancing good and bad deeds in an age-appropriate delivery, using a drawing of a scale and a mathematical equation. But she also she shared a metacognitive strategy with the children when she told Dalal to, “Organize the thoughts in your own head and then talk.”

Amira used the two methods common to the other educators: group and individual memorization. She distinguished between them: “The individual thing is for assessment and group thing is to memorize. To stick the āyāt on their hearts” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 676, 677). When doing group recitation, Amira, like the other educators, led by example, with her own recitation. In terms of memorizing new material, she started with group recitation ten times, followed by one time for each girl on her own. “I saw that ten times is fair enough; not that
heavy. And usually ten times, you get at least 80 percent of the words in your mind” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 1194–1194). When it was time for individual Quran study, Amira often set the rest of the class to work on questions in the Islamic Studies textbook while she had individual children go up to her at her desk, one by one, to recite the Quran they were working on.

Amira had three unique strategies in addition to the two shared with the other educators, which translated in to approaching the Quran from many different learning angles. The first was having the children follow along reading the Arabic text at the same time as they recite—whether they were doing individual or group work: “When I am reciting, what do I do with my eyes? … I have to look at the book and look at the words, taking little pictures of them that are then stored in our brains. So please look at your book not at me” (FN, Amira PO1, 11/02/14). In this way, she added a visual component to the practice.

A second characteristic distinguishing Amira’s approach to Quran work was breaking up the recitation practice of new material to engage in dialogue on the meaning (she rarely did this when reviewing previously-memorized material). She developed these methods and strategies from her own experiences learning and memorizing Quran: “I worked on it as a student—I do that—and I am just sharing. And I’m adjusting the needs—adding components, adding some ideas and finding out with the group because they have to progress” (Amira, Interview 1, line 1204–1206). In this way, the process of recitation and memorization was not a solo practice; Amira was constantly mediating and making meaning of the text along with the students.

5.2.1.2 Amira’s Stages

Amira’s third unique and complicated strategy for memorizing the Quran requires a bit more examination. It illustrated the possibility for pedagogical creativity even when working
with material and that appears rigid and fixed. Amira called it “Stages” and it involved grouping girls working on the same chapters of the Quran together. They worked on memorizing for two minutes, during which time Amira went around the room correcting and assisting, then the girls presented what they had memorized.

Amira: Ok, do you remember what stage you’re in?

Sahar: I’m going to be alone. I don’t want to be alone!

Amira: Lima, which surah are you in, Surah Naba?

Lima: I’m in Surah Naziat!

Amira: Dalia, which surah are you? Did you finish Surah Al Bayyinah? You will be with Sahar.

Lima was alone; Bayan was alone. Dalia and Sahar were together. Amira drew a table on the whiteboard. Along the top row of the table, she wrote in Arabic the chapters (surahs) of the Quran that each girl in the class was working on. On the left hand column of the table, Amira wrote: Round 1, 2, 3. Then she said, “We’re going to do three rounds, ok?” and she started her timer for two minutes. The girls began reciting.

First, Amira went over to Lima and listened to her reciting Surah Naziat. Lima’s recitation was fluid. Amira offered little corrections along the way. When Lima finished, Amira said, “Ok, you went up to āyah 13, so you can now work on 14 and 15.”

Amira went over to Bayan: “Let’s go!”

Bayan was reciting Surah Al Alaq. Amira counted how many ayas Bayan had done—13, just like Lima. Meanwhile, Sahar and Dalia were working as a team on Surah Al Bayyinah.

Amira went over to them.

Amira: Ladies, how are you?
Sahar: Not good.

Amira: You are so *amazingly* good!

Sahar: I know [she smiles]. (FN, Amira PO5, 3/8/15)

This is an example of one of the many times Amira built rapport with the girls using humor and encouragement.

The two girls started reading together—they were not reciting because they hadn’t memorized it; they were actually reading the Arabic text. Amira showed them with her mouth how to pronounce the difficult words. While Amira was with Sahar and Dalia, the other two girls were reciting quietly to themselves at different tables. Amira returned to Lima, listened to her reciting, then stopped her to give a bit of meaning: “What is Wadi al-Muqaddasi Tuwa? Read the English!” Lima read it from the textbook and Amira expanded upon the meaning: “Yes, it’s the valley where Musa, ‘alayhi al-salām (upon him be peace), met Allāh, *subhanahu wa ta’ālá* (above, beyond and exalted). Good job! Sixteen ayas!”

Next, Amira went on to Bayan, who was very focused on her recitation. Soon, Amira and Bayan were on the floor together, in prostration, side by side. When they got up, the other girls asked them what they were doing.

Amira: This sign here [pointing to a mark in the text of the Quran] means you have to do *sajdah* (prostration).

Sahar: What is *sajdah*?

Amira: Beautiful question. Remember sajdah in prayer? So what do you do when you see this sign? You say *Allāh akbar* (God is most great) and you go into *sujūd* (prostration) and you do three, “*Subḥana rabbī al ṣālā* (above and beyond is my lord).” It’s called *sajdah al tilawa*. Say it!
Children: Sajdah al tilawa!

Amira: Who did this? The Prophet did it (FN, Amira PO5, 3/8/15)

There are many pedagogical elements in Amira’s Stages approach that made it engaging and meaningful for the children. Amira going into prostration alongside Bayan, foreheads on the ground together, is an example of how Amira was an active participant in the learning activity. She constantly mediated the material for the whole class so that they all participated and benefited to what one particular girl was learning. In this case, all the girls learned sajdah at-tilawa as Bayan was learning it, and they also learned that this particular practice originated in the way Muhammad used to recite the Quran.

Amira moved on to Sahar and Dalia, who were reciting in unison.

Sahar: We did it under two minutes, I think we can do it!

Amira: You are fighting Shaytan. I know you can do it.

Amira often told the girls: “You know when we forget what happens: Shaytan is there.”

(FN Amira PO1, 11/2/14)

The way that Amira had the children visualize a negative force obstructing their intellectual process can be understood as a metacognitive strategy aimed at helping children focus, persist, and succeed. Determining whether or not it was a successful strategy would require further research.

Sahar and Dalia stumbled through their surah. Amira gave them some pronunciation instruction. Then she said, “You guys need to do the first three ayas in under two minutes or no break for you. I know you can do it.”

She went back to Lima and got down on her knees, leaning her arms on the desk, face-to-face with the child. She listened as Lima finished. Lima went to write how many ayas she
did on the whiteboard.

Sahar and Dalia looked at each other and smiled. Sahar said to Dalia, “I think we can do it.” Lima finished writing on the whiteboard and went over to help them.

They were all quiet listening to Bayan. Bayan got to the part where they do sajdah at-tilawa. Amira and Bayan bowed down in prostration.

Amira: Ok, Bayan, go on break.

Meanwhile, Sahar and Dalia were worrying together: “I hope we can do it!”

Amira went over to them.

Sahar: We did it like ten times!

They started and stumbled through it. Amira gave corrections. Lima was there, watching; she started leaping in circles around them. The girls finished.

Dalia: See? Less than two minutes!

Amira: How do you feel?

Sahar: Great! Now we can have our break!

Amira: There is no regret. Once you have done your best, then you let it go. (FN, Amira PO5, 3/8/15)

The Quran is a physical and psychological cultural tool. It is at once a physical book and a set of conceptual guidelines that the children are in the process of learning that they might later use in the mediation of their own lives. In this data excerpt, Amira was engaging the students in the social practice of Quran Work using a range of new pedagogies for pronunciation, mediation and memorization. Her Stages method described here employed individual and group work, reading, reciting, and even physical actions. It involved the whiteboard, a visual aid tracking the girl’s progress, and a timer. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it featured Amira’s own
participation in facilitating the process, mediating and illuminating meanings, modeling correct pronunciation and ways of approaching mastery and internalization of the ancient text. Through encouraging, loving, hugging, and participating, Amira was fully engaged in this practice with the girls, making memorization of the Quran an affectively-positive experience. But Amira made it cognitively stimulating at the same time by keeping it moving at a fast pace—only two minutes per segment—and providing meanings along the way. The entire process, including the detailed thought that went into designing Stages, reveals the importance that Amira gave to Quran Work and its role in nurturing the children’s “relationship with God” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 283).

5.2.2 2. Practicing the Acts of Worship

There are five specific acts of worship within the Islamic system of principles and practices, called the five pillars, that are required of all healthy, adult Muslims (Esposito, 2003). They are the testimony of faith (the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad), ritual prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj). Practicing to perform these acts of worship constituted a distinct social practice within the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque, defined by learning the reasons behind why Muslims do them and by practicing their elements. This preparation took place in different ways with different educators, both dialogically and actively. Some of the acts of worship, like giving charity, fasting or performing Hajj, did not actually happen during the time I was observing at the school. Instead, educators described to the children the reasons behind the act of worship and discussed how they are conducted. The other two acts of worship—the shahādah, or testimony of faith, and ṣalāh, the ritual, congregational prayer—were both practiced and performed.
5.2.2.1 Tala Practices Prayer

The second pillar of Islam is the ritual, congregational prayer that occurs five times daily. It is the only one of the five pillars that the children participated in enacting every Sunday. In order to enhance participation, the educators led the children in practicing the steps of the ritual prayer.

For example, Tala engaged her students in an elaborate practice of the ritual prayer that started with a craft activity and moved on to acting out the sequence of the prayer. The girls were excited about the craft activity. Tala handed out six differently colored cards to each girl. They were to draw one of the positions of prayer on each card. She provided the Arabic name of the position and its description as they went through the sequence of prayer, pose by pose.

Tala: The first card, the first position, is called Qiyam. Just do it the way you like! The next one is…

Dalal: Quruh?

Tala [laughing]: Quruh? Rukowa! And you could draw it like this.

She drew a stick figure bending over halfway.

Tala: You don’t have to worry about clothes or hair! What do we say here? And how many times do we say it?

Girls: Three times!

Tala: Because I want you to pray right! And we are going to practice it after the break!

Hemma: Can I write 3x?

Tala: Perfect.

Hemma: What’s the third one?
Tala: Oh, you guys are excited now? We’ll do the third one after snack! (FN, Tala PO2, 01/25/15)

Although Tala gave them direct advice on what to draw and write, the craft was constructive in that each child drew on her own and Tala encouraged flexibility in drawing as the girls wanted. The focus was on getting the words and positions correct, not on creativity. Further, she did not give the meaning of the words—in English or Arabic—and the children did not ask.

The next step was to act out the positions on the cards. Tala had the children do it, standing at their desks, glancing at the cards they had just created. The following class, Tala had the girls take the sequence of movements into the prayer space to enact it in real time. Tala and the girls went to the rug. They sat on the ground with their stick-figure drawings on little pieces of paper. Yara had the idea to sit in a circle, which Tala accepted, “Good idea.” Karima said, “We can sit close to each other; we’re family” and Yara added, “We’re sisters.” Tala led the girls through the sequence of the acts of prayer dialogically. After that, it was time to practice.

Tala: Ok, line up, shoulder to shoulder!

Girls: Shoulder to shoulder!

They stood in a line and each girl led the class in one step of the prayer sequence. Tala sat in front of the line of girls, correcting and mediating. She called the name of the girl going next and, in this way, each girl got a chance to lead. As Yara and Karima were messing around, Tala asked them stay a bit longer on the carpet after the other girls had returned to their desks. She had them go through the sequence of the prayer on their own. When they were finished, she said:

Tala: Yara, you are going to pray fajr [the dawn prayer] every day.
Yara: Why?! [surprised].

Tala: Because you know how to do it! When you wake up you pray two rakāt. I’m going to tell your mum you are working on this. Karima, and you too. (FN, Tala PO3, 02/01/15)

This was practice for the live, ritual congregational prayer that the girls participated in at the end of every school day. But, as Muslims customarily pray five times a day, Tala was teaching the girls a social practice that they could take out of the school and use in the world, every day, if they were not doing so already. Like Amira’s Stages, the way that Tala facilitated this social practice—having the children draw the positions and then act them out—reflected the importance that she placed on active learning. It also revealed that Tala was sensitive to the girls’ desires: they liked to draw and do crafts. She tried to select pedagogies that incorporated their desires. Finally, Tala fostered relationships amongst the students, by having them work together and take turns leading, and with her, by accepting their suggestions and engaging with them in warm ways.

5.2.2.2 Imran Practices Wuḍū’

In preparation for engaging in another act of worship, ritual prayer, Imran taught the children how to do the ritual ablution, or wuḍū’, that precedes it. They started with the textbook. Faiz read the description of the practice: “By making wuḍū’, we prepare our bodies and minds for ṣalāḥ (ritual prayer).”

Imran: What is “preparing our minds”?

Children offer various answers, none of which Imran was looking for.

Imran: Preparing your mind is simply to set your intention! That’s the easy answer. Set your nia: Nia is the Arabic word for intention.
Imran asked Mir to come up to the front of the classroom to demonstrate the actions that Faiz was reading. Faiz read a sentence then stopped. Mir demonstrated what Faiz had just read. Then Imran asked the class: “Did he do it right?” All the children said, “Yes!” except Ziad.

Ziad: No! He didn’t say bismillāh (in the name of God) before he started!

In this way, Imran went around the room in a circle giving the children chances to read, act out the actions, and answer questions. It went on for about 20 minutes in dizzying circles, but the children seemed to remain engaged. Finally, Imran said: “Ok, its time for break. After break we are going to go up and actually do wuḍū’ before we pray. We are not going to leave school today until we have wuḍū’ perfect.”

After the break, the children filed up to the ablution room, near the men’s prayer hall. Children sat lined up on the back wall of the tiled room while each child did wuḍū’ individually. As each child sat on a stool in front of the tap, leaning over a trough, Imran sat next to each one, watching and correcting. It took a long time. Imran was particular about each child’s wuḍū’ and asked them to repeat the action if they did one incorrectly. The rest of the children were watching and waiting; they were not allowed to speak or chat.

The girls wore hijab. Imran got them to do wuḍū’ over top of their hijab. He reminded them about not wasting water: “The Prophet said to not waste water, even if you are making wuḍū’ in the running water of a stream!” Walking back to the classroom, the children were in a perfectly straight line. (FN, Imran PO2, 02/22/15)

In this example of practicing an act of worship, although there was some active learning and group work, there was also basic repetition, waiting for other children to finish, and strict boundaries, for example, no talking.
In my first interview with him, Imran described his early school days: “We were scared of the teachers. If I do something wrong—sticks, right away” (Imran, AI1, 04/06/15, line 1186).

Imran described how corporeal punishment was common when he was a child. I wondered how these early experiences shaped the ways in which he used discipline in his class. He required a level of discipline that didn’t always seem appropriate for the children’s ages. While Imran was often warm and affectionate with the children and he really seemed to care about their opinions, feelings and progress in the class, if a child stepped out of line, he raised his voice, which seemed to generate a feeling of discomfort in the classroom. Overly strict discipline runs the risk of eroding the good feelings generated through relationship building and from doing group work together. Imran’s emphasis in this example upon rote actions aiming for perfected behavior—in an atmosphere devoid of fun—recalled his emphasis on behavior in his descriptions of human development in his interview:

[T]he parents they have to watch their children for sure at home: what they are acting, what they are doing, how is their behavior with their sister, their brother, how is their behavior with their parents—this is all important. How they act at home, how they are cleaning, how they are taking care of the home. (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 58–62)

This quote sounded reasonable when Imran said it: parents need to take care to ensure their children are behaving respectfully with other people and participating in taking care of the home. But when I considered this quote after observing Imran’s wudu lesson, I realized that his focus upon behavior might sometimes come at the expense of positive affect and relationship in the classroom.
5.2.3 3. Performing the Ritual Congregational Prayer

Of all of the Islamic acts of worship, salah, the ritual congregational prayer was the one that children participated in performing every time they attended the Jamma Mosque School. It occupied the last half hour of the day’s lessons, starting with the call to prayer (adhān), when all of the children and educators readied themselves for the prayer by doing the ritual ablution and donning prayer clothes as needed. By the time the second call to prayer came (iqama), about 15 minutes later, everyone was assembled in the mosque in straight lines. Ritual congregational prayer is an example of a social practice that is a routine of physical movements accompanied by specific cultural tools. Physical cultural tools included prayer rugs that served as clean locations to lay one’s head, and gender specific clothing: headscarves for women; white hats for men. Psychological cultural tools included Prophetic and personal supplication (du‘ā’), ayas of the Quran, and articulated intentions. Children stood with adults in a heterogeneous assembly of ability and understanding, exemplifying Cazden’s (1981) performance before competence.

At the Jamma Mosque, like other mosques, the ritual congregational prayer was enacted slightly differently between the males and the females. First, the girls and the women prayed in a different space than the boys and men. Second, the male teachers took the boys up to the prayer space earlier than the girls; they seemed to spend more time there, before prayer.

5.2.3.1 Rayan Leads the Prayer

As imam of the Jamma Mosque, leading the prayer was one of Rayan’s primary tasks. He took his class up to the mosque early, so the boys had time to prepare. The transition between the classroom and the prayer hall looked like this:
Rayan said: “People who don’t have wuḍū’ will go upstairs first. Sami, tell me, what you’re going to do up there?”

Sami: I will pray two rak‘āt and wait for the imam to start the prayer.

Rayan: Yes, but you will pray *four* rak‘āt. Then, while you’re waiting, you can read Quran or the hadith books.

The children repeated the information.

Rayan: Ok, you guys know the rules and regulations? No talking to each other.

Hamed: And sleep.

Rayan: No sleeping. You can sleep when you go home.

The boys went up to the prayer hall; some stopped in the ablution room. (FN, Rayan PO1, 11/23/14)

In this way, Rayan dialogically reviewed with the boys the etiquette of transitioning from the classroom to the prayer hall. He also previewed for me what would occur once they got up there.

During my first observation, the first time I made my way upstairs to the men’s prayer hall, I received raised eyebrows from an older man coming down the stairs. It turned out to be Abdul Salaam, the head of the mosque committee. I continued walking into the men’s prayer hall and he followed me to ask what I was doing. As I was answering, Rayan arrived with my partition. I realized that should have walked up with it on my back like a snail. In becoming increasingly engaged in the research process, and comfortable in my role as a researcher on site, I had forgotten to be more careful about my presence in the men’s space.

Rayan set up the partition up for me in the far corner of the men’s prayer hall.

“I’ll pray there, too,” I said.

“Sure, whatever makes you comfortable,” Rayan answered.
One of the children came to visit me behind my partition. He was the only child that I saw make it to the red apple on Rayan’s apple spectrum. I learned that he was only seven years old; almost two years younger than most of the other kids in the class. He was in the advanced class due to his knowledge of Arabic and Quran.

I peeked through the cracks in the partition to see Rayan moving between boys, squatting down, whispering to them, giving specific instruction and positioning them in a long line. The other male teachers and several fathers arrived in the mosque and started doing their sunnah (optional) prayers that happen before the congregational prayer. All together, there were about six adult men and about 17 boys. Rayan got in line at the end and started his sunnah prayers. Some children were reading Quran; others were talking quietly. A man read a Quran sitting against the back wall. The muezzin waited quietly, hands in pockets. It was almost totally silent in the space. (FN, Rayan PO1, 11/23/14)

In my first interview with Rayan, he described what he was doing with the boys in the mosque over the 15 minutes between the call to prayer and the start of the prayer:

I get down to their level. I sit or I try to be facing them at the same height and just give them a small advice: ‘What are you doing? Are you reading? It’s a good time to make du‘ā’—between the adhān (the call to prayer) and the iqama (the call that communicates the prayer is actually starting). Perhaps, ‘Review a surah that you are learning or a du‘ā’ that you know. Repeat it. Make du‘ā’ for yourself, or your parents.’ ‘Did you pray your sunnah?’ Remind them of their prayers. Some of them say no, some say yes. Some of them, they just come and they just sit. No, you should pray before you sit. I try to instill that on them: you shouldn’t just sit down, right? (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 939–952)
Here, he outlined some of the major cultural tools of the Islamic system: making du‘ā’, reading, reviewing Quran and praying the sunnah prayers. This time in the mosque was about practicing those cultural tools under the guidance of Rayan as imam. Rayan also described how he sometimes needed to take some of the boys to talk about different issues: jumping around, making noises, breaking wind, chatting and showing skin:

When they are praying, their back is showing, their shirt is not low enough. I might take them aside and say, ‘When you pray, you should be covered’ (line 937). Then if they are chatting, to one another, I go to split them up [laughs]. I tell them: ‘It’s not the time to chat right now. You can chat,’ I tell them, ‘but just wait until we go on a break, until the ṣalāh is finished. Then you can go outside and play. But try to have a time for everything. This is a masjid now. So try to respect it and respect the other people. There are people praying.’

(Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 952–957)

Rayan’s aim was to make them conscious that there were in the mosque and illustrate how to respect it through role modeling and mediating the correct mosque etiquette. Other errors in etiquette included pointing feet in the direction of the qibla (the direction of Mecca to which Muslims pray). Rayan continued:

Or they lay down like they’re in the bedroom [laughs]. So I tell them, ‘This is a masjid right? This is not your home!’ It’s not where you get into that type of comfort zone. There are other people there! And their parents are not there. If the parents are there, and they are still doing it, then you have a bigger problem! So we are just doing what we can, really. Just to try to teach them these Islamic morals or values. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 961–966)
From this detailed description, it is clear that Rayan aimed to use this time in the mosque with the boys to practice implementing Islam etiquette and principles.

Similar to Amira’s Stages, Rayan’s active participation with the boys, in both preparing for the prayer and performing the prayer, was educative. He built relationships with each of them by working with them one-on-one; the act of collective participation in the congregational prayer bonded the boys to each other.

Rayan finished his optional prayers and sat down with two boys. His body language suggested that he enjoys this work. He moved on to show two others how to sit cross-legged. The muezzin stepped up to the microphone and called the second call to prayer—the iqama. Rayan called out: “Boys, line up! Straighten the line. Shoulder to shoulder!” Then he stepped onto the prayer rug at the very front of the line of boys and men and raised his hands, “Allāh akbar!” and started the prayer. (FN, Rayan PO1, 11/23/14)

Rayan’s emphasis, throughout his interviews, was on children learning the correct social practices in the correct times and places. When asked about how he saw the role of this mosque, in terms of children’s learning and development, Rayan said:

[F]or things to be put in their proper places. When it’s time to be serious, I like to see seriousness. Like, when they come into the mosque, to pray their sunnah, or do their prayers, du‘ā’, Quran—I like that to be serious. I don’t want them to chit-chat in that setting. While they are outside playing, go ahead! Play, scream, shout! I like to see that. That’s ideal for me. They know the difference between this and this. They are disciplined in that regard. (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 234–239)

The children were certainly receiving a chance to practice seriousness in the mosque and they also had chances to play outside together so Rayan seemed to be putting into practice his ideal
vision of a Muslim child’s learning environment. And within this environment, Rayan was one of the most experienced others. He took seriously his role in inducting the boys into the social practices of the mosque.

5.2.4 Summary

With Quran Work, both the content and aspects of its pedagogy are set. Muslims must memorize the Quran if they want to be able to recite it as part of the daily ritual prayer. Even with these restrictions, however, the educators found creative ways to shape their goals to the needs and interests of their students. This suggests the same for other social practices, especially those that do not come with their own intrinsic pedagogy and for those that involve practicing rather than performing.

Tala’s prayer practice and Imran’s ṭūḍū’ practice both involved physical activity on the part of the students: enacting the prayer and practicing ṭūḍū’ with running water. Within the social practice of Practicing the Acts of Worship there was more room for creativity. In fact, this social practice was the least restrictive in terms of pedagogy.

As for Performing the Ritual Congregational prayer, this social practice too comes with its own pedagogical constraints and allowances. Given the fact that it is one of the obligatory acts of worship, performed live with members of the outside community, means that the ways it is performed cannot be altered. On the other hand, the process whereby children are included in a mature social practice and participate along with more experienced others who are role modeling more final forms of development is, in itself, generative.
5.2.5 4. Speaking with God

Understanding social speech is “crucial for understanding how people come to make sense of themselves and others” (Vågan, 2011, p. 50). Speech and discursive practices were associated with every social practice in the Jamma Mosque School. They are important in this study because they constituted a unique pathway to the development of consciousness, which Vygotsky (1995) identified:

Originally, for a child, speech represents a means of communication between people… But gradually a child learns how to use speech to serve himself, his internal processes. Now speech becomes not just a means of communication with other people, but also a means for the child’s own inner thinking processes. (p. 353)

Children immersed in the social speech characteristic of the environment in which they are learning and developing eventually appropriate aspects of that social speech, which become their own thoughts. This point is salient in every social environment. In this particular social environment, specific types of social speech were taught intentionally as integral aspects of the Islamic system of principles and practices. Muslims informally refer to du‘ā’ as, *us speaking to God* and recitation of the Quran as, *God speaking to us*. Ritual prayer employs both. Vygotsky’s explanation above, combined with the data excerpts below, illustrated the ways in which social speech processes contributed to learning and development made visible through a sociocultural lens.

In the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School, social speech was of three distinct types, each of which featured during certain times and activities: 1. Phrases taken verbatim from the Quran, 2. Du‘ā’—Quranic, Prophetic, and personal, and 3. Islamic expressions. The three types of social speech shared basic characteristics in that they were all in Arabic, all referenced God,
all reflected aspects of the Islamic system of principles and practices, and all served a specific function. They differed in terms of what those functions were and the times and places in which they surfaced. In this section, I give examples of each type of social speech and I illustrate social speech was sometimes used as a component of social practices and sometimes used as a discursive practices in its own right.

5.2.5.1 Quranic Phrases

The entire Quran is an important source of content learning within the Islamic system and memorization/recitation of the Quran as a social practice comprised a large portion of the day’s lesson in the Jamma Mosque School. But the Quran has other functions, too, and one of them is that it contains specifically meaningful verses, that serve particular functions. In this data excerpt, the children were about to embark upon memorization of Āyāt al Kursi, the Throne Verse, a commonly memorized āyah at the end of the first chapter of the Quran. Amira started with a preamble about Āyāt al Kursi, highlighting the unique function that this particular āyah serves.

Amira said: “If you recite Āyāt al Kursi after every prayer, I will protect you from any and all evil! When do we recite Āyāt al Kursi?”

The children offer some answers and agree upon after prayer and before sleeping.

Amira: Salma, what did you mother say about Āyāt al Kursi?
Salma: My mother recites it before she drives the car.
Amira: Yes! It is a protection. From the unseen events. So anytime you need protection from God, recite this aya.

After they repeat the first three lines several times, Amira continues her mediation of the aya: “This āyah gives us something! Did you get any feeling?”
Sahar: I did! I got a happy feeling!

Amira: Ok. Why do we need to know God? We know that God is there and He never dies, He never needs to sleep, He is the owner of everything. So what I want you to do at home: work harder to memorize this aya. I want you to get it. Why? Because it is urgent! You need it after prayer, before you sleep and to protect you from everything. (FN, Amira PO5, 03/8/15)

Here, Amira taught the children a particular Islamic cultural tool: how to use a specific verse of the Quran for a specific function. She used the same process to teach another cultural tool: supplication (du‘ā’).

5.2.5.2 Du‘ā’

Imran was one of the educators who explicitly and repeatedly taught du‘ā’ as a discursive practice, highlighting its various functions. In this data excerpt, Imran described adhkār—which literally means, remembrance, and is another word for du‘ā’—as protection from negativity. He identified specific du‘ā’ for entering the washroom, dressing, and getting in the car and described them as being, “Your weapons that protect you in the life!” He described waking up and saying, “Alḥamd li’llāh (thank God), my life is so nice. I have so many things [to be thankful for]. Everyday, I do my adhkār, I memorize it and I do it everyday.” He related that once his car was hit by a truck:

When I came out of the car, the firefighters they said, ‘How did you come out from the car?’ Because I have my weapons [whispering]. I did my adhkār. [Before driving] I said ‘Bismillāh, Allāh akbar! Allāh akbar! Allāh akbar! Subḥān alladhī sakhhara lanā hādhā wa mā kunnā la hā muqrinīn, wa inna ilā rabbīna la munqalībūn’ (God is the greatest.
Glorious is the one who has made this available to us; we could not have overcome it, and we are certainly returning to our lord). These are my weapons! Yet! We cannot say, if an accident happened, ‘I made my du’ā’, why did the accident happened to me and I got a broken leg?’ This is qaddara allāh al qadar (God-determined destiny)! We should respect that and we should approve that. But, we say, tawakkalnā ‘alá allāh (we put our trust in Allāh)! Do your weapons, do what Allāh has commanded you and don’t think about what might happen. Then whatever happens, thank God about it. (Imran, AI1, 3/6/15, p. 1295–1343)

Here, Imran clearly describes how engaging in these Islamic discursive practices are more than simply using particular type of social speech, like du’ā’; they articulate and shape very specific ways of thinking and acting. Through regular identification of positive aspects of life, gratefulness practices, and putting trust in God, these discursive practices could literally change one’s worldview.

Amira started every class with the same supplication, the Du’ā’ of Musa (supplication of Moses), leading the class in saying it together. While all the educators taught du’ā’, Amira went into particular detail.

Towards the end of one day, as the class was going over the homework, Amira said: “If you have difficulty in your job, what do you do? How to ask Allāh’s help? Ladies, stop writing.”

Bayan puts her hands palms facing up in supplication.

Amira: What kind of language do you use?

Sahar: Arabic!
Amira: That’s the point—you can use any language, at any time. (FN, Amira O5, 03/08/15)

Here, she emphasized the practice of du‘ā’ and made sure the children understood that it is a flexible tool to be used any time, in any language. Another day, Amira started with her usual Du‘ā’ of Musa and she added another du‘ā’, one for parents. She said it in Arabic, and then she translated it: “Please Allāh, spread over my parents the wings of your mercy, as they had mercy on me when I was young.”

Dalia: Why are we doing a du‘ā’ for mummy and daddy?

Bayan: So they can live a long life?

Amira: Because they need this mercy. They are working so hard. And they are also praying for us for things to be good for us. I suggest that you do this du‘ā’ when you are in sujūd (prostration). (FN, Amira O5, 03/08/15)

These supplications as discursive practices contain principles; in this case, being merciful to parents, acknowledging the hard work that parents do and praying for their wellbeing. But as well as constituting discursive practices, these aspects of social speech are also cultural tools, or meditational means (Wertsch, 1998), in the sense that they mediate the way that a person lives and acts. Amira offers suggestions on how to use du‘ā’ to improve daily life situations. The pedagogy here is memorization; just like for the Quran work.

In terms of how the children themselves make sense of du‘ā’, one day they were studying a surah of Quran and going through some questions in the textbook collaboratively. They came across a section referring to the “best of creation.”

Bayan held a paper up in the air containing something she had written: ‘Dear Allāh: please make me amongst the best of creation always!’
Amira: Mā shā’a allāh! Is that du‘ā’, Bayan?

Bayan: Yes, it’s du‘ā’! Whenever we ask Allāh for something, that is du‘ā’! (FN Amira PO2, 11/09/14)

There are two notable points to be drawn from this data excerpt. The first is that Amira was sensitive and responsive to the students’ contributions to the class, she noticed them and responded to them. Second, she used them to highlight the principles and practices of the Islamic system that she was working so hard to teach, and, thus, helped the students make deeper and more collaborative meaning of them.

5.2.5.3 Islamic Expressions

The speech of all the educators was rich with Islamic expressions evoking God, a third type of social speech. In every class, in every section of the class, educators found opportunities to embellish social speech in the classrooms using these common Arabic–Islamic phrases. Imran and Amira made these phrases into mini-lessons in and of themselves; Tala and Rayan tended to simply use and model them. For example, one of the boys in Rayan’s class announced that his friend’s father had brought him to the school that day. Rayan said, “Mā shā’a allāh, they were being generous” (FN, Rayan O4, 03/15/14). In the following section, I give examples of three commonly-used Islamic expressions: al-salām ʿalaykum (peace be upon you), bismillāh, jazākum allāh khayran (May God reward you with the best), āmīn (amen), and in shāʾa allāh (God willing).

At the start of class, one day, Imran came in in a friendly way. He said, “Al-salām ʿalaykum!” to the children as he entered the room.

The children mumbled responses.
Imran turned around, left the room, and re-entered, saying “Al-salām ‘alaykum!”

The children repeated the phrase with attention this time.

Imran: You’re still sleeping? (FN, Imran O1, 02/15/15)

A proper greeting of al-salām ‘alaykum was so important to Imran that he made an emergent lesson out of it. Rayan often did this too. When he was reviewing practicing doing ablution with the children, he asked the first child:

“Ok Abudi. Stand up. Just tell me what you do? You turn on the water. Pretend… A lot or a little bit?

Abudi: You first say bismillāh—three times.

Rayan: No, not three times. Once is sufficient. (FN, Rayan O2, 11/29/14)

The expression, bismillāh, means in the name of God, and it is used when embarking upon any given task. In this example the child remembered that it was the first thing to be done, although Rayan corrected the number of times it should be said.

Imran emphasized other Islamic expressions in his class. In this case, he was trying to teach the children to say, jazākum allāh khayran, which means, ‘May Allāh reward you with goodness. He described:

Jazākum allāh khayran! I did it for three weeks. I give someone a pencil, I take it from him. When they have some biscuit and they want to share it with another, they say, ‘Oh, jazākum allāh khayran!’ Alḥamd li’llāh (thanks to God), all of them they remember that now! (Imran, A11, 03/06/15, line 1362–1365)

A related expression was found in Amira’s class. One of the students announced that when a teacher asks you how are you doing, you should say, “Great.” Amira corrected her: “What would
be an appropriate answer from a Muslim? *Al kheir alhamd li'llāh* (good, thanks to God)” (FN, Amira O1, 11/02/14).

Three final words that arose as discursively important in the speech of all four educators were: *Takbir*, which is the Arabic name for the phrase *Allāh akbar*, implying that God is greater than anything that can be named (Esposito, 2003) and *in shā’a allāh* (God willing)—as mediated by one of the students. As homework, Amira had asked the children make and present posters depicting the prayer positions:

One child made a large poster with flowers and a picture of a girl doing the prayer posters; another child made a series of colored words; another simply read off a piece of paper.

After each presentation, Amira would say, “*Takbir!*” And this was the signal for the children to say, *Allāh akbar!* When they were finished, Amira said: “*May Allāh increase your knowledge.*” Then she told them the reason for saying, *Allāh akbar*: “*Bringing attention to the higher intention of why we study and what we are doing here, giving Allāh His highest place.*” For the children who didn’t present anything, Amira said: “*Finish your posters over the winter break and when we resume in January, then you can present them!*”

The children each described to the class what they intended to do.

Suddenly, Bayan interrupted: When they said they were going to do a poster, they didn’t say *in shā’a allāh* (God willing)!

Amira: Quick, say, *in shā’a allāh*!

The children all said, “*In shā’a allāh!*” (FN, Amira O4, 12/14/14)

From this data excerpt, it is clear how various specific Islamic expressions were used in specific circumstances. In this study, Islamic social speech was identified as constituting discursive practices used in the classroom to contribute to the construction of Islamic consciousness. Here, I
identified three distinct types of social speech: 1. Quranic phrases that serve particular functions, 2. Prophetic and personal supplication (du‘ā’), and 3. Everyday Islamic expressions that accompany and annotate mundane daily events, like greeting each other, sneezing, and expressing a future plan (Stathis, 2005). All three types of social speech hail from the Islamic primary sources—the Quran and the sayings of Muhammad—and they promote the permeation of Islam into daily life (Stathis, 2005).

5.3 Chapter 5 Summary

What the educators and students did together in the classrooms and in the Jamma Mosque itself can be understood in terms of social practices laden with Islamic content and cultural tools—ways of thinking, speaking and acting—which dialectically and reciprocally over time and through practice constitute consciousness. In this way, cognitive, social-emotional and spiritual functioning are intimately related to social, cultural and historical context (Wertsch, 1998). Second, I described how I identified and defined what constituted a social or discursive practice in this study. Through thematic analysis, I identified social practices as including etiquette, religious, contemplative and discursive qualities. But in order to be defined as a social practice as unit of analysis in this study, each social practice had to be distinct: unique from other things happening within one educator’s classroom and similar to practices happening across all the educators’ classrooms. Third, I identified and described four social practices, forms of action mediated (Wertsch, 1998). I exemplified these practices through data excerpts, and highlighted how they linked to educators’ perspectives on learning and development. These perspectives, integrated within an Islamic system of principles and practices, each with their own affordances and constraints, contain various possibilities for social futures—possibilities of thinking,
speaking and being—depending upon the ways in which each educator sets up and mediates the
social practices. As Islamic learning leads to Islamic development, these distinct Islamic social
practices play a leading role in the development of a specifically Islamic consciousness. From
this perspective, the Jamma Mosque School was a site within which the Islamic system of
principles and practices, made visible in and mediated by social practices, was organized to
move development forward toward the ultimate purpose of human development and Islamic
education, which is expanded consciousness of God.
Chapter 6: Muslim Educators’ Tools in Crafting “The Better Option”

A critique from within Muslim educational circles is that much of Islamic education, as it is currently being practiced, falls far short of its transformative potential. Mohamed (2014) asserted that, “much of what passes as Islamic education today is not representative of the holistic, integrated and comprehensive educational philosophy of Islam” (p. 315). Al-Sadan (1997) pointed out that the generative methods in Islamic education outlined by scholars as far back as the 6th century, including teaching and learning through student-teacher relationship, engaging students in participation, dialogue, and personal experience, and the use of teaching aids above and beyond lecturing, are not being used in some classrooms today. In presenting a view of Islamic education at weekend mosque schools in Muslim communities the West, Ramadan (2005) suggested that students are playing the “game of an education that has in fact lost its way” (p. 127). He argued:

If we consider what is usually offered today to generations of young Muslims in the West, we become convinced that what is called ‘education’ (which should be the passing on of knowledge and of knowing how to be) is in fact an ill-administered ‘instruction,’ simply a handing on of knowledge based on principles, rules, obligations, and prohibitions, often presented in a cold, rigid, and austere manner, without soul or humanity. Some young people know by heart long surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an and a dizzying number of verses and hadiths that have absolutely no impact on their daily behavior; on the contrary, inevitably, they have taken on the outward form but have no contact with the base. (pp. 127-128)

Here, Ramadan illustrated pedagogical problems that have implications for cognitive, social and emotional development, and he identified a key concern: young people are mastering the Islamic
system, but they are not applying it or living it in daily lives. While my study encountered aspects of Ramadan’s (2005) description, it also revealed some developmentally-generative pedagogies across the social practices. Within the clamor of rote memorization, closed-ended questioning, and traditional discipline techniques, there were instances of developmentally-generative pedagogies. This is the third main theme of this study.

The first two themes—that the learning and development of Muslim children is indivisible from the Islamic system, and that Muslim educators used distinct Islamic social practices to mediate that system towards specifically Islamic developmental ends—may seem obvious from a sociocultural perspective. The question now becomes how to optimally nurture Muslim children’s cognitive and social-emotional development through social practices in Islamic learning environments embedded in plural societies? The third theme of this study involves the pedagogical approaches that educators’ used in the classrooms. Consistent with Ajem and Memon’s (2011) definition of pedagogy as the method and practice of teaching based on principles that reflect a particular philosophy of education, here pedagogies are considered as components of social practices (as cultural tools), in mediating the Islamic system of principles and practices.

Islamic social practices, as identified in Chapter 5, contain some intrinsic pedagogies that are educative from a sociocultural perspective. Heterogeneous participation in the congregational acts of worship, for example, adults and children together, occurred in both the classrooms and within the whole mosque. Each educator engaged in authentically role modeling final forms of social practices with the children—from Quran recitation to prayers to du’ā’ to social etiquette. Along with these, in this chapter, I identify other pedagogies that I observed in the classrooms that are also educative from a sociocultural perspective: relationship building, positive mediation
(of the divine connection), responsivity to students’ needs and interests resulting in differentiated and emergent mediation, active learning, engaging in reasoning, and the use of questions and inquiry.

Given the fixed nature of Islamic educational material and the simultaneous need to re-interpret that content in every new culture and age (Ramadan, 2013), pedagogy holds perhaps the most promise in making Islamic principles and practices optimally relevant in today’s world. Further, pedagogy offers opportunities to nurture cognition and emotion—critical and creative thinking in the service of analyzing Islamic principles in non-Islamic contexts—and to foster mastery and appropriation of the Islamic system. As Tala pointed out, “Here [in Canada], here people have a lot of options. So you have to make your option [Islam] be better than the other options. A better option for everybody!” (Tala AI1, 02/03/15, line 1107-10). When asked how to do that, Tala answered, “For kids, make it fun. For adults, make it worth it…Mostly speak to their hearts” (line 1112–1114). So how to make it fun? How to make it worth it? How to speak to their hearts? Pedagogies offer a potential starting point for making Islam “the better option.”

In this chapter, pedagogical approaches observed are organized into two sections. The first section includes pedagogies educators used to mediate the Islamic system: relationship building, positive mediation (of the divine connection), responsivity to students’ needs and interests resulting in differentiated and emergent mediation, active learning, engaging in reasoning, and the use of questions and inquiry. These pedagogical approaches began from sensitizing concepts in the sociocultural literature emphasizing the importance of both cognitive and social-emotional development, and the unity between them.

The second section of this chapter examines how the educators used the secular, Western cultural context outside the classroom walls to mediate the Islamic system. Examples of how the
secular, Western context was actually present within the Jamma Mosque School included big questions the children asked, how the educators taught Arabic, qualities they identified in a good Muslim educator, and the ways in which they used the secular, Western context as a foil in mediating the Islamic system. I also examine the educators’ own analyses of a Western worldview in relation to their own and the ways in which they valued and used particular pedagogies rooted in that Western worldview.

Instead of describing all of the pedagogical approaches that I observed in the classrooms, or providing a critique of the weaker ones, I present data excerpts to exemplify the mixed use of pedagogy across the educators’ classrooms. Within the pedagogical approaches included in this chapter are some intrinsic to the Islamic social practices, some that the educators developed themselves, and some that evoked the secular cultural context.

6.1 Mediating Islam: Being Muslim Together, Thinking Islam Together

The educators at the Jamma Mosque School mediated the Islamic system of principles and practices. Above and beyond teaching the curriculum, and across the social practices, the educators used opportunities to emphasize Islamic principles or reasons behind a practice. The following is one example. Rayan’s class was working on individual recitations of Quran. A boy named Zizu started reciting his surah well, but then he started to falter. Some of the children began to giggle.

Rayan: Why are you laughing? Do you want to leave the class?

Boys in unison: No!

Rayan: Zizu, where were you?

Zizu: I don’t remember—
Yusuf [interrupting]: Because you went too fast.

Rayan: Yusuf, you worry about yourself, ok? For a person’s good, Islam is—

Mahmood: To not be jealous?

Rayan: Of course!

Abdullah: We should not be—

Rayan: Be in charge of yourself and do not interfere with anyone else! That he leaves aside what does not concern him, this is part of you being a good Muslim, ok? Zizu continue.

(FN, Rayan O4, 03/15/15)

Here, Rayan used two instances of the children’s behavior as chances to define what it means to be “a good Muslim.” First, he brought to the boys’ attention the fact that laughing at their classmate was not acceptable. Second, when Yusuf interrupted and commented that Zizu lost his place in the surah because he “went too fast,” Rayan told him that part of being a good Muslim is “leaving aside what does not concern him.” While the educators mediated the Islamic system, the ways in which each educator approached mediation illustrated both similarities and differences across the four educators.

In this study, the importance of creating a warm climate in the classroom was evidenced by what the educators did and said. All of the educators, for example, exhibited care for the children and strived to connect with each of them. All of them were warm and engaging with their students. All of them mentioned touching the hearts of the children first. Imran referenced the pedagogical benefit of using affection in the classroom, saying: “When I am friends with them [the children], they will be more peaceful. They will have more open heart to get knowledge from me” (Imran, AI2, 03/06/15, line 1196–1197). Here, Imran echoed the literature in suggesting that by nurturing friendship and relationship, children are more responsive to
knowledge. Amira referred to the same phenomena in more detail: “[W]e make it very friendly when we do the Quran—why?—because we need to touch the heart of the child. And when they have that…sticky forever. Ever” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 779–781). She was suggesting here that if an educator can approach the teaching/learning relationship in a warm, friendly way, she can touch the heart of a child, which results in “sticky knowledge” or knowledge that sticks; from an etic perspective, internalization as appropriation (Wertsch, 1998). Amira elaborated “sticky knowledge” as knowledge related to a child’s life—knowledge of interest to a child: “[W]e are looking for sticky knowledge and sticky knowledge has to be related to their lives or they cannot get it” (line 310–311). When knowledge relevant to a child’s life is explored with the educator in a way that touches the child’s heart, it is internalized to become part of the child’s own psychological functions (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013; Vygotsky, 1997). In fact, appropriating the principles and practices of Islam seemed to be the main motivation behind the Jamma Mosque School: “What we try to offer them [the children] are the principles of Islam so that they can take them out of the mosque and use them” (Rayan, first meeting, 10/12/14). In this way, both Amira and Rayan addressed the problem that Ramadan (2005) raised regarding young Muslims whose knowledge of the Quran has no impact upon their daily lives.

In this study, the educators engaged in relationship-building with and amongst the students; they were sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of the children; they engaged in some active learning, group work and storytelling; and they encouraged participation and performance before competence (Cazden, 1981). All of these pedagogies, which are explored in the remainder of this chapter, actively contributed to creating a socially, emotionally, and cognitively enriched learning environment that helped set the stage for increased learning and development.
6.1.1 Relationship-Building

Cazden (2001) stated that “Of all educational resources, our own behavior as teachers is the most precious” (p. 145). In this way, the teacher him/herself is the main pedagogical tool in mediating learning and development in Islamic educational contexts. All of the educators in this study referenced the importance of educator–student relationships and each one, in different ways, attempted to build relationships with the students in their class.

Amira and Tala tended to relate to the girls by showing interest in their lives outside the Jamma Mosque school, accepting the girls’ invitations for conversations on topics of interest to them, and sharing compliments. Tala said: “The more you have a relationship with kids, the more they understand from you” (Tala, AI1, 03/02/15, line 1183–1184) and she described relationship as transcending the bounds of the classroom:

It’s not just the teaching time where there is relationship. There is a relationship before and after, like, for example, here there are teachers… they invite the students to their house. Or go with the students to the park. Just have a play time. Just have relationship time. Not just in school, when you teach them, that’s it. (line 1197–1204)

Here, Tala is describing relationship as being behind the teaching, supporting the teaching, as an ideal situation. I did not observe her actively doing this with the Jamma Mosque School students; she expressed the wish to.

Rayan shared another ideal situation in describing one of Muhammad’s qualities:

They say that he is the most perfect of Allāh’s creation—the Prophet Muhammad, ṣallā allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam. So you see examples of it in his companions, like Anas Ibn Malik, raḍiya allāhu ‘anhu (God be pleased with him), he was khādim al-rasūl, the servant
of the prophet. His mother came to the Prophet [when Anas was a boy] and said, ‘He is going to serve you.’ And the way Anas described the Prophet’s manners with him, like, ‘He never shouted at me, he never rebuked me, he never said, Why didn’t you do this? Why didn’t you do that? He never talked [like that]… for ten years!’” And we can learn so much from that! (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 378-384)

Rayan’s description was of a man who, for a decade, never spoke harshly to his young helper. This relationship sets a precedent for creating a climate of gentle respect in the classroom, and it also foregrounds the importance of relationship, or knowing one’s students and their particular dispositions.

Both Rayan and Imran established rapport with the students, but kept more distinct boundaries as older, respected, more-experienced others. They described this as “balance.” Imran said, for example:

I’m not going to be friends with them at all times! Otherwise they will think that I am like a kid with them, just joking! No, I have to be serious in some things, in the topics, and very peaceful when we go in the hallways, in the playground, play with them. So in that case they will have, what do you call it, muwazinah—balance! (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 1199–1203)

This quote actually contains two ideas. The first is that he cannot “be friends” with the children all the time or they will not take seriously his teaching and the topics that require seriousness. Second, to be friendly all the time would be unbalanced.

Rayan, as the imam of the mosque, upheld this role in front of the boys, which necessarily meant a certain power differential and distance from them. He, too, emphasized balance in not being too lenient with the children:
You have to find a balanced way. *Hikmah.* You use wisdom. It means that you put things in their proper places. When there is a time to be harsh, you are harsh. When it’s time to be lenient, you are lenient. It’s putting things in the right place, at the right time, at the right moment. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 103–107)

This balance between harshness and leniency seemed to serve, for Rayan, a larger pedagogical purpose of helping children learn the time and the place for seriousness, when performing the acts of worship, and the time and the place for play. Learning this balance was one of the main principles Rayan wanted children to learn at the Jamma Mosque School. He emphasized:

I want for things to be put in their proper places. When it’s time to be serious, I would like to see seriousness. Like, when they come into the *Muṣallā* (place of prayer) to do their prayers, du‘ā’, Quran—I would like that to be serious. I don’t want them to chit-chat in that setting. While they are outside playing, go ahead! Play, scream, shout! That’s ideal for me: they know the difference between this and this. (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 234–239)

Here, Rayan is describing another permutation of balance: that of etiquette situated in place and practice. Both Rayan and his class seemed to particularly enjoy being up in the prayer hall, engaged in the acts of worship leading up the congregational prayer, when Rayan was working with them one-on-one. In the classroom, however, it seemed that Rayan equated seriousness with traditional pedagogic delivery, more akin to Ramadan’s (2005) description of “simply a handing on of knowledge” (p. 128). The children—boys between eight and ten years old—spent much of the time sitting at their desks and gradually, it appeared, getting more and more restless. I asked Rayan if he might introduce more active learning strategies—like treasure hunts or drama or role-play—into the sections of the class, like Islamic studies that do not necessarily have their own intrinsic pedagogies (like memorization of Quran or participation in the ritual prayer).
said, “I’d like to see that in a couple of years. Because now—looking at their maturity level—I don’t think they’d be able” (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 261–263). This was once instance where it appeared that an educator’s understanding of child development, and resultant choice of pedagogy, seemed questionable in terms of serving the developmental interests of the children.

Based on my observations, the balance that Rayan and Imran spoke about seemed difficult to attain in classroom social practice. Further, the traditional disciplinarian role, which they both adopted at times, seemed contradictory to the warm, affectionate role that they adopted at other times.

6.1.2 Mediating the Divine Connection

Along with relationship, another pedagogical approach that featured in the classrooms was the way in which the educators mediated the children’s connections with God, as one of the major educational objectives at the school. Again, there was wide variety in how the educators mediated this connection. Amira and Tala repeatedly emphasized the nature of that connection as being love and friendliness. Amira said:

The mission here is to take out our desire and to stay CLOSE to God. That’s the point. And some of the kids, subḥān allāh, get it right away, saying, ‘Oh, that’s brilliant. If God is my best friend, I cannot do something wrong—not please him!’ So why would we have to say to them, ‘You’ll get punished if you don’t do that’? No. That doesn’t make sense. We leave the beauty between us and God; you know, the beautiful relationship! (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 469–473)
Most of Amira’s teaching worked to nurture this connection with God and she sought opportunities to build it in positive ways. In one of the surahs that they were studying, they came across the Arabic word for *gardens*.

Amira: Gardens! What are these gardens?

Sahar: Is it a garden like a flower garden?

Amira: Yes, flower garden! Allāh created colors in *jennah* (heaven) that we don’t even know! Gardens. Forever. When we love Allāh. And fear him.

Sahar: You fear Allāh because when you did something wrong and you don’t pray forgiveness for it. Then, on the Day of Judgment, you are scared because you don’t know what will happen.

Amira: Fearing doesn’t mean all the time punishment. When I *love* Allāh… I’m going to give you an example. You have a very best friend, sister or mother. Let’s say mother. I do all my best to please her. Why?

Iman: To get candy?

Amira: I try to please my mother because I fear that if I do something wrong… she will be not happy. Because of my love for her, I don’t want her to be unhappy. The fear comes from my heart, from the *love* I have for her, not because she’s going to punish me. And Allāh loves us 70 times more than our mothers—*70 times!* (FN, Amira PO2, 11/09/14)

In this quote, Amira explicitly led the children away from thinking of a relationship with God in terms of one based on fear and punishment—common in many Muslim classrooms (Ramadan, 2005)—and provided real-life analogies to help the children think in terms of love.

While all the educators mediated the meaning of the Quran according to both common understandings and their own personal insights, Tala seemed to be the most sensitive to the age-
appropriate nature of material. Tala started to read the English translation of the surah from the textbook and then stopped. “This is too harsh for kids, you guys are still kids. So let’s just say that you try to do lots of good deeds and Allāh will help you with that and add your good deeds” (FN, Tala PO4, 04/05/15). Later, I examined the textbook. It spoke about hell being an abyss of burning fire that hugs you like your mother. Tala chose not to read this from the text as it was written in the textbook because she thought the children were too young. This illustrates Tala’s perspective on child development, as well as how she intentionally strived to create a positive mood in her classroom.

Although Amira did not shy away from the harsher material in the textbook, as Tala did, Amira highlighted the positive for the children, in particular, angels and miracles. She said, for example: “Allāh made the Quran easy! That is the miracle!” (FN, Amira PO2, 11/09/14).

Imran seemed to mediate the divine connection in a more fear-based way. For example, when the children were learning how to do wudu he had each child contribute the description of one action while a child at the front of the class acted out the action.

They were at the arm washing part of the sequence and Mir, the child acting out the actions, did not illustrate washing his arm all the way up to the elbow. Imran said, “Wrong! He didn’t wash right up to his elbow. His shirt will get the ajr (reward from God)? Just kidding. On the day of Judgment, that part of your arm… will testify against you. (FN, Imran PO2, 02/22/15)

In other words, because the child did not wash his arm all the way up to the elbow, his arm would speak against him in front of God. But Imran also used humor in this data excerpt, thus illustrating some sensitivity to the children, and in his interview, Imran elaborated on the positive dimensions of the expression, being “afraid” of Allāh:
Being afraid from Allāh ‘azza wa jalla (mighty and glorious) means: What He commands us to do, we should do it just because of Him. What He commands us not to do, we should not do it just because of Him. We should help the people just because of Him; we should take care of our wife, just because of Him; we should take care of our parents, just because of Him; take care of our kids, our students, just because of Him. This is how “afraid from Allāh” is. Because if I say afraid of Allāh, someone might think “scared.” No. Not scared. (Imran, AI2, 05/15/15, line 205–211)

Here, Imran unpacked the idea of “being afraid” of God in ways similar to Amira: afraid does not mean scared; afraid means that we do what Allāh wants us to because we want to please Allāh. This was slightly different than the way that he mediated the divine connection in the classroom, which was more about fear than love and pleasing God.

Rayan’s approach was similar to Imran’s, but in Rayan’s description regarding the divine connection there was more consistency between his words and actions in the classroom. He described the divine connection as follows:

We [Muslims] are not people who side to one side or another, to fear only or to hope only. We have to be in the middle. But once a person knows about the fear aspect, which is important, he will not do wrong. He will not oppress. He will be kind. Because he keeps it in mind that this is pleasing to Allāh. On top of fear and hope you have love… When we do ‘ibādāt (acts of worship), first of all they should be done with love—love for Allāh. This love then has the fear and the hope. How? Because you fear, ‘Maybe Allāh will not accept my actions. Maybe I was not sincere. Maybe I did something wrong’ —and we do many things wrong. And Allāh afwan katir, Allāh forgives a lot… (Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 465–487)
In describing this fear and hope within one’s connection with God—fear of displeasing God and hope for His forgiveness—Rayan outlined the way that both are factors motivating behavior. He described it in this way in the classroom, to the boys, also.

### 6.1.3 Differentiated and Emergent Mediation

Another pedagogical approach observed in the classrooms was sensitivity to the needs and interests of the children, which was then operationalized in differentiated mediation—doing things differently depending on, and in response to, the children—and emergent mediation, as when educators utilized opportunities as they arose to mediate the Islamic system.

The educators exhibited sensitivity in gauging the mood in the classroom on any given Sunday. Amira, for example, determined the topic to start class depending on the mood of the children. Rayan was sensitive to the fact that children got bored and it was best to start the class with Quran: “That’s when they are more fresh. It’s better to start with Quran. And then we go into other stuff… They get bored quick” (Rayan AI1, 12/17/14, line 1000–1). Another part of being sensitive was to ask children to share thoughts and feelings. Rayan often made space for children to contribute when he was telling a story: “They always put their hands up: they want to add stuff that I already said. [laughs] But they just want to say something; they want to be part of it. Some of them are really excited about it!” (line 1004–10).

A second part of being sensitive to the individual needs of children was emphasized as the importance of knowing one’s students and crafting a teaching/learning relationship specific to each one that translated into differentiated mediation. Referring to the story of Muhammad’s ongoing gentleness with his young helper, Rayan provided another description of an interaction between Muhammad and one of his companions that illustrated the need to balance gentleness
with firmness, when the situation so required. One of Muhammad’s companions came to the mosque wearing a gold ring.

The Prophet took it [the ring] from the companion’s finger and threw it away. He was wearing gold and we don’t wear gold, for men. So the Prophet threw it, basically. The other companions said, after that, ‘You can still go get that [ring] and sell it and make a profit from it.’ But the guy said, ‘No. I’m not going to pick up what the Prophet threw away!’ [laughs] (Rayan, A12, 04/03/15, line 398–402)

The principle being taught here was that men are not supposed to wear gold in order to remain humble regarding their wealth. Muhammad taught his companions this principle through action. Rayan used this as an example of a time when Muhammad was not gentle or lenient and Rayan emphasized the importance of being able to discern the character of the person receiving the lesson:

You need to know who you are talking to. If you are going to be harsh to this guy and he’s never going to come back to the masjid, don’t be harsh with him. It’s different. There’s another guy, he’ll come back but he’s acting up right now so he’s advised in a harsher manner. (Rayan, A12, 04/03/15, line 392–395)

Rayan counseled being gentle with someone who might be frightened away by harshness and being harsh with someone who is temporarily “acting up” and might respond well to harshness. This is an example of differentiated mediation based upon relationship, where the teacher knows his or her students and teaches according to their specific dispositions and needs in the moment.

The third aspect of being responsive and sensitive to the needs and interests of the children was acting upon the children’s thoughts and feelings to actually change what was happening in
the classroom. In Amira’s class, at the beginning of one day, she was preparing the class to start the memorization of the Quran. She launched into explaining Ayat al Kursi:

   Amira: Nine passages. Nine stops. If you practice it like that, it will be easy for you to memorize. Nine stops in one aya. Ok, let’s do the first line.

She looked around the classroom. The girls were silent, just sitting there.

Amra: Do you guys need coffee?

The girls giggled.

Lima: We need to tell you what we did this weekend!

Amira: Oh yes, the icebreaker, we will do that after we finish Ayat al Kursi! (FN, Amira PO5, 03/08/15)

In her desire to connect with the children and make most effective her teaching, Amira had devised an “icebreaker” activity whereby she connected with the girls and checked in with them about what was going on in their lives outside the classroom. In this data excerpt, she is responsive to their silence and asks them about it. She also connects with them using humor.

Another application of being responsive to children is seizing upon their interest in the moment and crafting emergent mediation. In the Jamma Mosque School, there were many moments where educators took advantage of situations that arose to illustrate Islamic principles and social practices. The following data excerpt also took place in Amira’s classroom at the end of the classroom time. The girls were getting ready to leave the classroom for the ritual, congregational prayer when someone anonymously dropped off a large box of doughnuts for the children. The girls rushed to the box and clustered around it.

   Amira: When we have a treat—an unexpected treat—what do we say?!
Children offered various answers: Thank you! Merci beaucoup! Jazākum allāh khayran!

Alḥamd li’llāh!

Amira: Who’s giving this to us?

Sahar: Allāh?

Amira: Through who? Do we know this person?

Lima: Sarah and Fayrouz’s mum?

Amira: We don’t know! So if we don’t know who gave this to us, what can we do?

[Silence]

Amira: We can make du‘ā’ for that person! And what kind of action is this, the person giving us this treat?

Cala: Charity!

Amira: Right! So let’s do du‘ā’ for him or her: “May Allāh accept their generosity and reward them and always make them able to provide.” (FN, Amira PO5, 03/08/15)

The children were excited about anonymous treat of doughnuts but before they dove into the box, Amira engaged them to teach them the Islamic social etiquette involved in such a situation.

It was particularly interesting because the person who gave the doughnuts was not present to receive their social etiquette (dua). Thus, Amira’s lesson served to illustrate the fact that, in large part, these social etiquettes are performed not only for people, but for God.

6.1.4 Active Learning and Group Work

All of the educators used active learning and group work in different ways and at different times in the Jamma Mosque School. Amira’s Stages approach to memorizing Quran and Tala’s practicing of the ritual prayer were two examples. Rayan sometimes used team teaching in
having the children each other Arabic numbers and letters and his mediation of the ritual, congregational prayer was one lengthy active learning exercise in situ.

The only time I observed acting used as pedagogy was in Imran’s classroom, one day, when he facilitated a complex active learning activity. He had two children go to either ends of the room. Then they approached each other, hands outstretched, and enacted a greeting in Arabic. The children wore pleased, and slightly quizzical expressions on their faces. Then they switched positions. Imran had two new children enact the greeting and he added an additional line in classical Arabic. He told the children:

We are learning two things here, we are learning *adab*—the etiquette, Islamic etiquette. And we are learning how to say these conversations in Arabic. But I can’t give you everything all at once. So we will do the next one [vignette] in the English. Next week, we will have it in Arabic. (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15)

Imran clearly indicated to the children the reason behind the enactment—adab and Arabic. Then he set up another more complicated vignette involving brothers and sisters visiting a sick neighbor. Before they acted it out, Imran reviewed the whole thing with the children, in English:

Imran: If you knock on the door first time, they don’t answer…

Faiz: I am going to ring the doorbell.

Imran: They didn’t answer again, what are you going to do? Knock again or go home?

Mido: I would call on the phone.

Imran: They didn’t answer the phone.

Yasmine: I would go to the window and look—

Imran: No, no, no, no!

Faisal: I would shout!
Imran: No, no, no! Ok, good, we have two things: you cannot go look in the window and you can’t shout around. Mir, what are you going to do?

Mir: Go home.

Ziad: Knock again!

Imran: Ok, let’s knock again. They still don’t answer, what are you going to do. Zaid, what are you going to do?

Ziad: Go home.

Imran: Why?

Ziad: Because we knocked three times!

Imran: In Islam, you are allowed to knock *three times*. The third time, if they don’t answer, just go home.

The children enacted the vignette. (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15)

In this data excerpt, Imran went over the scene with the children before they acted it out, so that they understood the key principle: Islamic social etiquette dictates that a visitor knocks on the door three times and if no one answers, the visitor goes home. The vignette progressed to include the principles of taking care of a sick friend, seeking permission from adults or older siblings before leaving the house, and greeting people upon arrival someplace.

After the children had enacted the vignette, Imran debriefed with them:

Imran: Ok, Zuzu, what did we learn?

Zuzu: That if your friend is sick, we should go take care of them.

Imran: Good job! Next!

Faiz: That we should only knock three times and if they don’t answer we should go home.
Imran: Yes. And, Tassy?

Tassy: Take permission from our parents or our older sibling before we go out.

Imran: And respect them when you enter the room. Respect the older brother and the younger sister. Do not ignore her because she is a younger girl! (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15)

In the debriefing, Imran reiterated the principles he was trying to teach. All together, there were three layers of learning: dialogue, followed by acting, followed by dialogue. Imran conducted the vignette in English to ensure the children fully understood the principles of social etiquette.

The point of sharing this data excerpt is to illustrate that active learning occurred in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School. But, further, this example ties into the first two themes of this study. The topic of Imran’s enactment exercise was principles of social etiquette. Indeed, from the second theme that social etiquette practices are themselves acts of worship. This was an example of the social practice Practicing the Acts of Worship. Here, the children were practicing an act of worship using acting as an active learning pedagogy, mediated by Imran as a more experienced other.

Given the gravity of the material being taught, and also its deep roots in Islamic history, I was curious about the educators’ perspectives on experimenting with and importing new pedagogies to mediate Islamic material. Rayan clarified:

Having different methods, it’s ok. Like, using computers to teach, these are methods, means. It’s ok. I have that apple spectrum that you saw. Sometimes I use it, just to make them be quiet or follow the rules. That’s just a medium, a means. That’s ok, in shā’ā Allāh (God willing). But to innovate, in a way, something in the deen—like an ‘ibādāh (an act of
worship), say this 500 times today, say it 500 times next week, at the same time—no.

(Rayan, AI2, 04/03/15, line 342)

In this way, Rayan strongly differentiated between using new methods to teach the existing Islamic material and innovating new material or new acts of worship. The latter was not appropriate.

Amira discussed the Islamic prohibition against depicting or enacting prophets, saying:

“Even if I would like to do a play about the Prophet Muhammad, I am not allowed to do a play about the Prophets. Situations, yes. But, [not] acting as a prophet…” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 894–5). She went on to describe how she worked with that prohibition using an active learning activity in an Islamic studies class at a different mosque school. She simulated a story of the prophet Jonah (or Yunus, in Arabic) being swallowed by a whale. She said:

One day, I was talking about—subḥān Allāh, I will never forget it, in my life [whispering]—Prophet Yunus, ‘alayhi al salām (upon him be peace), when he was in the tummy of the whale. God said to him, “Yunus, if you didn’t do remembering of God in the tummy of this whale, you would have stayed there forever until the Day of Judgment.”

Amazing! So how to give them [the students] this feeling? I couldn’t do the action of Yunus, ‘alayhi al salām. So I asked them to turn off the lights, because it was an evening class. Turn off the lights and think that you are in the tummy of the whale [laughs]. What would you do? Everyone started saying, ‘I would cry, scream! I don’t know!’ Just to get the connection…[to feel] the real situation, as if you are in it? It is to ask the help of God [whispering]. He will send you angels to help you. That is the point. See? So I simulated.

(Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 895–916)
Simulation was Amira’s way of working with a prohibition. In simulating the situation, as a way to tell the story of Jonah, she was also stimulating the emotions of the students, and then directing their attention to connecting to God, the ultimate objective of the lesson.

6.1.5 Engaging in Reasoning

Reasoning with children as part of mediating the Islamic principles and practices holds the potential to make the material more meaningful and, simultaneously, support cognitive and affective development. All of the educators engaged in reasoning with the children and some of the educators emphasized the relationship between reasoning and development in the interviews. Tala, for example, held reasoning in such high regard that she defined a well-developed person as someone “who try to understand the reasons behind why we do things. Why do we have to pray?” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 63–64). She shared the fact that, when she was a child, she never asked, “Why do we pray?” She said:

Back home, we would pray, we would be told, ‘You have to pray, you have to pray, you have to pray!’ Ok, we will pray but we don’t know why we are praying. We just know it is a practice that we have to do everyday. But you don’t know why. What are the benefits? …What is it helping you develop or do? (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 849–853)

Here, Tala described learning an act of worship in her community in Yemen and only being told that the Quran “stops you from doing bad things; makes you do good things” (line 854–55). Tala said that was not enough; she wanted more explanation on the deeper reasons behind prayer. She emphasized that parents and teachers need to help children inquire into the reasons behind the acts of worship, saying: “Once you know why you are doing it, you have a choice if you want to do it or not. They are fully developed by choosing the right thing to do (line 67–73).’’ In this
way, she directly linked reasoning to development, and she highlighted the role of more experienced others in facilitating this process of expanding reasoning. Knowing why makes it meaningful, purposeful, and a motive for doing so.

Imran offered the students a practical reason why he was teaching them the Arabic numbers: so they could use them when trying to find pages in the Quran. Then he gave them lots of chances to practice. He also emphasized the importance of explaining to children the reason why something or other is deemed *harām* or forbidden in Islam: “Don’t tell him ḥarām. Yes, tell him ḥarām, but not all the time: ‘Ḥarām! Ḥarām! Ḥarām!’ You should tell him why—**exactly why**” (Imran, AI2, 05/15/15, line 364–366). He gave an example of what he expected he would do with his own future children, in deciding which cartoons to watch on TV. He said:

> We should choose it [cartoons] for them and also we should explain for them: why! [whispering]. Why I choose this cartoon for you? Why not the other one? Because they have their own choice, they are human, as me. It’s not that I am older and they are young that means I have to be restrictive on them and just do what I want. No. Let them do what they want but if I don’t like something I should explain why. (line 368–373)

In this quote, Imran suggested giving children their autonomy, but mediating their cartoon experience in line with Islamic principles and explaining why some cartoons are better than others.

Rayan used analogies, as well as his command of English, to provide reasons behind the practices and to elaborate on particular concepts and words in his class of mixed-ability English speakers. In one class, he was trying to explain the concept of “deserving” or “being worthy” of worship. He told the boys: “Guess what? Allāh created everything. But then the people go and pray to a stone or a rock [laughs]. Who *deserves* the worship, the stone or Allāh? Allāh! Only
Allāh deserves our worship” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 114–116). This example illustrates that Rayan used casual speech—“Guess what?”—and humor, the idea of worshipping a stone, with more complex speech to identify the reason behind a given concept.

In considering the reasons behind the acts of worship, the educators went further than simply telling the children, Allāh wants you to pray, so pray. Or, We make wudu before we pray because that’s what the Prophet used to do. They shared with the children the benefits of the acts of worship on their daily lives. Amira often told the girls that the reason they recited the du‘ā’ at the start of class was to protect themselves against “minor shirk,” meaning minor mistakes in their acts of worship. The girls joked, “Protection from minor sharks” and Amira laughed along with them (FN, Amira, PO3, 11/16/14). She also described one of the purposes behind memorizing the Quran:

We [human beings] are weak, overall. But if we have the words in our hearts … protection!
That’s why when we are memorizing Quran, we pray, ‘Oh God give us the power to memorize it and give us the heritage of etiquettes of this Quran in our hearts.’ (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 491–497)

Here, as elsewhere, Amira was explicit about the purposes behind the acts of worship and she offered the children strategies in approaching them. Evoking the help of God was a strategy for facing life problems that Amira discussed in the interviews and with the children; as was visualization, in this case, of protective words in the heart. Finally, Amira often emphasized to the girls the importance of reflecting their Islamic learning in their behavior: “Because it doesn’t make sense if I am memorizing Quran and my actions are opposite [laughs]” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 946–7). In this way, she role modeled an overarching reason behind all the social practices: better behavior. Amira was also illustrating a fundamental Islamic principle: the
application of knowledge. Al-Sadan (1997) paraphrased the 6th century Islamic scholar Al-Ghazzali in saying: “If man [sic] should read a hundred thousand scientific books and learned them all, they would be of no benefit to him if he failed to apply them and they were not used” (p. 102).

Rayan added another dimension: giving the children chances to use reason to solve Islamic problems, and to think about the reasons behind a fiqh (Islamic legal) ruling. In this case, he described giving the boys a hypothetical situation: “You’re stuck and you need to make wudu and there is no water…what to do? Get them to think, you know!” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, p. 1091–2). In giving the children practice in applying Islamic principles in various situations, he was not only preparing them for what they will face in life, as religious minorities in a secular society, but he was practicing with them thinking and problem solving. Both Amira’s comment above about memorizing the Quran and acting upon her learning, and Rayan’s example here of thinking through complex, life situations illustrate what Ramadan (2005) suggested that Muslim educators needed to do with the children: practicing the important skills of thinking, reasoning, application and re-application of timeless Islamic principles.

6.1.6 Cultivating Inquiry and the Use of Questions

The educators seemed to have a complex relationship with inquiry and the use of questions in the classrooms: while the asking of questions was generally encouraged, the educators did not answer all of the children’s questions. Further, they ways in which they themselves used questioning was in a close-ended manner. Looking a little closer, on the one hand, each educator expressed enthusiasm for inquiry as an intellectual process. They maintained that students should question. One Sunday in Amira’s classroom, Sahar began to ask a question, “I have a question—
"Amira rushed over to her desk, saying, “I love your questions. What is it?” (FN, Amira PO3, 11/16/14). Imran was also enthusiastic. He said:

I encourage them to ask questions—everywhere! Even the young ones, three years old! If he can talk, ask me! And if you don’t like that, ask me: ‘What is going on with this? I don’t like it!’ I tell this to all my classes: ‘Ask me every time! Because the question, when you ask it, takes you to more knowledge. More knowledge! Still, if you don’t like the answer, still ask more, more questions! Ask a different person… until you have the answer that your heart feels is good.’ (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 1134–42)

There are three important points to take from this data excerpt. First, Imran encouraged questioning; second, that he saw the connection between inquiry and knowledge generation, and; third, a satisfying answer should make one’s heart feel good. Clearly, Imran saw the multiple benefits of inquiry in the classroom.

Tala described elaborate question sessions that she used to conduct at the Jamma Mosque School in the days before the school had a curriculum and when she was the only teacher. She used to hold “free question times,” when the children simply asked her questions (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 751). Sometimes, the daughter of the mosque owner came to help Tala with the 13 children and they conducted the question times together. Tala described the kinds of questions the children asked, “Are songs ḥarām?” “What happens when we are in school and its time for prayer?” “Are we supposed to wear the hijab?” and “Are we allowed to put on makeup?” To that last question, the daughter of the mosque owner answered: “You’re so beautiful, you don’t need makeup. You are so beautiful, why would you need makeup when Allāh made you beautiful?” (line 793–94). While Tala said that she thought was a good answer, with her own daughters, she had a different strategy. She allowed the girls put make up on at home, on Saturdays. Her reason
behind this strategy was: So they don’t feel like they are missing something. Or, ‘I want to do something so bad!’ [whispering]. Then they will just go do it at their friend’s house and not here” (Tala, AI2, 01/05/15, p. 167–9). In order for her girls to not feel “held back” (line 158) she let them do it at home, with her.

While all of the educators welcomed students to ask questions, and all of the educators seemed to understand and acknowledge the importance of inquiry in the classroom, in practice, the educators did not always answer the children’s questions. An example of this was when Rayan was telling the children the story of Cain and Abel, two sons of Adam, where one brother killed the other brother. A child interjected: “It’s ḥarām to kill your own brother!” Rayan answered, “Of course, man! This is the first crime that happened on earth. This is very evil right?” (FN, Rayan PO3, 12/07/14). Rayan continued with the story:

Rayan: When he killed him he didn’t know what to do with him. So he carried him on his back for days and days... Eventually, Allāh sent two crows... to show him what to do. They fought and then one buried the other one. He [Qabeel/Cain] felt regret but he didn’t make tawbah (repentance) to Allāh. He felt bad. He had to bury his brother.

Zizu: How did he understand that Allāh was sending the crows specifically to show him? What if they were just two random birds?

Rayan: We don’t have to go into ifs. The point is to understand the concept. Then Qabeel went to live in the flat lands... (FN, Rayan PO3, 12/07/14)

Zizu’s question was not only perfectly times in the context of the story, whether he intended it to be or not, it actually pointed to a larger question relevant to the objectives of Islamic education in general: how does God communicate signs to people? How do people recognize signs? Even if Rayan did not want to interrupt the flow of the story, which was riveting, by answering this
question in the moment, it was a question that needed an answer later. In this case, maybe Rayan wanted to continue with the trajectory of the story and not go down a tangential path.

Rayan described how he would deflect a question he deemed “not suitable” by saying either, “Maybe you’ll understand this later” or, “It’s Allāh’s wisdom” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 1032 & 1035). Rayan elaborated, “You can go back to that—Allāh said it; that’s what it is” (line 1036). In this case, Rayan identified an out, intrinsic to the Islamic material itself, for sidestepping questions that for one reason or another he did not deem suitable to answer. “I say, ‘Allāh does what He wants’ [laughs]” (line 1055). He was not being glib; he explained that “sometimes we don’t know the why” (line 1057) and this was his way of dealing with that.

Imran had another way of fielding questions that he (or the scholars) did not have an answer to: “We should tell them, ‘We don’t have this knowledge! I’m not hiding something from you. Me, I don’t know that!’ Then they will feel relaxed, ‘Ok, no problem.’ But if I tell them, ‘No, don’t ask this question, this is not good!’ then [the children will say] ‘He is hiding something; hiding something!’” (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 1165–69). In offering this humble admission to the class—that he does not have all the knowledge—Imran hoped to maintain sincerity and honesty. It may have a further benefit in keeping children excited about questioning, seeking, and learning Islam.

In terms of the questions that educators posed to the children, I observed that much questioning was done in a close-ended manner, in the form of initiation-reply-evaluation (IRE; Mehan, 1979; Wertsch, 1998), a testing genre in search of one correct answer. Rayan described three reasons for posing questions to the students: “I just see if they are paying attention, and what did they understand from what I taught them? And it reminds me of what I did, if I forgot” (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 1016–19). So while Rayan had purposeful reasons for asking the
students questions, they were instrumental, serving as pre-tests and wake-up calls for the children and reminders for himself, rather than seeking to stimulate deep inquiry and help children make meaning.

So a difference emerged between the way that the educators used questioning as pedagogy, a testing genre, and the questions posed by the students, which related to making sense of their daily lives inside and outside the mosque. It was a difference between instrumental questioning as a classroom tool and open-ended inquiry in order to understand and appropriate. In regards to whether or not rigorous questioning of Islamic material in open-ended ways is even possible, I asked the educators directly: “Is there anything in Islam that a person should not question?” The educators gave me various answers. Imran said:

No. They can ask. And we should answer them! Because if we do not answer them, as a more knowledgeable one… what is going to happen? They will have lots of questions keeping in the head, keeping in the heart: “Islam is not answering me about that. Why? They told me, ‘Don’t ask about that question!’ That means they are hiding something! Islam, they are hiding something; maybe it is not good?’ No, no, no—ask! You must ask and we will answer you! (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 1148–1155)

Imran’s enthusiasm for teaching Islam is reflected across most of his utterances. Here, it seemed that his primary motivation in answering children’s questions about Islam was to nurture love of Islam. Amira, on the other hand, had a restriction on questioning. She said:

The only questions that there is no way to talk about them are the ‘how’ questions. How God is? How the angels look like? These kinds of hows, this kind of unseen knowledge—God didn’t give to us—these ones you have to stop them right away. We are not allowed to talk about it. ‘Oh, does God have legs and hands and…’ you know, these kinds of things.
You say, ‘Only Allāh knows. Allāh didn’t give us the knowledge of it.’ Because if we talk, if we open this little tiny door … it will be a big, huge fitnah (disturbance). It will be a big, huge occasion for Shaytān to make up stories. That’s it, end of the line. I don’t give anything else. However, I go back, I give them other alternatives. I say, ‘Ok if you are asking how Allāh is, let’s ask, what are the beautiful names of God?’ He is the al-nūr (the light), He is al-hādī (the guide)… (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 1256–69)

In this way, Amira described how she limited speculation on God’s attributes and instead directed students to what is documented in Islam’s primary sources.

6.1.7 Summary

Consistent with the educators’ first conceptual theme—that learning and development are intrinsically interwoven with the whole Islamic system of principles and practices—constant mediation of the Islamic system using pedagogies as components of social practices emphasized interpretations of the whole. This is also consistent with Wertsch’s (1998) description about how educators construct and engage students in social practices motivated by larger, cultural, historical purposes.

Learning Islam through understanding the principles and participating in the practices was the Jamma Mosque School’s reason for being, as evidenced in the words of the educators. Amira said that the children need the mosque school as a place to come to because “they don’t see anything, when they go out from the masjid or the weekend Islamic school; they don’t see anything [Islamic]” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 352–353). In a secular, Western cultural community, the mosque school is often the only place they experience Islam. Tala echoed this sentiment saying, “[I]t’s like they are so lost in this community because there is no Islam” (Tala,
AI1, 03/02/15, line 505–506). Given that the mosque school held such an important position in the lives of these Muslim families, ensuring that the children actually learned the material being taught there was of utmost importance. This, then, becomes a question of which pedagogies embedded within social practices might Muslim educators use to facilitate internalization as both mastery and appropriation of the principles and practices of the Islamic system. This is a question for further research.

6.2 Mediating Islam in Light of What is Not Islam

The more time I spent in the Jamma Mosque School, the more I realized that educators were doing more than simply teaching the Islamic system to the next generation. There was something else going on in the classrooms. It was not articulated; no one talked about it directly, but it cast its shadow on many of the things that were happening in the classroom and in the mosque in general. That something was the dominant, secular, Western culture in which the mosque school was embedded. The educators were mediating this second worldview, and how to negotiate it as a Muslim. None of the participants said: “We are the interpreters of secular Western culture for Muslim children.” And, yet, mediating the secular context was visible throughout observations and interviews, in the words and actions of educators and students. I came to see that this context acted as a foil against which the teachers taught the Islamic system of principles and practices. Students asked questions related to being Muslim in non-Muslim communities. Educators used examples in their teaching drawn from Western culture—most often negatively—to highlight aspects of Muslim culture. But there were two aspects related to Western culture the educators seemed to embrace. The first was certain Western qualities and abilities in a Muslim educator, including proficiency in English and knowledge of Western
culture. The second was certain pedagogies common in formal Western classrooms, both instrumental ones, like Rayan’s Apple Spectrum, and progressive ones, like honoring children’s voices, “Letting them say what they think” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 898).

In this section, I map four ways in which the role of the Western cultural context became visible in the teaching and learning of Islamic material. First, students asked big questions directly linking the Islamic system to their daily lives in a secular culture. Second, the Western cultural context informed the ways in which the mosque school taught Arabic. Third, the context helped shape the approach the mosque took to teaching Islam, as well as qualities of good Islamic educators. Fourth, the educators deliberately used this context pedagogically, as a foil, in illustrating Islamic principles and practices. This fourth point—secular context as educators’ foil—is examined more closely in regards to two aspects: (a) the educators’ own analysis of the context in light of Islamic principles and (b) the adoption of Western pedagogies.

6.2.1 Connecting to the Context through Big Questions

Some of the students’ questions appeared qualitatively different from other questions that regularly circulated in the classroom. These questions were posed urgently—often erupting from a student and interrupting the prevailing conversation—and they were related to children striving to make sense of their lived experiences.

The following data excerpt provides an illustration: One Sunday, Amira was in the middle of trying to explain what the word polytheist meant by giving a small English lesson embedded within the Quran study section of her class: “What does poly mean? What does theist mean?” she asked the class.
The children gave various answers until one of them said: “People who worship more than one god?”

Amira: Yes! And what is *shirk* (associating partners with God)?

There was some discussion amongst the children, and then Sahar interrupted with a question that cut across the chatter of the class: “What if you have friends who are not Muslims—is that ok?”

Amira answered, “*Alḥamd li’llāh,* if they are peaceful people” (FN, Amira PO1, 11/2/14)

In this moment, Sahar was actively connecting the material that Amira was teaching to her own life in a secular community that included non-Muslim friends. Amira was mediating the Quran, describing people who believe in many gods (polytheists); people who didn’t believe in one God. Sahar may have been wondering if her friends at public school believed in one God, or were they polytheists, as Amira was describing. Thus, Sahar’s question was one of utmost importance: how to integrate the material the she was learning at the mosque school with her daily life in a secular Western culture? This moment in Amira’s classroom was not just teachable, it was an opportunity for Amira to help Sahar make meaning about how to relate to and form relationships with non-Muslim people in her community and, thus, integrate her Islam across the plural domains of her life.

It happened another time, too. The same girl, Sahar, asked, “Are Israel people bad?”

Amira: No! But it’s a long story.

Sahar: When we were in Lebanon…

Amira did not engage the question and, instead, continued with the lesson. (FN, Amira PO1, 11/2/14)
Again, Sahar was sharing sensitive topics of vital interest to her life. In these two cases, they were not accepted as invitations to make meaning of being Muslim in a diverse world and living Islam outside of the Jamma Mosque School.

In the context of my research, these questions were significant for two reasons. First, they signalled the existence of that something in the room: the secular Western context that both the children, and the adults were trying to make sense of as Muslims. Second, these questions were actually provocations offered by the student to the educator to stimulate meaningful discussion, which could be accepted and used to make everything happening in the classroom more meaningful and relevant to life outside the classroom walls. This was the first way in which the secular Western cultural context revealed itself as a potentially rich and profound pedagogical resource from which the educators could draw.

6.2.2 How We Teach Arabic in this Context

The second way the secular Western context made itself visible was during my first interviews. First, with Rayan. We were discussing the best ways to teach Muslim children Arabic, when they are living in a non-Arabic-speaking country and when Arabic is not necessarily spoken at home. Rayan’s philosophy, as a non-native Arabic speaker, was to teach the children the vocabulary and meaning of the short surahs from the Quran so that they could use them in their five daily prayers and understand the meanings. These short surahs are the most commonly-used verses of the Quran and Rayan’s goal was to teach them, rather than the entire Arabic language.

This sentiment, however, was not shared by some of the other members of the mosque. Rayan said:
One of the brothers, we had a meeting before we started this term, he said, ‘We should teach them [the children] Arabic.’ I didn’t agree. Because they are going to forget it; they are never going to use it. And these are Arabs, some of them, who want to teach them Arabic. They are Arabs themselves, and they feel like, ‘Oh, my kids are not speaking Arabic!’ Yeah, well, that is the reality! Sorry! You live here. They go to [public] school every day. Only at home, they understand what you are saying in Arabic. (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 364–373)

The tension here was between Arab members of the mosque, who wanted to teach their children the Arabic language, and Rayan, who wanted to teach the children the Arabic of the Quran that they could then use as a tool in their prayers and other acts of worship every day of their lives. Rayan noted that it was futile to teach Muslim children to speak Arabic when they were living in an English-speaking, Western context because they had few opportunities to actually use the language: “When are they going to use it? With whom are they going to use it? They will forget it, they will forget it right away!” (line 380–383).

Instead, he proposed: “Now we need to plant the seeds—by teaching them how to read and write and at least understand the surahs that they will be using every day. I think that that is good. It’s good for here” (line 416–418). His emphasis on the word here—and the architecture of his argument overall—was another indication that the context in which the mosque school was embedded had a profound effect on the ways and manner in which the educators taught Arabic, one of the primary cultural tools of the Islamic system.
6.2.3 Contextual Influences on the Good Muslim Educator

Tala added a different dimension to this issue of cultural context in illustrating the third way that the secular cultural context made itself visible within the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School. When I asked her about qualities that make a good Islamic educator, she asked, “In this country?” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 1091). Not realizing what she was getting at, I replied, “In any country.” She explained, “It is different in all countries!” (line 1094). She then described how Muslim educators need to teach children in ways consistent with the culture in which they live. She provided an example from her home country of Yemen:

Being back home and teaching Islamic studies, you gotta be doing whatever they’re doing. You have to be, like, more strict. You have to be always on point—there. You can’t teach something that is not there. It has to be whatever everybody is knowing. Everybody is [doing]… It’s just because they know they have to grow up and do the same thing. They can’t run away from it. (line 1096–1105)

In this way, Tala described how the teaching methods used in mosque schools need to be in harmony with the ways that people live out in the community, without compromising Islamic principles. Principles do not necessarily have to change in relation to community context; pedagogies do.

Rayan provided further elaboration on this point, while describing the qualities that make up a good Muslim educator, by acknowledging that mastery of the English language and knowledge of Western culture are two important qualities. He listed knowledge of English as the third quality, after knowledge of Arabic and rules of Quranic pronunciation: “They have to be a good English speaker. That’s a preference—you can’t always get it [laughs]” (Rayan, AI1,
Rayan elaborated on why understanding the secular context is an important quality in a Muslim educator, saying:

We are living here. It’s all relative to the environment… You bring someone fresh from there; they don’t know anything. They don’t know the reality here. So you gotta really engage in their [the students’] level of what they are going through here. Just think about it: they go to a public school five days a week, from the morning til the afternoon. Here, they come two hours, three hours, that’s it—once a week. And who knows how much Islam they get at home…

Clearly, Rayan recognized the importance of a Muslim educator understanding the Western cultural context, being in touch with it and being ready to mediate it with the children. He embodied this mediation himself by using sophisticated analogies drawn from everyday life in Canada to explain Islamic concepts and he developed rapport with the boys by relating to their experiences being Muslim in a non-Muslim culture.

Given that the Islamic acts of worship are relatively consistent the world over (Sannehin, 2004), one may think that teaching them might be consistent the world over. But the educators of this study illustrated that it is, in fact, a complicated interaction between the Islamic system, the cultural context, and the educators as mediators of both. The way that educators approach the teaching and learning of Islamic material interacts with the context in which the learning environment is embedded, and educators bring their unique nuances into that interaction. In other words, educators need to be able to teach Islamic material using a variety of cultural tools and pedagogies—including those relevant to the culture in which Muslim children live. Ramadan (2004) went even further, in suggesting that the universality of the Islamic system means that knowledge of the context is required for living Islam:
The universality and “comprehensive character” of this message also requires a knowledge of the context in which individuals have to act in order that they may have the means to live consistently with the demands of the morality of their religion. (p. 128)

Here, he emphasized the necessity of knowing the context in order to live true to the moral demands of Islam.

6.2.4 Western Context as Educators’ Foil

The fourth way that the importance of the secular, Western context was made visible in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School was the way educators used examples drawn from Western culture to highlight aspects of Islam. They used the Western context in primarily cautionary ways. There are several pedagogical points to note in the following data excerpt, where Rayan was going through the textbook with the children on the meaning of the words in one of the chapters of the Quran.

Rayan read page 49 and summarized for the children: “Muslims can never accept any compromise in their religion.” Then he asked them, “What does compromise mean?”

Zizu: I think it means to overthrow?

Zaman: If you want something, you make them together?

Rayan: Ok, so if I have this pen here and I really like it. But you offer me something like a toy. Would you compromise the pen for the toy? You might, right? In this way, to compromise in the deen is to say, ‘Ok, we’ll worship your gods, the idols, and then you worship our God.’ Does Islam work this way?

Boys: No, no, no!
Rayan: This was their idea [the non-Muslim Meccans] so to slow Islam down and stop it from becoming dominant. (FN, Rayan, PO4, 03/15/15)

Here, Rayan gave the boys a chance to define the word “compromise” and when they could not, he offered a simple analogy to explain it, and to present the principle that Muslims do not compromise their religion.

Rayan continued: You all know Sūrat al kafirūn?

Hamed: This is real?

Rayan: It’s real, it’s not fiction!

Ali: The Quran has no single mistake and every single thing is true.

Mahmood: It is the words of Allāh.

Zizu: Allāh doesn’t even do one letter of false.

Ali: He never lies.

Rayan: Allāh is perfect, right? And kafirūn means those people who reject Islam, who don’t believe.

Again, Rayan gave the boys space to offer their thoughts on the perfection of the Quran—a form of peer-teaching in itself—and then he summarized their thoughts by saying “Allāh is perfect, right?”

Muhammad continued reading the meaning of the surah in English.

Rayan interjected: Do you guys understand that? They have their worship, their religion, and we have ours. And we don’t mix them together. Christmas…

The boys booed.

Zizu: But we have to have respect for other religions.

Rayan: Why don’t we celebrate Christmas?
Hamed: Because it is *ḥarām* (forbidden)!

Sami: It is not part of our religion.

Rayan: Christmas is related to other peoples’ religions and we don’t believe that so we don’t celebrate it. If we celebrate it, it’s like we’re compromising on our religion… It’s not part of our belief and way of life. (FN, Rayan, PO4, 03/15/15)

In this final part of the data excerpt, Rayan actively used an aspect of Western culture—Christmas—to flesh out the concept he had started with: not compromising Islam. In using what is *not Islam* to teach *Islam*, Rayan gave children a concrete example drawn from their daily lives in a Western community.

Most of the educators did this at various times and they did it in similar ways: drawing upon an aspect of Western culture to highlight an aspect of Islamic culture without necessarily analyzing with children the positives and negatives of either system. Highlighting something positive about secular, Western culture—or pointing out similarities in principles or practices between the two cultures—was not something I actually saw any of the educators do with the children. The educators’ themselves had clearly given some thought to the secular, Western context and drawn out both negative and positive aspects that they used, as evidenced below. But they did not share this analytic practice with the students.

This complex example of the ways in which Rayan used various practices in this *one* data excerpt to teach *one* Islamic principle is testimony to the fact that: Rayan himself had analyzed the two worldviews to come to an understanding that he shared with the children in the ways he mediated the Islamic system and the educators were drawing from various cultural tools and pedagogies in teaching Islam, including those drawn from the secular, Western context in which they live. Now, I look closer at these two points.
6.2.4.1 Educators’ Perspectives on the Intersection

The educators’ uses of the secular Western context were rooted, it seemed, in their perspectives on secular, Western culture in general, and its intersection with the Islamic system. Each of them commented at various times on secular, Western culture during the interviews. When Rayan was speaking about the Islamic principle of children respecting parents, for example, he drew upon his own experience as a recent Albanian immigrant in a Canadian high school, saying:

[T]his is what they lack a lot here in the West; they lose respect for parents, become rebellious, especially in the teenage years—it’s the toughest time…And I really feel bad for the kids here, because a lot of parents, they feel they have no options except to send their kids to public school. And it is really tough. High school is the worst. And it has gotten worse; since I was there. It was bad enough then, but it’s gotten worse now, from what I can see. (Rayan, A11, 12/17/14, line 253–269)

Three important points are illustrated in this quote; all of them hinge upon principles. The first is the idea of a clash of principles: the importance of children respecting parents in Islam, which is lost in secular, Western culture. He briefly touched upon teenage years, a developmental period that is experienced differently by youth in different cultures (Crockett, 1997). Second is the idea that public school is bad, in terms of principles, for Muslim children—high school being “the worst”—and that if Muslim parents had other options, they might not choose public school for their children. The third point is temporal in nature and highlights degradation of principles: public school is “getting worse.” Taken together, these points serve to illustrate the way Rayan felt about Canadian public education: that it is not ideal for Muslim children.
Imran echoed this sentiment. He emphasized that children spend several hours a day in school, outside the care of parents, and that parents do not know what the child is doing during those hours: “I cannot sit in the class, right?” (Imran, AI1, 03/06/15, line 158). He said that he would not be able to put his own child in the Canadian public system: “I am going to try my best not to put him in public school. But if I have to, I am going to work hard with him” (line 160–162). Fear of Muslim children spending so much time in a secular, non-Islamic social environment, devoid of Islamic principles and practices, seemed to be the primary concern here. Imran mentioned working hard with his future child on these principles and practices after school. Rayan also mentioned the importance of parents working with children at home on the Islamic system, saying, “If the parents are not trying at home, how can you expect them to come [to the Jamma Mosque school] for two hours a week while they are spending five days a week at public school?” [laughs] (Rayan, AI1, 12/17/14, line 156–160).

For Rayan, and Imran before him, the sheer number of hours a child spent in a secular, Western social environment, was an issue. Along with connecting to the second sub-theme of this study, the importance of Islamic consistency across home, school, and mosque contexts, Rayan and Imran’s comments bring to mind the aspect of sociocultural theory that focuses on the role of the social environment in a child’s development. A child’s thinking develops in relation to his/her social environment; what exists in that environment shapes the basis of a child’s word meaning and thinking (Vygotsky, 1994). Rayan and Imran clearly understood this impact of the social environment on a child’s development and their response was to try to increase children’s time spent in Islamic social environments.

Amira mentioned the vulnerability of Muslim children in secular society in general saying, “If I don’t have any peace in my heart—if I am trying to find that outside in society—I will be
just astray, right away!” (Amira, AI1, 12/16/14, line 276-7). She was describing something
different than Rayan and Imran. While they were talking about the problem of reconciling
Islamic and secular principles and practices in the school system, Amira was referring to the
same issue in the society in general. She suggested the impossibility of finding inner peace in a
secular, Western society and the risk of going astray. Given the connection between the social
environment and the development of thinking, “going astray” in this data excerpt might even be
rephrased as “going developmentally astray,” from the perspective of the developmental goals of
Islamic education.

Tala, for her part, seemed to be constantly performing a three-part analysis of home
(Yemen), here (secular, Western, Canada), and the Muslim community. While all the educators
drew from the secular, Western context in their teaching to varying degrees, Tala was the most
vocally positive about it,

[O]ver there [Yemen], with everybody doing the same thing, it's like machines, or robots.
They are doing the same thing without having to know. But when you see other people
over here living, and you feel like there is a value of life, a goal in life here. There,
everyone has the same goal. Everyone is doing the same thing. And some people do it
because just people will see. ‘Oh, I didn’t fast! They are going to laugh at me.’ But, here, if
you don’t fast, who cares? It’s like your own thing then. It’s just you wanting it now! You
really feel the value of that thing. There, we don’t have to think—just follow! (Tala, AI2,
05/01/15, 91–106)

Tala clearly identified a difference between living in a Muslim-majority country, where there is
social value attached to the acts of worship, and living in a secular society, where there is little
social interest in whether a person is performing the acts of worship or not. For Tala, this
increased the value of performing those acts of worship, and required Muslims to analyze why we do the acts of worship and think for ourselves. It also underlined the value of a place like the Jamma Mosque, where people are “the same as us, can understand us; never ask questions…” (Tala, AI1, 02/03/15, line 516). From this data, it is clear that the educators themselves engaged in ongoing consideration of overlapping cultural contexts.

This consideration is important for cultural continuity as Islamic principles are reinterpreted. Further, it is rooted in Islamic history. Muhammad first introduced the principles and practices of Islam into a pagan Arab cultural context and spent the next 23 years parsing that context for aspects to be accepted into Islam and aspects to be rejected. In many ways, he taught Islam through illustrations of what Islam is not, drawn from the local, cultural and historical context of his time. His predecessors continued this trajectory as they moved out of the Arabian Peninsula. The historian Maria Menocal (2002) described a historical moment, 200 years after the death of Muhammad:

The virtue of this Arab-Islamic civilization lay precisely in its being able to assimilate and even revive the rich gifts of earlier and indigenous cultures, some crumbling, others crumbled, even as it was itself being crafted...Out of their acquisitive confrontation with a universe of languages, cultures, and people, the Umayyads, who had come pristine out of the Arabian desert, defined their version of Islam as one that loved its dialogues with other traditions. (p. 352)

In this quote, Menocal highlighted the fact that early Muslims embraced dialogues with people of other cultures—even acquired and assimilated aspects of those cultures into their own. Thus, analysis of cultural contexts for the re-interpretation of Islamic principles is a cultural heritage—a legacy of inquiry—that Muslim educators need to practice rigorously with the next generation.
6.2.4.2 Western Pedagogies as Cultural Tools

The second way that educators made constructive use of the secular, Western context was through the adoption of pedagogies philosophically rooted in formal Western education. All of the educators used a variety of pedagogical methods in their classrooms, including those generally considered Western. They either explicitly mentioned the use of Western methods or implicitly included them in repertoires of classroom practices. Here, in speaking of West or Western, I am not referring only to a geographical area. I am referring to the social practices and cultural tools, including epistemologies, of predominantly Christian communities of people who originated in Western Europe. Van Oord (2007) suggested that we “generalize the concept of ‘the West’ from a geographical and temporal entity to a mental category” (p. 383). Ramadan (2005) pointed out pedagogical ideals of Western school systems, including encouraging children to “express themselves, give their opinions, and articulate their doubts and hopes” (p. 127). Tala illustrated a similar approach in describing the way that her husband, who was born, raised and educated in Canada, taught children: “I went to his classroom one time and I saw that he would let them talk. And he would not talk!” (Tala, A11, 02/03/15, line 901-2). Tala saw the benefits of encouraging children to discuss and share opinions as encouraging their interest in the class while sharpening thinking skills: “I feel like they get more interest? You make them feel that the attention is there… their opinions are valuable, it just makes them know, ‘The teacher will listen to us.’ And …thinking skills!” (line 924–32).

Another way of understanding these pedagogies is that they are related to the cultural tools that Kozulin (1998) identified as valued in Western formal schooling, including abstract thinking, analogical reasoning, transferring of cognitive strategies across contexts, and problem
solving. While these pedagogies are not exclusive to Western cultures, they are identified as ideal characteristics of formal Western education. When I speak of Western pedagogies, then, I am referring to those rooted in Western epistemologies, related to cultural tools privileged in formal Western schooling, and those commonly practiced in classrooms across North America.

The educators in this study had clearly identified some pedagogies that they considered valuable for teaching and learning within the Islamic system. Tala, for example, in sharing a dream she had about opening an Islamic school in Yemen, explicitly highlighted some pedagogic styles of classroom practices that she considered “Westernized.” She said:

If I was going to open a school in Yemen, I would to make it Westernized because that’s how they are gonna like it. And by then the generation is going to be growing by loving rather than by following… Teachers can make it fun there, it’s not hard. But … it’s kind of controlled. Here, you can get people to give opinions, kids can say stuff, they have rights to do this, they have rights to do that, you can make it fun, you can make it play, they can make activities out of it. I would like to do that back there. (Tala, AI1, 03/03/15, line 1128–40)

Here, Tala seemed to use the word Westernized to describe pedagogies that included encouraging children’s voices and opinions, teaching through fun, and nurturing “growing by loving” Islam, instead of simply following rules. In this way, Tala was actively considering Western pedagogical approaches and selecting those that worked in harmony with the Islamic system of principles and practices toward the objectives of Islamic education. The other educators were not as explicit as Tala in describing their use of pedagogies untraditional to Islam, but they all used them in various ways.
The educators’ use of Western pedagogies speaks to the fact that the educators were, intentionally or not, analyzing and drawing from the secular, Western context around them. Clearly, all of the educators were parsing the Western cultural context on a few levels: first, to teach children Islam, second, how to be Muslim in secular culture and, third, to enrich their own approaches to teaching—selecting aspects to accept and aspects to reject.

6.2.5 Summary

The Islamic system of principles and practices is not monolithic, nor does it exist in a vacuum. Muslim communities the world over are embedded within or existing alongside different systems of principles and practices, or both. Further, given globalization and increasing digital connection between people in vastly different cultures—even the epistemologically Western roots of the Internet itself and digital dominance of Western pop culture—how educators negotiate the development of Islamic consciousness in relation to these other systems has social and individual developmental consequences. Living in the modern, globalized, technological world as a Muslim requires that we understand the principles and practices of both worldviews: where they intersect, where they diverge. Al-Sadan (1997) proffered three ways to approach Islamic education in a global age: the first is to deem Islamic educational theory unsuitable and exclusively follow Western educational theories, the second is to reject Western theories outright, and the third is to build an Islamic framework of education that accepts educational ideas and methods from other cultures as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles. This third approach is the one pursued by earlier Muslim thinkers and the one required today.
Through the examples educators offered, even through the way that the school approached Arabic language instruction and hired new educators, the educators at the Jamma Mosque School were essentially doing two things: they were teaching children Islam and they were teaching children how to be Muslim in a dominant, non-Muslim culture. Moreover, the educators used that non-Muslim culture as a foil in teaching Islam; for the students, it served to varying degrees as a lens through which the students learned Islam. The educators differed in the ways they used the cultural context and they used parts of it in different ways. This section acknowledged that this particular mosque community, like others around the world, is embedded in various different cultural contexts and that part of teaching Islam is teaching how to reconcile Islam with the other systems at play in our world.

The potential of this reconciliatory role is not always met, however, and Ramadan (2005) described how weekend Islamic schools can actually cause more confusion that reconciliation:

[Young Muslims are very often taught to fix their “differentness” by means of a critical and deprecatory discourse vis-a-vis the “Other,” the Westerner, whom “they must never resemble.”] This outward value, fed during the weekend by the encouragement of a feeling of absolute Otherness, changes during the week in everyday life, precisely through contact with this “Other,” into an uneasiness and an inferiority complex almost impossible to live with. Eventually, the religious and spiritual education that is provided and that should give the young and the not so young the means to confront the challenges of their society pushes them along one of three avenues: to pretend, to lose themselves in silence, or to reject everything and rebel. (p. 127–128)

In this quote, Ramadan described the feeling of “Otherness” that educators cultivated in children attending weekend mosque schools and its potential results. It underlined the fact that educators
need to be mindful and intentional about how they use the secular Western context as a pedagogical tool, and also how they frame Otherness. Are children encouraged to feel superior, inferior, or different from their non-Muslim compatriots? While difference is perhaps inevitable, the other two feelings are not. Muslim educators in an equity-oriented democracy have great potential, here, to cultivate awareness and pride of a Muslim identity while helping children negotiate a non-Muslim culture, and to provide support on how to participate and thrive there.

6.3 Chapter 6 Summary

The reason to focus the last chapter on the role of the educator and the pedagogies used in the teaching and learning of Islamic material is linked to the previous two themes. Learning and development, for Muslim children, is interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices. Social practices form the bridge between the social, cultural, historic whole and individual development; they operationalize the purpose of Islamic education toward its objectives. Pedagogies are cultural tools embedded within the social practices and they hold the potential to facilitate the mastery and appropriation of the principles and practices.

The educators in this study illustrated the use of affection, relationship-building, sensitivity, active learning, reason, dialogue and inquiry: developmentally-generative pedagogies. They did not use these pedagogies all the time and they were often alternated with pedagogies that have been critiqued in the sociocultural and Islamic education literature as less developmentally generative. Further, the educators did not foreground these pedagogies when sharing perspectives on human learning and development. Still, the fact that these generative pedagogies were observed in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School, used by educators who held no official teaching certifications, suggests that the Islamic system of principles and
practices is not only a rich source of accumulated cultural knowledge but, possibly, untapped pedagogies too.
Chapter 7: Conclusion: If the Sea were Ink

The objective of this study was to elicit Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development. The four participants who responded indicated that, indeed, Muslim educators have distinct perspectives on learning and development that are enacted in social practices using some developmentally-generative pedagogies. I organized the educators’ perspectives into three main themes. The first theme involved the educators’ perspectives on human learning and development, which, for these four educators at the Jamma Mosque school, was intrinsically interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices and contains developmental goals unique to Islam. One of those goals was the nurturing of a specifically Islamic consciousness or *taqwá*. Educators’ descriptions of a well-developed person were synonymous with their descriptions of the objectives of Islamic education.

The second theme of this study addressed social practices, in which educators enacted their perspectives and mediated the Islamic system towards the goals of both Islamic education and human development. Four social practices—Quran Work, Practicing the Acts of Worship, Performing the Congregational Prayer, and Speaking with God—bridged between the Islamic system of principles and practices, embedded within a secular, Western cultural context, and the individual psychological functions of each child. The ways in which the educators used these four social practices to mediate the Islamic system were made unique by the pedagogies as cultural tools each one selected to use.

The third theme of this study was that pedagogies used in the Jamma Mosque School included some intrinsic to Islamic social practices, some assembled through the educators’ own lived experiences, and others that emerged from the surrounding secular, Western context. Aspects of developmentally-generative pedagogies observed in the Jamma Mosque School
classrooms included relationship building, positive mediation (of the Divine connection), responsivity to students’ needs and interests, active learning, engaging in reasoning, and the use of questions and inquiry. Ultimately, the ways in which educators engaged children in the four social practices were unique to each educator given his/her own unique perspectives on human learning and development.

In this chapter, I first provide four examples drawn from the participants illustrating how the themes of the study worked together. Second, I outline some implications and recommendations. Third, I provide contributions to the literature, limitations of the study, and questions for further research. I end a thesis summary and conclusion.

7.1 Tying it all Together: Four Examples

Before I discuss the implications of this study, I provide four brief examples of how the three themes of this study worked together in the Jamma Mosque School. Using data excerpts from each of the four educators, I interpreted them with the three themes in mind, illustrating how the unique pedagogies that each one brought to the common social practices resulted in unique mediation of the Islamic system. Moreover, in each case, the educator him/herself was the most valuable pedagogical tool (Cazden, 2001).

Amira’s Stages approach to the social practice of Quran Work illustrated the creative use of specific pedagogies to mediate the fixed material of the Quran. Rather than setting up Quran Work as a practice characterized by rote memorization, Amira made it into a complicated, creative, social experience whereby several pedagogical tools were at work along with the traditional pedagogy of repetition. These pedagogical tools included group and individual work, her own recitation modeling ideal form, a whiteboard, an iPad, humor, encouragement,
challenge, and her own participation, for example, kneeling on the floor in prostration with one of the girls. All senses stimulated, the girls had to stay alert to what was happening in the classroom and Amira scaffolded their growing mastery of Quran recitation.

Rayan spent part of one class involved with the children in the social practice of Practicing the Acts of Worship, where the particular act of worship practiced was the *shahādah* (testimony of faith). He asked the boys to recite the *shahādah* in Arabic and English and then he used dialogue as a pedagogic tool in making further meaning of it. Rayan, in particular, used dialogue, problem solving, and storytelling to mediate the Islamic system. He encouraged the boys to think about the material and made space for their individual contributions.

A unique pedagogy that Tala brought to two social practices was that of *leading*. In one social practice, Practicing the Acts of Worship, Tala gave each girl a chance to lead part of the prayer sequence. During another social practice, Performing the Ritual, Congregational Prayer, Tala gave girls chances to lead the whole group in saying the du‘ā’ after the prayer. In this way, the girls had a chance to lead the others in real time and actively contribute to one of the most important Islamic practices—ritual, congregational prayer—that is traditionally led by men. In this second example, Tala worked with the children on du‘ā’ as social speech, also offering them chances to lead.

Finally, Imran’s active learning episode where the children enacted the Islamic social etiquette of in visiting a sick friend illustrates how the three themes of this study came together. Recall that before the children acted out the scenario, Imran discussed it with them. “If you knock on the door first time, they don’t answer… They didn’t answer again, what are you going to do? Knock again or go home?” (FN, Imran PO4, 04/12/15). One child suggested going to the window and looking in; another suggested shouting. Imran did not accept either of these
suggestions. A third child suggested knocking again and this was the correct answer: Islamic etiquette dictates that a person knocks three times, and no more. Imran said: “The third time, if they don’t answer, just go home.” An important point to note here is that there was a correct way to enact this scenario: social etiquette comes from the Islamic system of principles and practices. In leading this enactment exercise, Imran was mediating that system. He was the link between the Islamic system and the students. He engaged the children in a social practice—Practicing the Acts of Worship, because social etiquette is itself an act of worship—using the pedagogies of dialogue and acting. He used dialogue to discuss the social etiquette before the children enacted it. Finally, he used dialogue to debrief the experience. Imran’s perspectives on learning and development were illustrated in pedagogies he selected to use to enact the social practice and his constant role-modeling the principles and practices that are the subjects of his lessons, towards the objectives of Islamic education.

The pedagogies selected by each of these teachers likely had implications for the way that the children understood all aspects of the Islamic system, however, how the children took up the pedagogy mediated by their teachers was beyond the scope of this study.

7.2 Implications and Recommendations

Three implications surfaced in this research related to each of the three overarching themes. First, because the Islamic system of principles and practices is itself a theory of learning and development, containing intrinsic pedagogies, ultimately, the learning and development of Muslim children is inextricably linked to this Islamic system. It is simultaneously a theory, a framework, and a source (Vygotsky, 1994) of Muslim children’s learning and development. Rather than importing theories and pedagogies alien to an Islamic context, attention needs to be
paid to enriching the developmental potential within the Islamic system. The next two implications flow from here, in describing how Muslim educators might approach this enrichment.

Sociocultural theory highlights that learning leads development; that instruction moves “ahead of development, pushing it further and eliciting new formations” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 198). Therefore, from this perspective, instruction is of key concern in educational environments. This is particularly pertinent in Islamic educational environments in North America, which have, historically, emphasized administration and curriculum over instructional approaches (Ajem & Memon, 2011). The second implication is that the social practices mediating the Islamic system, as vehicles of instruction, include pedagogies as cultural tools that constitute unique developmental pathways to draw development forward. These pedagogies include du‘ā’ as social speech, participation in complex social practices, and educators’ mediation of the Islamic system, role modeling its final forms of social practices. Islamic social practices, internalized into individual psychological functions, may be made more developmentally generative by enriching intrinsic pedagogies and incorporating select extrinsic pedagogies. In this study, the educators’ varied use of pedagogy in creatively mediating a fixed system, including some pedagogy considered developmentally-generative in the literature, illustrated that refining pedagogy may be the way forward in enhancing the developmental potential of Islamic education, as well as its reinterpretation in contemporary Canadian culture.

There are three aspects of pedagogy to be re-examined in Islamic educational environments: first, pedagogies intrinsic to Islamic social practices; second, pedagogies derived from outside the Islamic system, which are both developmentally-generative and harmonious to the Islamic system; and, three, pedagogies that work to reconcile the Islamic system with the
cultural context in which it is embedded. Working deep within the Islamic system, Muslim educators must highlight developmentally-generative aspects of social practices that already exist there, and enhance them with empirically-based pedagogies consistent with Islamic principles.

Focusing on the social practices used to mediate between the Islamic system and the development of psychological functions in individual children, Muslim educators need to engage students in these social practices in ways that facilitate not only the mastery, but the appropriation these principles and practices. The role of Muslim educators is to optimize the developmental potential of those practices using cognitively and social-emotionally generative pedagogies, which, according to Ajem and Memon (2011) must be guided by principles that reflect an Islamic philosophy of education. The educators’ pedagogies provide a place to begin in considering how to optimally nurture Muslim children’s cognitive and social-emotional development through social practices in Islamic learning environments embedded in plural societies. Given the fixed nature of Islamic educational material and the simultaneous need to re-interpret that content in every new culture and age (Ramadan, 2013), pedagogy holds perhaps the most promise in making Islamic principles and practices optimally relevant in today’s world.

The third implication is that the role of the teacher includes modeling and facilitating the re-interpretation of Islamic principles while mediating the Western cultural context in ways that help children thrive within it, as contributing members. Ramadan (2005) suggested that analysis of local, prevailing cultural contexts is required for optimal practice of the Islamic system. He said:

If the learning of the Qur'an, the tradition, law, and jurisprudence are fixed, according to the model proposed so far by the mosques and related organizations, we must add to it an in-depth knowledge of the environment, adapted for different age groups: mastery of the
language, familiarity with the history of the country, knowledge of the institutions, study of the culture, social dynamics, and the political landscape, and so on. (Ramadan, 2005, p. 129)

Here, Ramadan suggested that sophisticated analysis of the secular social landscape is required for Muslims to both benefit and contribute. He further suggested that this analysis is necessary in staying true to the Islamic principles. Both mediating Islamic principles and analyzing the local social context become responsibilities of the Muslim educator. Unpacking these two roles, the first involves optimizing the developmental potential of Islamic social practices using cognitively and social-emotionally generative pedagogies, mentioned above. The second role involves mediation of the secular cultural context in ways that simultaneously enhance children’s development as Muslims, as agentic members of that context, and as active participants in the re-interpretation of Islamic principles in every age and culture. This reinterpretation begins with mastery and appropriation of the Islamic system of principles and practices, including its cultural tools as ways of thinking and being, but it continues with analysis of concepts drawn from the local context as to their applicability to the Islamic system. Some may be beneficial, others may be acceptable with adaptations, others may be incompatible. Leading this analytic, conceptual integration is a significant responsibility for Muslim educators as agents of both continuity and agents of change. To this end, attention must be paid to the educational and professional development of Muslim educators as they interpret, enact, and mediate the principles of Islam for children in 21st century Canada. Knowing that the core content, learning objectives, and social practices of Islamic education are set within the overarching system, the adaptable parts include the role of the teacher and pedagogies. These parts, taken together, have the potential to change
mediated action and, as integral components of social practices reflecting the whole, they have the potential to change consciousness.

### 7.3 Contributions, Questions for Further Research, and Limitations

This research contributes in three ways to a gap in the literature at the intersection of Islamic education and human development. First, it offers access to Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development speaking about how they approach the education of Muslim children inside a mosque weekend school in Canada. Second, it offers a sociocultural analysis of social practices taking place in an Islamic mosque school, aiming to highlight generative aspects of practices. Third, in starting to make explicit the processes of human learning and development implicit in Islamic education by listening to, observing and engaging with Muslim educators, this research is one step toward addressing some of the challenges in Islamic education. Yet, perhaps the most significant contribution of this study to the literature involve the questions that it poses for further research. Keeping in mind the objectives of learning and development within Islamic education, as articulated by the educators in the Jamma Mosque school, the questions involve examining which cultural tools intrinsic to the Islamic system of principles and practices are developmentally-generative in today’s plural, digital age, and can be enhanced; and which cultural tools extrinsic to the Islamic system are harmonious with Islamic principles and might be employed.

Three specific questions for further research came out of this study. Each one involves consideration of the balance between continuity and change. Echoing Ramadan’s (2004; 2013) calls for renewal of interpretations while staying ever closer to principles, Al-Attas (2005) described the historical unfolding of the Islamic system in the following way:
What is assumed to be a developmental process is in the case of Islam only a process of interpretation and elaboration which must of necessity occur in alternating generations of believers of different nations, and which refer back to the unchanging Source. (Al-Attas, 2005, p. 16).

Here, Al-Attas acknowledged three things that constitute a philosophical framework that must be borne in mind when considering questions for further research. First, the revealed Islamic system is rooted in a divine and unchanging source. Second, the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which Muslims live are constantly changing. Third, living Islam across changing societies, cultures, and histories requires interpretations and elaborations referring to that unchanging source.

Each question for further research presented here involves inquiry into how pedagogy, within a fixed system of principles and practices, might foster appropriation of the Islamic system of principles and practices, including taqwá, for ongoing reinterpretation of that system. Each question requires sophisticated analysis of the Islamic system itself in order to understand the ways in which its principles might be reinterpreted in varying cultural contexts, while coming every closer to the revealed essence of Islam. The first question is: Which pedagogies intrinsic to Islamic social practices can be enhanced to be more developmentally-generative? This question involves children’s engagement with Islamic material, like Amira’s complex pedagogical approach to Quran memorization, and participation in the social practices, like Tala’s invitations to lead.

The second question is: Which theoretically-derived leading activities—from play to drama to dialogue and inquiry—exist within the Islamic system, or are harmonious with it, and are relevant to the particular cultural context? This question involves a detailed parsing of the
literature on human learning and development to identify essential characteristics of leading activities that might be appropriate in an Islamic system and meaningful in the unique cultural contexts in which the Islamic system is being taught. It involves ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical analysis, in close collaboration with Muslim scholars and educators, and paying mindful attention to the unique micro-contexts in which the educators teach.

The third question is multi-faceted and involves non-Muslim social and cultural contexts in which Muslim communities are embedded. It includes examination of teaching, learning, and practicing the Islamic system in a globalized, plural world, without either losing or diluting Islam in secular cultures or retreating into isolated Muslim groups. The question is: In what ways can educators facilitate Muslim children’s re-interpretation of Islamic principles and participation in plural communities? How might educators draw from non-Muslim contexts in ways that are not only beneficial for Muslim children’s learning and development, including reflexive and analytic development, but in ways that advance the goals of learning and development intrinsic to the Islamic system? Further, how might educators foster the inclusion and contribution of Muslim children in non-Muslim contexts?

All three questions contribute nuances to an overarching developmental question: How can Muslim educators teach Islam in ways that foster the appropriation of the Islamic system of principles and practices through culturally-relevant pedagogies, so that living the Islamic system enables reinterpretation of the principles and practices to maintain their relevance for every given social, cultural, and historical context?

There were four limitations to this study. The first involved the research design itself. The scope and depth of this study was limited from the outset by the research questions from which it was generated. I had two specific sociocultural questions I was examining. Although
ethnographic methods of data collection were used, including participant observation and active interviewing, this was not an ethnography. The scope of the study might have been wider if the research design had been a classical or critical ethnography and I had spent more hours at the research site and observed a wider range of activities connected to the mosque, including seasonal camps and Quran competitions.

The second limitation involved sample size. The objective of this study was to listen to Muslim educators’ perspectives on human development. Ideally, I would have listened to thousands of perspectives. While I never intended to generalize this study, with a sample size of only four educators, I ran the risk of having a sparse data set with which to work. That risk did not materialize and I came out of the data collection phase of the study with a large amount of dense data. The four educators were generous with their time; they wanted to answer my questions and help me understand. They provided individually and collectively rich interviews in terms of the perspectives they offered on learning and development, and their social practices in the classrooms. They were not only diverse amongst themselves in terms of their life experiences and teaching approaches, each one was uniquely motivated and passionate about teaching Islam. Rayan offered a unique perspective as the imam of the mosque. Tala and Imran’s critical perspectives as relatively new arrivals in Canada were useful in contrasting the ways in which Islamic education is approached in a Canadian context as compared to their home contexts. Amira’s own depth of practice and understanding of Islam served as an anchor, in this study, providing clear definitions and aims of Islamic education. Her own motivation towards self-improvement—as a Muslim and as an educator—and her passion for Islam translated into creative pedagogies in the classroom. Because there were only four educators and one mosque school involved in this study, I cannot know whether my four educators were unique in their
individual and collective richness or if every mosque school in Canada is composed of such diverse and motivated educators. Is the Jamma Mosque School an outlier or is it typical?

The third limitation was my negative bias toward certain pedagogical approaches that I have seen in other weekend schools in Canada: a focus on rote memorization, discipline tactics rooted in behaviorism, a lack of critical and creative exploration. While this negative bias sensitized me and made visible those less-effective pedagogies in the Jamma Mosque School, I was mindful of this bias going into the study. I set an intention to try and see past my bias to what else was going on in the classroom.

Reflexivity, whereby I questioned myself, as well as a series of questions in my interview protocol on the educators’ backgrounds helped in this regard. I asked where the educators had learned Islam themselves and also where they had learned to teach Islam. Tala told me that she had been taught to follow Islam without questioning (AI1, 02/03/15). Imran told me that his schoolteachers punished children with sticks (AI1, 03/06/15). So when I saw faint echoes of these practices in the classroom, I had a sense of where they were coming from. Further, it is possible that being sensitized to these less-effective pedagogies helped me identify them and, more importantly, identify the pedagogies that were not them, including the nurturing of relationships, moments of dialogic exploration, interactive storytelling, acting, and group work.

These less-effective pedagogies helped me think about which pedagogies were intrinsic to the Islamic material itself and which were extraneous. For example, repeated recitation of Quran is a practice intrinsic to memorizing the Quran and memorizing the Quran is both a practice and an objective intrinsic to Islamic education. Amira found ways of approaching this practice that was effective and interesting to the children in her “stages” approach. Rayan’s “apple spectrum,” on the other hand, is a discipline practice extrinsic to Islamic material that did not seem to be
effective. I saw that most practices intrinsic to the Islamic material itself were either already developmentally generative—like participating in the ritual congregational prayer—or could be deliberately enriched to be more developmentally generative—like leading the ritual congregational prayer. This is an area that requires further research, discussed below. It also points to the fourth limitation.

Given that I am a practicing Muslim by choice, I already accept as worthy the Islamic social practices and educational goals. For example, I understand that repeated recitation is a necessary primary practice in memorizing the Quran and I see memorization of the Quran, as one of many educational activities, as a valuable practice and educational goal. The fourth limitation of this study was that my own positive bias may have functioned in ways that motivated me to pin all of my hopes for Islamic education on the positive aspects of social practices that I observed in the classrooms of the Jamma Mosque School, searching for wise nuances in the words of the educators to bring them to light for a world hurt by the actions of some Muslims. Similarly, my negative bias may have functioned as a dumping place for all that I have seen as less effective in Islamic education over the last decade of my life as a Muslim. Still, with mindfulness, while my acceptance of Islamic practices may be seen as a positive bias, I have actually gone one step further in deliberately choosing to identify and highlight elements of social practices that are educationally positive and developmentally generative, rather than simply critique the practices I found in the mosque school.

I do this for two reasons. First, because the Islamic social practices are inevitable for Muslim children. For the past 1400 years, Muslim children have been studying the three major domains of the discipline—Quran, Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, for example, at the International Conference on Education, in Geneva in 1992,
stated that education, including religious education, is an obligation upon every Muslim, male or female, at the level of religious duty (Al Sadan, 1997). If memorization of the Quran and other social practices are inevitable components of Islamic education, how can Muslim educators approach them in the most developmentally generative way possible? Further, Islamic history describes developmentally-generative pedagogies—including inquiry, critical thinking, teaching by analogy, story-telling, and field trips (Ramadan, 2007; Rufai, 2010)—that seem to have been lost in many contemporary Islamic Studies classrooms (Shamma, 1999). How might Muslim educators reclaim these lost pedagogies?

The second reason that I aimed to highlight positive aspects of Islamic social practices stems from a personal philosophy that it is more effective to grow the positive than remove the negative. Critiques of Muslim educational practices are common in both the media and in the educational academic literature (Ramadan, 2005; Shamma, 1999; Tauhidi, 2001). Less common are examinations of positive aspects of practices—the positive thesis—in the Islamic studies classroom.

One final aspect of my positive bias is that while many educators in Muslim contexts are scrambling to bring Western pedagogies to Muslim children, often with little analysis on the epistemological roots and Islamic compatibility of these pedagogies, I am approaching it from the other direction first: how does Islamic education serve the developmental needs of Muslim children today, living in multiple cultural and digital contexts? Placing the objectives of Islamic education at the center of Muslim children’s learning and development, and working within the framework of the Islamic system of principles and practices, I will later develop with educators a pedagogical model that sharpens the developmental potential of intrinsic pedagogies and analyzes for potential use pedagogies that may be considered external to Islam.
7.4 Thesis Summary and Conclusion

This study examined four educators’ perspectives on human learning and development at the weekend school of a Sunni Muslim mosque in a metropolitan city in Canada called the Jamma Mosque. It responded to a gap in the literature at the intersection of Islamic education and human development: Muslim educators voices articulating perspectives on what human learning and development meant to them in relation to practices they utilized and created with the Muslim children in their care. Sociocultural theory, as articulated by Vygotsky (1987, 1994), framed this study, providing understanding of human learning and development as socially, culturally and historically situated and mediated by social practices. Participant observation of social practices in the classrooms, and in the mosque itself, made visible learning through social practices; learning that is normally hidden beneath the surface of repertoires of verbal and physical action. I used active interviews to gather Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development and examine the relationship between these perspectives and the practices they co-created with their students. This study provided a sociocultural angle from which to view four social practices identified: recitation and memorization of the Quran, practicing the acts of worship, participation in the ritual congregational prayer, and learning Islamic social speech. I used a conceptual framework adapted from Vadeboncoeur (2006) and Wertsch (1998) to help make sense of the data gathered. Ongoing thematic analysis was supplemented with reflexivity, which served to balance the analysis between the etic perspective provided by theory and my own emic perspective as a practicing Muslim.

I identified three main themes. First, for these educators, learning and development is intrinsically interwoven with the Islamic system of principles and practices that contains distinct
social practices in the service of unique developmental and educational goals. Second, four
social practices played a leading role in bridging the Islamic worldview as a whole with
individual learning and development. Third, the pedagogies educators used in the classrooms
included those intrinsic to the Islamic content itself (Quran, du‘ā’, and ritual prayer), those
imported from outside the Islamic system of principles and practices, and those that involved
interaction with the secular context outside the classroom walls. Further research is needed on
how these pedagogies might serve to either expand or constrain the learning, development and,
ultimately, the consciousness of Muslim children.

The limitations of this study included research questions of narrow scope, a small sample
size of four educators, researcher bias against less-effective pedagogies, including the use of
harsh discipline and close-ended questioning, and positive researcher bias regarding Islamic
practices. This positive bias was capitalized upon to highlight developmentally-generative
aspects of Islamic social practices that are inevitable components of Islamic education,
memorizing Quran, for example, and participation in congregational prayer. Islamic education
itself is inevitable for Muslim children, which is where the implications of this research lie. If the
learning and development of Muslim children is inextricably linked to the Islamic system of
principles and practices, the role of Muslim educators is to optimize the developmental potential
of those practices using pedagogies that enhance cognitive, social-emotional and spiritual
development. Further, mediation of the secular cultural context in which the school is embedded
must be done in ways that enhance children’s development as both Muslims and as contributing
members of that cultural context.

In conclusion, there was a distinct dialectical quality to the way the research and the
writing of this thesis unfolded: the research questions inquired into two ever-evolving aspects of
culture—perspectives and social practices—and the narrative that I wrote from the data, while concluded here, is in an important sense evolving as well. Educators attending to their own human learning and development continue to learn and develop. Finally, I, too, as a researcher, am engaged and will continue to be engaged dialectically with social practices and expanding conceptions and consciousness. Observing social practices in the classroom and constructing knowledge together with Muslim educators are particular social practices in and of themselves that have the potential to contribute to the expansion of consciousness; just as reading, listening, repeating, and writing expand consciousness, so too does the practice of research. The social practices of gathering and analyzing data leave us altered and, thus altered, we engage in social practices differently.

Inquiring into the topic of this thesis—learning and development within the Islamic system and the principles, practices, and pedagogies that form a foundation for learning and development—is expansive. Like any investigation into knowledge it generates further exploration. As noted in the Quran, “…if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink…the words of God would not be exhausted: for, verily, God is almighty, wise” (31:27). This speaks to the expansiveness of knowledge, as created by God, and the significance of ongoing inquiry into God’s creation. Speaking specifically about learning the Quran, Amira said: “It’s an ongoing process, a life process. Even if you read it a thousand times, you will learn [something new] every time you read it. Allāh is unlocking knowledge in your heart; it’s a continuous process” (Amira, AI1, 12/15/14, line 580–4). And so, while this particular study is finished, the importance of inquiring into the topic continues. As Muslim communities continue to develop in secular, Western cultures, their educational endeavors are sure to evolve in ways that enhance the principles and practices of Islam.
REFERENCES


*Curriculum Inquiry, 42*(1).


Appendices

Appendix A: Active Interview 1 Protocol

**RQ 1: What are Muslim educators’ perspectives of human learning + development?**

**I/Qs:**

1. Please share your thoughts on what human development means to you.

2. Can you describe a person who you consider ‘well developed,’ ie: has developed all their faculties.
   
   — An ideal person?

3. At what age or stage of life do you think people stop developing?
   
   — Are you and I as adults still developing?

4. What are the ways in which you, yourself, nurture your own development?
   
   — How do you continue to develop your own self?

5. What do you think is the ultimate aim of human development?

6. Do you think about children’s development when planning to teach Islamic studies?
   
   — Do you plan activities to develop your students in certain ways?

7. How do learning activities in the classroom relate to children’s development?
   
   — Do children have to be already developed to a certain extent to participate in Islamic activities?
   
   — At what age do you start teaching Quran?
   
   — When do they start to participate in prayer?
—How do you explain complicated concepts like faith, destiny etc?

—When do you start teaching children about hell and the devil?

8. Is the 7/7/7 hadith authentic? (“For the first seven years, love them. For the next seven, discipline them, for the next seven, be their friend.”)

—How do you use it in your teaching?

—How might this hadith relate to human development?

9. What is the purpose or ultimate goal of teaching children Islamic studies?

—What do you hope they come away with after learning with you?

—Is there an identifiable goal shared by Islamic studies teachers?

10. Where does this goal come from?

—Is it set by you? The Imam? The faith of Islam? The discipline of Islamic studies? The Quran, hadith, literature?

RQ 2: How are these perspectives enacted in social practices in the classroom?

For all of the questions specifically directed at what appear to be social practices, I am trying to understand:

—What are they?

—Why are they being (intentionally or unintentionally) used?

—Where do they come from?

—How do they enrich learning and drive development forward, or not?
**IQs Questions for specific educators**

1. Please describe your pedagogies for teaching Quran: pronunciation, memorization, interpretation.

2. Pedagogies for teaching du‘ā’?
   - What is the function of du‘ā’? Why is it important to practice with children?
   - Which other ones are important and who decides which to teach?

3. Please tell me about your use of questioning.
   - How do you handle the big questions that children ask, like, “Is it ok to be friends with people who are not Muslim?”
   - Is it ever appropriate to have students question Islamic material in open-ended ways?

4. What function does affections serve?

5. How do you keep the class in order?

6. Is it important that children like attending your class?

7. What is Islamic etiquette (adab)?
   - How do you teach it?

8. What is the reason behind gender segregation?

9. Do all the things that a teacher does in the Islamic Studies classroom have to be rooted in the Quran and Sunnah? When and where is it ok to bring in new ways of teaching?

**Other General Questions**

1. How did you learn Islam?
— At what institutions were you educated in the deen? Did you learn it at home?

2. What were some significant moments in your educational history?

— Turning points? Ah-ha moments? Role models?

3. What qualifies someone to teach Islam?

— Are there any teaching certificates one must get?

— Is it more about teaching, faith or personality?

— Must they be practicing Islam themselves?

— How do you measure depth of faith?

4. What qualities are important in a good teacher?

— What would define a master teacher?

5. Have you had any formal Islamic teacher education?

6. Have you had any formal teacher education?

7. If so, did either program cover human development?

— If so, is that where you draw your ideas of human development?

— If not, where do you think it is that you draw ideas of human development?

8. What makes a good student? What are they supposed to do?

— What makes some children passionate and motivated students?

— How do you teach children taqwá: God consciousness? Can it be taught/learned?
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Consent Form for Educators

Study Title: Muslim Educators’ Conceptions of Human Development at a Muslim Weekend School in Canada

Dear Educator,

I hope this letter finds you, and your children, in the best of health and faith!

I am a Master’s student at UBC conducting research on human learning and development within Islamic educational environments. Weekend schools for Muslim children in North America are particularly important places of learning! The goal of my study is explore how Muslim educators understand and support children’s learning and developing while teaching Islam.

As you are a teacher of Islam, I would like to invite you to take part in this research! I am interested in the rituals and routines for learning that you create for children within your classroom and the things you do together.

Who is conducting this study?

- Although I am the one who will be physically conducting this study for my Master’s thesis, I am considered a co-investigator. The principal investigator is my supervisor, Dr. Jennifer
Vadeboncoeur. She can be reached at the number below. My number is there too. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either one of us.

What happens if you agree to take part in this study?

- I would like to visit your classroom on a few occasions over the coming months. I would sit at the back of your classroom and quietly observe, using a voice recorder and taking notes on my computer.

- Recognizing that the whole community is involved in teaching our children, I would also like to observe the other places in Jamma Masjid where learning takes place, like the playground and the prayer-space during congregational prayer.

- I would also like to talk with you for about one hour, twice, during the course of the study (two hours in total). The first interview would take place after I had observed a couple of classes. The second one, after a couple of months. We would discuss things like: How do children learn? In what ways do children change over time? What are the best ways to teach children Islam? How do we encourage our children to love Islam and bring its teachings to bear on daily life?

How will the research be done?

- I will take notes and use a voice recorder. There will be no videotaping or photographing! I will also take every care to keep your identity confidential. You will not be personally identified in the research; instead, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym in place of your real name. The school will also be anonymous, as well as the mosque. All of the information I collect will be kept safe in digital files under password and physical documents locked in a cabinet at UBC.

Where will the findings be published?

- The main findings of the study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may be published in academic journals. In order to maximize the spread of knowledge, I may also publish generalized findings in non-academic writings.

What do you get out of participating?

Although you will not be paid for participating in this study, there may be other benefits for you, including the following:

- This is collaborative research in that we will be working together to explore questions
regarding Muslim children’s development and the teaching/learning of Islamic material.

- Participating in this study might help you in terms of sharing and clarifying your thoughts on how children learn and develop, and in sharing ways of encouraging children’s love of Islam.
- This study could help other educators think about how we can best nurture children’s learning and development in the context of Islamic education.
- Our shared ideas might significantly benefit Muslim children—both the ones you teach as well as others.
- I would like to offer you, and the other educators, a professional development session at the end of the study. You could collectively choose from a menu of topics including things like:
  - Islamic material as a tool in cognitive, social-emotional & spiritual development
  - Strategies in teaching critical, creative & caring thinking
  - Role of play in human learning & development across the lifespan
  - Dialogue (halaqa) as a tool for developing thinking & communication skills
- By participating in the study, you are contributing to the larger good. There are at least four overlapping communities that might potentially benefit from this study—directly and indirectly—because community development starts with human development:
  - the local community of the Jamma Masjid
  - the local non-Muslim community
  - the internationally connected Muslim Ummah
  - educators, psychologists & social scientists in the field of human development in general

Could there be any negative consequences for participating?

- I do not think that there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. You never have to answer a question if you don’t want to. If any of the questions upset you, please be sure to tell me.
- This research is exploratory and I would not there to judge your teaching. In fact, I am most interested in the routines and rituals, the environment and the way that you present and model Islam.

Do I have to take part in this study?

- Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in
this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on employment. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

What if I have a complaint?

- If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Please feel free to call, text or email me if you have further questions, and please let me know whether you would like to participate by next Sunday, February 1. Thank you and jazākum allāh khayran!

Sincerely,

Claire Alkouatli

Jennifer Vadeboncoeur

MA Candidate, HDLC, UBC

Associate Professor, HDLC, UBC

Participant Signature Date
Appendix C: ALA-AC Romanization Table

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Vowels and Diphthongs

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