

**Muslim–Canadian Educator’s Pedagogies:  
Tools for Teaching, Learning, and Transforming**

by

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## Abstract

Islamic Education is a topic often clouded by stereotypes, misperceptions, and charges of antiquation and indoctrination, yet little empirical research has explored types and purposes of pedagogies in teaching Islam. This critical interpretive study invited formal, informal, and freelance Muslim–Canadian educators to explore a primary research question in individual and group interviews: *By what pedagogies do educators engage children and youth in teaching and learning Islam?* The methodological approach was an Islamic interpretive bricolage of Islamic paradigmatic and interpretivist concepts and methods, which aimed to recognize data beyond a narrow secular frame and interpret it in ways meaningful within Islamic educational communities. Methodological complexity was a function of sociocultural complexity. The 35 research participants referred to 17 different ‘back-home’ cultures in making sense of Islamic pedagogy in Canada. Thematic analysis of their variegated descriptions coalesced into three themes. First, Dimensional Pedagogies honor and engage unique developmental domains of learners. Second, Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies respond to cultures in which learners are embedded, revealing a need for Canadian cultural relevance in teaching Islam. Third, Transcendent Pedagogies are esoteric interactions beyond the reach of corporeal perceptions, whereby awakening God-consciousness is a primary purpose of both Islamic education and human life. Together, the three themes constitute a pedagogical typology that positions Islamic pedagogies as central to distinct expressions of education and human development, highlighting new directions in Islamic educational research. The typology suggests that secular, Western, teacher-education programs may not provide the range of pedagogies that Muslim educators need to effectively educate Muslim children. It illuminates modalities for advancing Islamic teacher education. In centering Islamic pedagogies marginal to a Canadian mainstream, while

simultaneously engaging with that mainstream, this pedagogical typology aims to realize inter-epistemic interaction as community development. A methodological implication is that situating educational research conducted with Muslim communities within an Islamic paradigm contributes to data recognition, analytic coherence, and interpretive significance. Further examination is required of these pedagogies in other cultural contexts, to discern methods of assessing their efficacy, and in considering their potentials within a larger Islamic theory of human development.

## **Lay Summary**

This critical interpretive study engaged 35 Muslim–Canadian educators, who taught in formal and informal Islamic schools, in interviews to explore the question: What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in teaching Islam with children and youth? Interviews were thematically analyzed to discern a three-part typography: 1) Dimensional Pedagogies honor and engage unique developmental domains of learners. 2) Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies respond to cultures in which learners are embedded, revealing a need for Canadian cultural relevance in teaching Islam. 3) Transcendent Pedagogies are esoteric interactions beyond the reach of corporeal perception. The typology positions Islamic pedagogies as central to distinct expressions of education and human development, highlighting new directions in Islamic educational research and Islamic teacher education. Further examination is required of these pedagogies in other cultural contexts, to discern methods of assessing their efficacy, and in considering their potentials within a larger Islamic theory of human development.

## **Preface**

The author was responsible for all the aspects entailed in developing the study, including: the conceptualization and design of the study, collecting and analyzing the data, and reporting the findings. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (H19-00275).

The conceptual bases of Sections 2.3.3.2 Pedagogic Themes in the Primary Sources and 2.3.3.3 Pedagogical Diaspora originated in a literature review on primary-source pedagogies in literature on Islamic Education for a directed studies course with Dr. Nadeem Memon in January 2018, which resulted in a paper (Alkouatli, 2018). Those two sections include material not published in that paper.

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## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

Adab:	social etiquette
Alhamdulillah:	praise and thanks are due unto God
Allah:	God
Alayhi salam:	upon him be peace
Al Sadiq al Amin:	the truthful, the trustworthy; Muhammad's nickname
Amana:	a trust or responsibility
Amin:	trustworthy; one of the nicknames of Muhammad
Aql:	intelligence or cognition
Aqidah:	articles of belief; Islamic creed
Akhlaq:	Islamic ethical behavior
Astaghfirullah:	I seek forgiveness from God
Athan:	call to prayer
Ayah / ayat:	a verse, a unit of Qur'anic text, a sign
Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim:	in the name of God, most compassionate, merciful
Baraka:	blessing
Bida:	innovation in religion
Deen:	religion, way of life; often referring to Islam
Dua:	calling on the divine, a supplication
Fatwa:	a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law
Fiqh:	the theory of Islamic law, jurisprudence
Fitnah / Fitn:	trial, tribulation, social disorder or disturbance
Fitrah:	essential human nature
Ghayb:	beyond immediate, corporeal human perception
Hadith:	a report or saying attributed to Muhammad
Hajj:	annual pilgrimage to Mecca
Halal:	permitted and good
Halaqah:	dialogic circle or discussion group
Haram:	forbidden because it causes harm
Hedaya:	guidance from God
Hijab:	cover, veil, or headscarf
Hikmah:	wisdom
Hookah:	waterpipe of tobacco, also called <i>shisha</i> or <i>nargeleh</i>
Ibadah / Ibadat:	act of worship: prayer, fasting, reciting Qur'an, dua
Ihsan:	excellence in actions; doing what is best
Ijazah:	a certificate to teach Qur'an and/or hadith
Ilm yandafubi:	useful knowledge that continues to benefit people
Imam:	Islamic religious/spiritual leader
Iman:	faith, conviction

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic words were transliterated into their simplest English rendering, without using any established transliteration system, given this study's positioning in the field of Education rather than Islamic Studies or Linguistics. 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.

Iman bil ghayb:	faith in that which is beyond immediate perception
Inshallah:	God willing
Jahannam:	hell
Jannah:	heaven; garden
Jazakum Allah kheir:	May God reward you with the best;
Jama:	a congregational group, often referring to praying
Jumuah:	congregational Friday prayer
Juz'a':	one of 30 sections of the Qur'an
Kaaba:	the holy sanctuary at Mecca
Kalima tayibbah:	the good word; the truth
Khuluq:	ethical character and behavior
Kushua:	presence with the Divine
La ilaha illa Allah:	there is no god but God; no reality but divine reality
Masha Allah:	appreciative expression attributing goodness to God
Masjid / Masajid	mosque / mosques
Madrasa / Mudaris:	school / schools
Minhaj:	way or path
Mizaj:	spiritual mood, level, or temperament
Mu'amalat:	actions in the world
Mu'rabbi:	the teacher who raises children; nurtures, develops
Nabi:	prophet; often referring to Muhammad
Nafs:	self, often referring to lower self or selfish impulses
Na'ma:	blessings or favors of God
Nar:	fire, sometimes meaning hell
Niyah:	intention
Nour:	spiritual light
Qalb:	heart; seat of emotions, intelligence, consciousness
Rabb:	lord, educator, sustainer
Rakah/rakat:	one cycle of ritual prayer (standing, prostrating etc.)
Rasul Allah:	messenger of God
Rida:	pleasure, satisfaction, acceptance (usually of God)
Radiya allahu anhu/a:	may God be pleased with him/ her
Ramadan:	the month of fasting from sunrise to sunset
Rizq:	sustenance or blessings allotted from God
Ruh:	soul
Sabr:	patience
Sadaqah jariyah:	a continuous or ongoing charitable contribution
Sakinah:	contentment or tranquility
Salaam:	peace
Salaam aleikum:	peace be upon you; common Islamic greeting
Salah:	Islamic ritual prayer; choreographed movements
Sahabi/sahaba:	companion/s of Muhammad
Salallahu aleyhi wa salam:	God's blessings and peace be upon him
Salah/salat:	ritual prayer
Salat al tawbah:	prayer of forgiveness
Sayyidinah:	an honorific, gender-neutral title

Shahada:	testimony; testimony of faith; to witness;
Shariah:	the law, individual and collective regulations
Shaytan:	the devil; a devilish character
Sheikh:	a person respected for knowledge or social status
Shifa:	healing
Shura:	democratic consultation
Sirah:	biography of Muhammad; his life story
Subhanahu wa tala:	above and beyond is God, and elevated
Subhan Allah:	above and beyond is God
Sujud:	the prostration part of ritual prayer
Sunnah:	the way of Muhammad
Surah:	a unit of Qur'anic text, a chapter
Tadabur:	reflection
Tajwid:	grammatical rules of Qur'an pronunciation
Taqwa:	God-consciousness
Tarbiyah:	education, nurturing, human development
Tarneeb:	a game played in parts of the Middle East
Tawbah:	repentance
Tawhid:	divine unicity; oneness of God
Tazkiyah:	self-purification
Wallahi:	by God; used for emphasis
Wudu:	ritual ablution, conducted including before prayer

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step into Islamic Education. Another busy academic who responded to my initial cold-call, Dr. Farah Ahmed, further along the path, offered wisdom and collegiality. Dr. Abdullah Sahin's traditional scholarly knowledge, critical contemporary work, initiatives through Warwick University, and support have been generative for my own work. Dr. Abdi provided a depth of experiential and conceptual understanding that encouraged me to go further in various dimensions. Dr. Jasmin Zine appeared when I needed her most; the supervisory role that she played in my work was transformative. I echo the words of other past students in wondering at the grace by which we came under her guidance. This research might have never seen the light of day without Dr. Barbara Weber's ability to "see purple" where others see blue and red. Her vision of my work, and the cognitive diversity of her students, is testimony to her own expansiveness. My External Examiner, Dr. Mohamad Abdalla, provided valued peer review and my University Examiners, Dr. Deb Butler and Dr. Sam Rocha, and Chair, Dr. Anne Phelan, gave me confidence in the final tense moments of my doctoral process. Finally, three little sparks of light at home illuminated my studies in human development, leaning, and culture, as we moved together across cultures and periods of ontogenic development. While 9-year-old Tasnim gave me sparkly, hand-made notebooks, broken crayons, and other found objects "for your PhD," 11-year-old Qayem gave me sage advice at critical moments: "Don't make too many changes, Mum, they've already approved it!" Fourteen-year old Aref filled the gaps left by a mother with her head in her research and a father working abroad. He bottle-fed the kittens, ensured we kept up with our historical Turkish drama series, and serendipitously discovered: "cooking relaxes me." Starting with pancakes, his expertise grew to acquiring strange new things from the butcher. As I will never be able to reciprocate what each person named here has given me, my only hope is to pay forward their openings, guidance, and light with my own students one day.

## **Dedication**

The generosities of time and insight offered by my research participants, into some of the most difficult-to-articulate topics, enabled this research to take place in the first instance. It is dedicated to them.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction: Mischief in the Mosque School**

My first motivation to study Muslim educators' uses of pedagogy in sites of Islamic education arose from a need I experienced within a Muslim community in British Columbia, Canada. Eager to have my children educated in the religion I had chosen and was myself still learning, I enrolled my three children in a weekend school run by a Saudi cultural organization. The weekend school aimed to keep Arabic-speaking children at grade level in Arabic, while teaching elements of the Islamic faith. We struggled for a year, but, finally, the Arabic instruction proved much too intense, and the hours too long, for both my children and me. Next, we tried a Sunni weekend school in a community center, but the children did not enjoy the instruction. Each week, I had to reason, cajole, push. Next, we tried a weekend school at a mosque. The children enjoyed this school more than the previous two, and I eventually found out why. I arrived a little early one day to pick them up, in order to see what was happening inside the school. I entered through the women's door and crossed the communal prayer hall to find the class containing my four and six-year olds. Their class was watching a video about one of the various prophets mentioned in the Qur'an,<sup>2</sup> a standard curricular item in Islamic schools. Ten children clustered around a laptop screen. When the video ended, the teacher turned off the computer and dismissed the children. She did not mediate the contents of the video; there was no discussion on how it might relate to their daily lives. While my smaller two children collected their belongings and packed up, I moved on to the classroom of my nine-year old, where a few children were ending the day with a game of fooze ball. I found my son laughing with another couple of older boys, as they made prank calls on one of the boys' mobile phones. I learned that the pedagogy at the school was not ideal, yet I was committed to

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<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an is the primary Islamic source text, considered the revealed words of God, preserved in original Arabic form. In this study, I refer to Asad's (1980) English translation (chapter: verse) when referencing parts of the Qur'an, either from the literature on Islamic Education, or from the words of the research participants.

keeping my children in this school, just to get *some* Islamic instruction. But then, a couple of weeks later—when my six-year old son came home from the school having cut his bangs short during class with a pair of craft scissors—I decided to withdraw them. While I valued their Islamic education *as much as* their public secular schooling, I could not find a venue able to teach them elements of Islam in ways that promoted deep understanding of the material while stimulating cognitive and social-emotional development. It was a *pedagogical* problem. And, as pedagogies are not disembodied, it was a teacher problem too. Burning questions revolved around what pedagogies teachers selected or constructed to use, why, and how they used them with children.

The parade of Sunni Islamic weekend schools occurred over three years. During this time, I had begun to conduct my Master's research at a different mosque school in a suburb.<sup>3</sup> Most Canadian Muslim children attend public schools rather than full-time Islamic schools (Memon, 2013; Niyozov, 2010), which means that informal mosque-school education may be a common and important site of Islamic education. Often, the educators at informal mosque schools are untrained, volunteer teachers, yet they are charged with educating the next generation in Islam, which makes them centrally important in considering the ways in which Muslim children are educated. In my Master's study, none of the educators held a formal teacher-education degree—some had previous teaching experience; some had a license to teach the Qur'an; some were intending to attain a degree.<sup>4</sup> Each had a passion for, and a conviction of the importance of, teaching Islam to children. One of three themes that I constructed during a seven-month long sociocultural study, looking at educators' perspectives on human development and how they enacted these perspectives

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<sup>3</sup> See Alkoutli (2015) for the full Master's study and Alkoutli & Vadeboncoeur (2018) for a succinct description of the themes.

<sup>4</sup> Please see section 3.3 (Research Sites and Participants) for a more detailed discussion on formally- versus informally-educated teachers and the rationales for including informal teachers in this study.



in social practices in the mosque school, was that each of the educators used pedagogies in diverse and versatile ways to teach a curriculum that explicitly privileged the reproduction of heritage practices over creative or critical renewal. Although the educators emphasized the orthodox basis of the curriculum, their individual pedagogic approaches to it varied amongst each other and syncretically mixed traditional and innovative methods of teaching and learning.

My position as a Canadian Muslim practitioner, educator, researcher, and parent is central to this PhD research study: examining Muslim educators' perspectives on pedagogy in light of their objectives of teaching and learning Islam. Recognizing that there are multiple ways of understanding and expressing *Islam*, I use the term to refer to people who self-identify as Muslim; who draw from the Qur'an and way of Muhammad<sup>5</sup> (*Sunnah*) as valued knowledge sources; and who describe their own practices, inspirations, and intellectual and creative productions as *Islamic*. While the conceptual paradigm framing this study, and the literature undergirding it, was constructed from Sunni Muslim perspectives, I aimed to look for the variegated ways in which people interpret and practice Islam as a "multi-faceted, multi-coloured display of human ingenuity in creating meanings in light of the Qur'an" (Kazmi, 2003, p. 283).

Thirty-five Muslim educators were the research participants in this study. I solicited their perspectives on pedagogy and invited them to imagine together new ways of engaging students in pedagogy. I inquired into how educators situate pedagogy in relation to overarching cultural contexts, educational challenges, and objectives specific to a learning context. As tools

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<sup>5</sup> Muhammad, considered a prophet who received the Qur'an, is often honored, upon mention, with the words, *peace and blessings be upon him*, or, in Arabic: ﷺ. I did not add this phrase every time Muhammad's name is mentioned, leaving it up to individual readers. Instead, I used the Arabic honorific in the text at points where the research participants themselves said these words after mentioning Muhammad's name—rather than transliterating the Arabic and writing them in English, as one research participant did when he made some textual corrections and additions to his interview transcript (Abid, 4/18)—in order to retain honor of identified without distraction to the reader.

operationalizing uniquely Islamic social practices, I considered how pedagogies might contribute to an epistemically vibrant pluriversalism<sup>6</sup> (Mignolo, 2011) in Canadian dominant-culture<sup>7</sup> communities. This study was part of a larger research trajectory inquiring into enhancing developmental potential in sites of Islamic education in cultural context—for fuller nurturing of both educators and learners, simultaneously and reciprocally.

In this chapter, I describe the context around pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam in Canada. I state the research issue, present a research overview including research questions, paradigm, and methodology. I present a rationale for the research focus on pedagogy, based upon gaps in the literature, and I conclude with a summary.

### **1.1 Context: Pedagogy in Teaching and Learning Islam**

Many of the children of world's 1.6 billion Muslims are educated, in some way, in Islam (Esposito, 2003; Thobani, 2007), with the nature of Islamic education being fluid, “an evolving, diverse and contested phenomenon, not only between meeting the needs of tradition and modernity, but also the needs of a diverse Muslim community (*ummah*) with various interpretations of Islam” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 7). For many, Islamic education refers to the “education of Muslims within the framework of Islamic faith and using the Qur'an as the basis for knowledge and way of life” (Marshallsay, 2012, p. 181). This education in faith is a basic and common type of Islamic education within Muslim communities in North America (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 7; Memon, 2013). Religious identity and practice appear to be strengthening, including amongst youth, as

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<sup>6</sup> Pluriversality is a quality or expression of decoloniality—antithetical to universality, as monocentric, universal, imperial, and objective—where truth and objectivity exist in parentheses, where there are many options as opposed to the impression of only one option, and where “no human being has the right to dominate and be imposed over other human being [*sic*]” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 23). As such, it refers to “epistemic democratization” (p. 89)

<sup>7</sup> I use the word *dominant-culture* referring to cultural characteristics of Canadian societies, which tend to be Eurocentric, residually-Christian, white-privileged, primarily secular, multicultural, and often discriminatory from minority-culture perspectives (Guo, 2015; Zine, 2007).

their communities evolve in Canada (Environics Institute, 2016), and many Muslim families also desire Islamic education for their children. Islamic education is deemed important in both Muslim-majority and –minority contexts (Halstead, 1995; McCreery, Jones & Holmes, 2007; Memon, 2011, 2013; Tan, 2009; Thobani, 2007; Zine, 2007, 2008). Such education includes nurturance of a religious way of life (Zine, 2007), internalization of Islamic ethical–moral principles for character development (Vicini, 2013), and shelter “from undesirable moral values associated with modernization (read Westernization)” (Tan, 2009, p. 72). For example, increasing interest in madrasa education in Singapore was described as a result of social change: “The air of uncertainty brought about by globalization has drawn the Muslims even closer to Islam. Some scholars have suggested that it offers a sense of security to alleviate fears while providing direction and hope” (p. 72). Through variations in interpretations and expressions, some scholars have suggested that timeless Islamic principles are ways of retaining humanity in the face of contemporary challenges, including corruption, false news, crime, and social decay; others have elaborated that many people view participation in Islamic education as protective against both anti-Muslim sentiment and behaviors that contradict particular Islamic values (Ezzani & Brooks, 2018, p. 4). These behaviors have been identified as primarily including pre- and extramarital sex and consumption of alcohol and drugs (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018, p. 35; Elbih, 2012, p. 165; Zine, 2001, p. 399). For some, Islamic education may represent a protective religious continuity against a creeping secular imperialism.<sup>8</sup>

An iteration of this secular imperialism, dating back to precolonial times, is epistemic racism, one of the most hidden forms of racism that considers all non-Western knowledge as inferior to

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<sup>8</sup> While recognizing that there are many shades and varieties of the word ‘secular.’ In this study, the word is used in a basic, common form as meaning non-religious and/or non-religious in the public sphere.

Western knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 29). Epistemic interaction between cultures and educational systems are not horizontally aligned: “In real terms, the dominant education in the globe today is a Western designed and Western-centric system of education that incessantly refuses to borrow from the rich educational achievements of extra-western locations” (Abdi, 2018, p. 10), despite the fact that those extra-western locations have produced learning programs useful across domains.<sup>9</sup> Epistemic racism also shapes contemporary expressions of Islamophobia (Grosfoguel, 2010), which has been defined as “a range of negative feelings toward Muslims and their religion, from generalized bigotry, intolerance, and prejudice on the one hand to a morbid dread and hatred on the other” (Halstead, 2008, p. 263), Taylor and Zine (2014) expanded this definition to include ideological foundations and institutional expressions. Islamophobia contributes to shaping dominant Western narratives that describe Islamic schools as breeding grounds for extremism,<sup>10</sup> characterized by antiquated pedagogies (Boyle, 2006; Burde et al., 2015; Ebrahim, 2017). The central role of religion raises concerns about indoctrination (Halstead, 2004); the educational value of some common mosque-school pedagogies, including memorization of the Qur’an, are questioned (Boyle, 2006). This is part of a larger problem whereby dominant-culture perspectives lack nuanced understandings of the sociocultural, historical contexts (Esack, 2013) and the pedagogical and educational objectives and potentials (Burde et al., 2015, p. 71) of sites of Islamic education.

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<sup>9</sup> In this paper, ‘the West’ refers to the common, collective designation of countries of Western Europe, North America, Australia, which Grosfoguel (2002) described as “White/European/Euro-American societies” (p. 206).

<sup>10</sup> While scholars have acknowledged that a small percentage of mosque schools may contribute to narrow or extremist interpretations of Islam, misunderstandings are propagated in Western communities, often through the media, of objectives and pedagogies in sites of Islamic education that may amplify negative perceptions of these sites (Boyle, 2006; Burde et al., 2015, p. 71).

In addition to reifying inequities in the larger society, Islamophobia may also contribute to the reproduction of inequities within Muslim schools and communities by precluding intra-community critique, masking gender inequalities and power imbalances (Kalin, 2011), and justifying a sense of self-preservation (Niyozov, 2016). Contextualizing sites of Islamic education within climates of Islamophobia contributes to making visible inequities Muslims face as minorities in a dominant non-Muslim culture, as well as inequities that may be reproduced through processes of teaching and learning in Islamic schools (Zine, 2008). Duderija (2013) described the dual responsibility of Muslim scholars and activists as being to, “defend the Muslim tradition against secular hegemonic discourses while at the same time maintain a posture of internal criticism in order to achieve the political goal of a more just, free, and egalitarian society” (p. 74).

The social importance of Islamic education for children—“that Islam must have a place in the education of young Muslims is upheld as a *sine qua non* by Muslim communities” (Thobani, 2007, p. 21)—is evidenced by the proliferation of both formal and informal institutions in Muslim communities the world over, including in Canada (Memon, 2011, 2013), where Islamic education takes various iterations, from full-time K–12 ‘Islamic’ schools, to weekend mosque schools, to homeschooling, to summer camps. Across institutions, many Muslim parents and students seek Islamic continuity in overlapping ways, including requesting inclusion of particular social and religious practices within public school (Guo, 2015; Schlein & Chan, 2010; Seward & Khan, 2016), like Friday prayers (*Jumuah*), for example; opting out of public school in favor of full-time Islamic schools (Ahmed, 2012; McCreery, Jones & Holmes, 2007; Zine, 2008); and attending informal Islamic education in mosques and community centers on weekends. Two primary venues of Islamic education are formal, full-time, K–12 Islamic schools and informal Islamic education. Often taking place in mosques, informal Islamic education has been referred to as *supplementary*

(Gholami, 2017) or *complimentary* (Kadi, 2006). While Gholami (2017) criticized the term supplementary as failing to do justice to the wealth of potential these schools may offer, in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, identity, learning, and development, both terms identify a common characteristic of these informal schools: “they are making up a serious deficit in the national system” (Gholami, 2017, p. 576).<sup>11</sup> Rather than considering these sites of education as alternative to secular public schools, many have begun to consider them as complimentary, whereby secular public education is not seen as a foreign or “illegitimate form of schooling that must be rejected but rather as a legitimate, useful, but deficient system that must be completed” (Kadi, 2006, p. 324).<sup>12</sup> While some educators in both formal and complimentary sites of Islamic education focus on teaching Muslim youth “how to be Muslims in the manner of their Muslim predecessors” (p. 324), others focus on exploring new ways to critically engage with inherited traditions of thought and practice (Safi, 2003, p. 7).

Scholarly discussions on Islamic education are often set against a larger a context of dissatisfaction, whereby some Muslim scholars claim that much of Islamic education, as it is currently being practiced, falls far short of its transformative potential (Sahin, 2013, pp. 5–30). 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, p. 108) described that the generative methods in Islamic education outlined

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<sup>11</sup> Beyond the North American context, mosque schools in Muslim-majority countries including Afghanistan (Burde, Middleton, & Wahl, 2015), Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria (Boyle, 2006), and Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal (Bah-Lalya, 2015) offer children Islamic education and academic skills in preparation for formal schooling. In addition, Boyle’s (2006) fieldwork in Morocco, Nigeria, and Yemen documented Islamic schools functioning in late afternoons, early evenings, and summers, when public schools are closed: “In so doing, they are able to attract students who attend the public schools but whose parents want to make sure that they also receive some elements of a traditional Islamic Education” (p. 483).

<sup>12</sup>I use the term *complimentary* to refer to informal, weekend-school Islamic education; I also use the term *mosque schools* when referring to complimentary Islamic education specifically affiliated with a mosque.

by scholars as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> 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. The heart of these critique involves methods of instruction, or pedagogy. Pedagogical aspects of Islamic education—as expressions of educational philosophies (Ajem & Memon, 2011, p. 2), as best practices in processes of renewal (Abdalla, Chown & Abdullah, 2018, p. 3), and as means towards educational and developmental objectives in teaching and learning Islam (Alkouatli, 2018)—have recently crystalized as a focal point within Islamic Education (Memon & Alhashmi, 2018).

Islamic Education, conceptualized as an emerging and interdisciplinary field (Sahin, 2018, p. 335), is currently experiencing growth and revival (Abdalla, Chown & Abdullah, 2018, p. 2).<sup>13</sup> Yet significant challenges remain: “How to solve the issues related to modernity and development while at the same time maintaining the cultural and religious integrity of the ummah remains an elusive and monumental task” (Cook, 1999, p. 342). Discussions of Islamic educational concepts are often contested between diverse perspectives within Muslim educational communities. In addition, significant differences in educational perspectives characterize liberal, secular, and various Islamic interpretative orientations. According to some secularists, unprovable propositions underlying religious beliefs that are not open to critical scrutiny constitute indoctrination rather than education (as described in Halstead, 2004, and Cook, 1999). According to some Muslims,

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<sup>13</sup> In this research, educational concepts—including those of ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy—are considered within the literature on Islamic Education rather than the literature on Islamic Studies or theology. In addition, they are considered primarily from Sunni Muslim perspectives. This is not intended to reify Sunni/Shia conceptual divides; nor to present Sunni as solely legitimate. Instead, it is the compound result of an analytic focus on pedagogies—and the need to cast a wide net on pedagogies referenced in the literature on Islamic Education, which is dominated by Sunni perspectives Sunni populations (and educational institutions) than Shia ones in Canada; and the fact that only educators from Sunni Muslim schools in the city responded to my invitation to participate in the research (see section 3.2.1 Criteria and Rationale for Participant Inclusion). Despite this perspectival focus, wherever relevant and possible, I aim to include Shia and other minority Muslim perspectives.

revelatory knowledge is the most elevated; it is unified and foundational to of all other forms of knowledge, leading the individual, society, and civilization to prosperity (Cook, 1999, p. 346; Nasr, 2012, p. 14). While the research participants of this study—Canadian-Muslim educators—were actively involved in teaching and learning Islam as a religious worldview, contestations of this worldview characterize the sociocultural context in which these participants were situated. An initial example is evidenced in the term *worldview* itself, which, in a contemporary, secular Western scientific conception, a worldview is restricted to sense and sensible experience, a “gathering together of various cultural objects, values and phenomena into artificial coherence” (al-Attas, 2005, p. 13); “the mind’s view of the physical world” (p. 12) and our human historical, social, political and cultural involvement in it. But an Islamic perspective of a worldview is a vision of reality and truth as “a metaphysical survey of the visible as well as the invisible worlds including the perspective of life as a whole,” which reveals “what existence is all about; for it is the world of existence in its totality that Islam is projecting” (p. 13). These tensions between paradigmatic perspectives characterize the foundations of this research, which aims to contribute to advancing knowledge in at least three communities: those of Muslim educators, Muslim scholars, and secular social scientists.

## **1.2 Statement of the Issue: Desires, Pitfalls, and Potentials**

In 2011, Memon asked three questions: “What is an Islamic pedagogy? Should we speak of an Islamic pedagogy or pedagogies? Who defines an Islamic pedagogy(ies)?” (p. 297). He argued that despite the proliferation of Islamic schools, and resources put towards curricula development, “there has been no formal, research-based deliberation of the principles of an Islamic pedagogy and the training of teachers with a nuanced understanding of their teaching environment” (p. 289). Above and beyond the desires of some members of Muslim communities for Islamic education,



Memon's (2011) questions reflect desire on the part of Muslim scholars and educators for expanded understanding of specific pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam. Sabrin (2010) also identified a pressing demand for "an Islamic pedagogy extracted from the Qur'an and Sunnah (and the rich scholarship that exists concerning them)" (p. v).<sup>14</sup> Teaching *Islamically* has arisen recently as a central concern (Abdalla, Chown & Abdullah, 2018; Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018; Memon, 2011, 2013; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018).

Contributing to demands for refined awareness of pedagogy are critiques of contemporary pedagogical use. Despite varied and seemingly effective pedagogies described in detailed accounts of the earliest sites of Islamic education (Abu Ghuddah, 2017; Ahmed, 1987; Mogra, 2010; Nasr, 2012; Ramadan, 2007; Rufai, 2010), questions exist as to whether and how these are implemented in contemporary sites (Al-Sadan, 1997; Ramadan, 2004; Sahin, 2013). Scholars question the effectiveness of pedagogies used in Islamic studies classrooms (Shamma, 1999;<sup>15</sup> Ramadan, 2004), including the heavy reliance on rote memorization (Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 253; Tan, 2009). Critiques of pedagogies constitute an aspect of critiques of Islamic education more generally, including missed opportunities for cognitive and social-emotional development (Sahin, 2013); ineffective discipline strategies (Zine, 2008); and lack of self-reflexive examination of one's own community and constructive engagement with other communities (Niyozov, 2010; Niyozov & Memon, 2011; Waghid, 2014). Both formal and informal sites of Islamic education have also been blamed for inadequately preparing Muslim children for civic engagement in plural societies

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Sadan (1997) pointed out three educational benefits of the Sunnah, commonly held by Muslim practitioners: first, the sunnah exemplifies Qur'anic approaches to life, in general, and education, in particular; second, the sunnah provides details not mentioned in the Qur'an; and, third, the sunnah illustrates the ways in which Muhammad dealt educationally with his companions and the children of his community (p. 94–95). The educators of this study often referred to aspects of the sunnah in describing their pedagogies.

<sup>15</sup> Locating significant problems in materials and methods unmatched to the needs and interests of the students, Shamma (1999, p. 293) described that at best, many Islamic classes produced factually knowledgeable youth who were not committed to Islam and, at worst, actually turned youth away from Islam.

(Memon, 2010; Zine, 2007). Some have suggested that failure to equip students to address contemporary challenges may be rooted in a lack of rigorous, critical engagement with Islamic material itself (Sahin, 2013; Waghid, 2014). Some Muslim scholars have described Islamic education as having become a rigid, authoritarian process verging on indoctrination (Ramadan, 2007; Sahin, 2013; Waghid, 2014), “no longer capable of producing creative minds or nurturing the skills necessary to solve the complex problems facing the worldwide Muslim community” (Sahin, 2013, p. 2). Additional criticism of pedagogies employed in sites of Islamic education come from the secular societies in which they are embedded, often characterized by ambient Islamophobia. They are often undervalued, at best, in terms of their potential for supporting young people’s learning and developing as both Muslims and national citizens; and maligned, at worst, as tools of indoctrination, extremism, and anachronism—in perception and in practice (Burde et al., 2015). Despite their pitfalls, pedagogies hold potential for development, playing a central role in operationalizing educational objectives and enhancing educational climates.

As Islamic education is central to Muslim communities for cultural and religious continuity—both in Muslim-majority contexts and in the diaspora—pedagogies are central to Islamic education. Yet a scarcity of empirical research on pedagogies used in teaching and learning Islam constitutes a significant gap in the literature of Islamic Education. Memon’s (2011) questions have only been partially answered.<sup>16</sup> Sahin (2018) has called for a paradigm shift in Islamic education to address what he referred to as “a widely acknowledged educational crisis” (p. 1). Key to this shift is the formation of a “transformative educational culture” facilitating “reflective and critical Muslim religiousities” (p. 1) in which critical engagement in pedagogy

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<sup>16</sup> The few empirical studies specifically inquiring into pedagogies in sites of Islamic education include: Abdalla, 2018; Boyle, 2006; Hardaker & Sabki, 2015; Rustham, Arifin, & Abd Rashid, 2012; Sahin, 2013; and Vicini, 2013. Conceptual studies include: Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018; Memon, 2013; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018.

plays a key role. While a paradigm shift is an expansive endeavor, requiring the efforts of various scholars in various dimensions and across contexts, my research aims to inquire into *pedagogical aspects* of this shift, in the cultural context of one Canadian community.

### 1.3 Research Overview

In response to this triad of desires, pitfalls, and potentials that currently characterize pedagogy in sites of Islamic education, this study engaged 35 Canadian Muslim educators in individual and group interviews to discuss their perspectives on pedagogies in relation to objectives of teaching and learning Islam, and their imaginations of how pedagogies might address particular educational challenges in relation to both content and context. The study was built upon a central premise that “learning always unfolds according to historically specific pedagogies in educational contexts” (Vicini, 2013, p. 396). A first implication of this premise is that any investigation into educators’ pedagogies must also take account of cultural context. Educators in sites of Islamic education in Canada are complexly positioned within Muslim communities—connected in multiple ways to larger, global Muslim communities—embedded in a secular, dominant-culture Canadian context. This study engaged with this complexity from the outset by constructing an overarching, interdisciplinary *Islamic paradigm*<sup>17</sup> as conceptual framework for the research—translated into the

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<sup>17</sup> A *paradigm* is an overarching philosophical system comprised of particular ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (Mathison, 2005), which “represent belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12). Mathison (2005) described a paradigm as typically consisting of “an ontology (the nature of reality), an epistemology (what is knowable and who can know it), and a methodology (how one can obtain knowledge)” (p. 300). This specific definition of a paradigm distinguishes it from related words, like *framework* or a *system*, although all three can be considered as networks of concepts and conceptual relationships. In this study, starting from al-Attas’ (1980) term “Qur’anic conceptual system” (p. 7), I use the term *Islamic conceptual system* when speaking about Islamic principles and practices, as a guiding framework for curricula, for example, and as a constellation of concepts in teaching and learning Islam. I use the word *Islamic paradigm* when speaking specifically about the ontological, epistemological, and methodological/pedagogical framework within which Islamic education is situated and which grounds this research. While Ahmed (2014) used the term *Qur’anic paradigm*, I use the term *Islamic paradigm*, in order to include the pertinent principles derived from the actions and sayings of Muhammad, which are foundational to considering pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam (Abu Ghuddah, 2017; Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018; Mogra, 2010; Rufai 2010; Sahin, 2013).

language of social science by a critical faith-centered epistemological framework, which was developed in Canadian sites of Islamic education (Zine, 2008)—and encompassing interpretivism as methodology into an Islamic interpretive bricolage.<sup>18</sup> A second implication of the premise that “learning always unfolds according to historically specific pedagogies in educational contexts” (Vicini, 2013, p. 396) is that culturally- and historically-specific pedagogies may be evolving in contemporary sites of Islamic education that hold promise in Muslim children’s learning and development as both Muslims and Canadians. These two contextual features of Islamic education in Canada featured prominently in the themes constructed from the data.

This study’s inquiry into *Islamic pedagogy*—as methods of teaching and learning towards specific Islamic educational and developmental objectives—was situated at the intersection of two larger and emerging fields of academic literature: Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology, which together may constitute Islamically-coherent<sup>19</sup> perspectives. Literature on Islamic Education provides insights into histories, debates, educational objectives, and pedagogies while literature on Islamic psychology provides insights into developmental objectives and dimensions of human participants in education, including teachers and learners. Together, the two fields enable the framing of questions such as: Who is the human self to be educated? What are we educating ourselves towards? Which are pathways towards development and what roles do pedagogies play?

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<sup>18</sup> Foundational concepts in this Islamic paradigm are described in sections 2.2 and 2.3; the paradigm itself is described in section 3.1.2; and how it functions in conjunction with interpretivism as a bricolage is described in section 3.1. See also Figure 3.1. Research Design.

<sup>19</sup> The importance of cultural relevance in research and education in general and pedagogy in particular is captured in literature on resource or asset pedagogies, which aim to foster successful academic and social experiences in school by responding to diverse home and community cultures, teaching in ways that build upon students’ backgrounds, and in the terms culturally-relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining (see, for example, Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). In working with Muslim educators and learners, Ahmed (2014) preferred the term culturally-coherent pedagogy. In this study, in recognition of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the research participants, varied interpretational approaches to teaching/learning Islam, and the demands of the local Canadian context, I refer to pedagogy and perspectives specifically meaningful to educators and learners teaching and learning Islamic material as *Islamically-coherent*.

One reason these two fields are still emerging is that, historically, both were interwoven into the normative lived experiences of people in Muslim communities (Azmi, 1993; Halstead, 2004; Kadi, 2006), whereby Islamic education was consistent across home, school, and community contexts, and perspectives on the human self were shared. The holistic interrelatedness of aspects that we contemporaneously understand as Islamic *education* and Islamic *psychology*—both highly relevant to ways of being and becoming Muslim—obscured their distinctions. For example, Haque (2004) described how early Muslim scholars, based upon readings of the Qur'an and hadith [sayings of Muhammad], “wrote extensively in the area of human psychology, although, the term ‘psychology’ did not exist at that time and such endeavors were mostly a part of philosophical writings” (p. 358). Needs to identify the boundaries of Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology came, in part, with the disjuncture that occurred as Muslim educational communities encountered colonial education systems and, later, as diasporic Muslim communities settled and evolved within Western ones characterized by compartmentalization of knowledge into academic subjects (Nasser, 2012). Still today, ontological perspectives in Canadian public schools and communities may not match those in Muslim home environments in forming a conceptually seamless whole with a Divine center (Nasr, 2012). In addition, the Western-dominated academy is premised on particular and secular assumptions and perspectives on learning and developing that may not encompass the depths and dimensions of Islamic ones. Both fields, then, contribute to the conceptual paradigm framing this study, within which pedagogy occupies a central but understudied position.

Most basically defined as ways of teaching and methodologies of instruction (Memon & Alhashmi, 2018, p. 169), *pedagogy* in a site of Islamic education refers to a process of guiding or nurturing a child that may correspond to the concept of *tarbiyah* (Sahin, 2013). *Tarbiyah* has been

described as holistic individual development in relational community (Halstead, 2004; Waghid, 2014) and as facilitating meaning-making rather than imposing information (Sahin, 2013). Ajem and Memon (2011, p. 5–6) described pedagogy as *coherent* when method and practice are consistent, *effective* when teachers and learners engage together in internalizing educational objectives, and *purposeful* when a teacher’s ontology and epistemology dovetail with educational objectives that, in turn, are reflected in practices of teaching and learning. In these ways, pedagogy is intimately connected to cultural and historical context.<sup>20</sup> To refine focus on pedagogy in conversation with Muslim educators, I drew upon Shulman’s (1987) concept of *pedagogical content knowledge*, as the blending of particular content and pedagogy into a process of instruction, as one concept within a larger conceptual framework including content, general pedagogy, curriculum knowledge, conceptions of learners, educational context, and purposes of education.

This study involved thinking together with Muslim educators in both formal (K–12) Islamic schools and informal sites of Islamic education (e.g. in mosques, on weekends) about the types and purposes of pedagogy in Islamic education in meeting educational objectives within the secular and plural context of Canadian society and inviting them to imagine together new ways of engaging students in pedagogy. This research builds upon a Master’s study,<sup>21</sup> where ‘findings’ motivated and shaped the present focus on pedagogy, educators’ uses of pedagogy, and who constitutes an educator as research participant. The first finding was that the pedagogies used by the educators in the mosque school—who were essentially community members volunteering to teach the community’s children Islam—stood out as varied and flexible elements of an otherwise

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<sup>20</sup> It also must be borne in mind that theoretical definitions of terms, like *tarbiyah*, drawn from the primary-source literature, might look very different in daily practice.

<sup>21</sup> Alkoutli, C. (2015). *Muslim educators’ perspectives on learning and development at a mosque school in Canada*. (unpublished Master’s Thesis). Retrieved from <https://circle.ubc.ca/>

‘fixed’ curriculum. The second finding was that although these teachers were not qualified by a formal teacher education program, some of their seemingly most effective pedagogic approaches were intrinsic to particular Islamic ritual social practices. Three examples were: (1) Participation as pedagogy in ritual acts of worship, like the congregational prayer, characterized by heterogeneity of age and ability, whereby younger learn from older by engaging together in a form of community role modeling. (2) Intentional use of *affection* as a pedagogic quality, which included physical affection towards the student, affection between teachers as sister/brotherhood in Islam, and affection towards content material. A corollary of this was that educators gave social value to skills particular to the mosque school and/or undervalued in the larger secular society, including recitation of the Qur’an. (3) Pedagogic use of social speech in the form of specific supplications (*du’ā’*), which educators taught to children as appropriate in mediating particular situations. While some supplications were derived from the Qur’an and Sunnah, the educators also taught the children how to craft their own *du’ā’*, relative to a given situation (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018, p. 33–34). Together, these supplications may contribute to shaping a metacognitive perspective whereby people triangulate their own perspectives with an overarching, divine, perspective articulated in supplication.<sup>22</sup> These findings brought to my attention the *uniquely flexible role of pedagogy* in teaching and learning Islam, and, while these three findings

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<sup>22</sup> An example of how educators use social speech to shape perspectives may be evidenced in a description of how one educator used supplication himself (described in Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018):

“One time, a big trailer just hit my car and my car was squished from two sides... When I came out of the car, the firefighters—they saw the state of my car—they said, ‘How did you come out from this car?’ Because I have my weapons [whispering]. I do my *du’ā’*. Before I do anything, I say ‘In the name of God... God is the Most Great. Glory is to Him’ These are my weapons! I put my trust in God... Then whatever actually happens, I thank God about it.

(AI1, 03/06/15, line 1326–1343)

Engaging in discursive social practices shaped specific ways of interpreting, acting, and regulating one’s own psychological functions (Wozniak, 1975). Each of the educators in the mosque school taught the children how, what, and when to engage in the social practice of Speaking with God” (p. 33).

may simply be considered examples of good pedagogy, their specific iterations in an orthodox Sunni learning context made me wonder whether teaching and learning Islam required particular pedagogical approaches. Thus, my Master's research was impetus for a closer focus on pedagogy, in this study, and the inclusion of both formal and untrained teachers as research participants, in contributing to a gap in the literature on empirical research on pedagogy.

### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

This study was designed to inquire into Muslim educators' uses of pedagogy in meeting educational needs and objectives, which, I hypothesized, might be unique to each student, teacher, and/or context and which may make visible particular developmental pathways. In addition, I was interested in probing the scope of pedagogical possibility in teaching and learning Islam and imagining new possibilities with educators. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children and youth learners in teaching and learning Islam?
2. How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives?
3. How do educators imagine, design, and/or implement new or contextually-relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam?<sup>23</sup>

The first question inquired into current pedagogical practices—including challenges and affordances—in teaching and learning Islamic content. The second question related to the intentionality and the vision behind pedagogic use, probing educators' educational objectives of

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<sup>23</sup> In the research questions driving this study, I use the technical term 'pedagogy.' In the interview/halaqah questions, I start with the term 'teaching method.' In order to translate between research and interview questions, I intend to define 'pedagogy' with the educators in my introduction/consent letters, please see Appendix A, where I equate the two terms: "methods (pedagogies)," and in my introductory conversations with them. Rather than presuming that they understand the term pedagogy and are reflective about it, I am presuming that they use methods in their teaching—however reflectively or unreflectively.



pedagogy. Are educators using specific pedagogies intentionally, for specific aims? Or are they using them automatically, or unintentionally, replicating ways in which they themselves were taught, for example, or how they believe that Islam *ought* to be taught? The third question aimed to explore possibilities of pedagogical change over time, place, and child—tailoring pedagogies to individual learners—and to generate some ideas on pedagogical innovations, directions, and contextual responses. Together, the three questions inquired into ‘Islamic pedagogies’ as methods specifically suited for teaching Islamic material, and whether they are alternative or additional to pedagogies used in secular educational contexts. These research questions were constructed in response to both gaps and critiques in the literature on pedagogy in sites of Islamic education, which form the rationale for the research focus described in section 1.3.4.

### **1.3.2 Methodology**

To answer the research questions, a critical interpretive study based on individual and group interviews was conducted with 35 Muslim educators<sup>24</sup> who taught in formal, full-time schools (12); informal, complimentary Islamic schools (18); and on a free-lance basis (5) in a city in British Columbia. Following a qualitative research trajectory that started with a socially-situated researcher and moved from research question, through conceptual paradigm, to empirical world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. xii), the methods in this study were derived from, and situated within, a larger *Islamic interpretive bricolage* as research design. This bricolage, described below and in detail in section 3.1, was composed of an Islamic paradigm elaborating a critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008), interpretivist methodology, Islamic research principles

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<sup>24</sup> As research participants in this study, Muslim educators are involved in the day-to-day teaching of Islam to children in a formal or informal site of education. I use the term ‘educator’ rather than ‘teacher’ to acknowledge that while not every participant holds a professional teaching degree, each one is engaged in the Islamic *education* of Muslim children. The term additionally recognizes that education transcends the boundaries of a school or site of education to continue in homes, mosques, and communities.

(Ahmed, 2014), and related methods. In the context of research methodology, a *paradigm* has come to mean “a set of philosophical assumptions about the phenomena to be studied, about how they can be understood, and even about the proper purpose and product of research” (Hammersley, 2007, p. 2). Each of these dimensions of a paradigm has resonances within sites of Islamic education; together, they highlight the necessity of employing an overarching Islamic conceptual paradigm to make analytic sense of the research questions, the empirical literature contextualizing this study, the perspectives and experiences of the research participants, and the data generated, and to guide coherent interpretation. Rather than being used as relevant analytic tools in research with Muslim schools, Islamic frameworks have been marginalized (Zine, 2008). Yet the importance of Islamic principles and practices must be understood in order to understand the lives, experiences, and perspectives of faith-centered Muslims. A few social science scholars have called for situating research in Islamic contexts first and foremost within Islamic conceptual paradigms (Ahmed, 2014; Al-Faruqi, 1988; Al Zeera, 2001; Zine, 2008), starting with recognition that an overarching worldview informs the very foundations of Islamic education (Mogra, 2010, p. 317). Al Zeera (2001) identified that research foundations must be constructed at the *paradigm level* in order to be optimally useful to Muslim communities. Ahmed (2014) articulated the importance of researchers’ “rooting thinking processes in Islamic epistemology” (p. 566) and offered six tentative principles to guide research in Islamic contexts that aim to retain “the holism of Islamic epistemology” (p. 567), which I used to guide this study (see section 3.1.4). Zine (2008) designed a critical faith-centered epistemological framework in seven principles (section 2.2) while conducting an ethnography in Islamic schools in Ontario (2007, 2008) based on Qur’anic precepts that constitute a specific “moral terrain” which aims to transcend sectarian differences and provides space for epistemic elaborations (p. 51). In designing the framework, Zine (2008) drew

from the anticolonial work of Dei and Azgharzadeh (2001), “as part of a broader challenge to Eurocentrism and the colonization of knowledge in education” (p. 50). She identified Islamic schools, and the knowledge they produce, as seeking to “subvert the dominant secular, Eurocentric discourses as the only valid basis for compulsory education and learning” (p. 70). Zine’s (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework was the cornerstone of this study, the first step in constructing a foundational conceptual framing of the research design: an Islamic paradigm of perspectives on ontology, epistemology, pedagogy drawn from literature on Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology (see sections 2.2 and 2.3). Importantly, Zine’s (2008) framework functioned as a heuristic in translating between an Islamic paradigm and qualitative social science research. Its aspect of *criticality* oriented the research design of this study towards a critical interpretive one that recognized the epistemic hegemony of the dominant culture in which the research participants were embedded and marginalized, while striving to also remain cognizant of injustices within the sites of Islamic education more broadly, and within myself, the researcher, as a human being (see section 3.1.1).

Within an Islamic paradigm, I employed interpretivism as a methodology, which made visible two interpretive acts. First, interpretivism centers *human interpretation* in experience and social interaction in developing knowledge about social science phenomena (Hammersley, 2007, 2013; Pascale, 2011; Schwandt, 2000). Human words are simultaneously interpretations and interpreted by others. An interpretivist might argue that “we cannot understand why people do what they do, or why particular institutions exist and operate in characteristic ways, without grasping how those involved interpret and make sense of their world” (Hammersley, 2007, p. 2). In terms of human development, for example, teachers’ varied interpretations of children’s natures, and understandings of how children learn and develop, color their approaches to pedagogy

(Killoran, 2003). In terms of Islamic education, there would be little point educating a child Islamically if a teacher did not conceive of that child as embodying a spiritual dimension, a soul; if a teacher did not recognize transcendent reasons behind ritual practices and their existential trajectories. Authentic interpretivism alone may render imperative an Islamic conceptual paradigm as the starting point of this study and its perspectival frame. In addition, the context of this inquiry (teaching and learning Islam); the academic field in which it was situated (Islamic Education); and the Muslim educator–participants’ social and epistemic locations (in Canada and, simultaneously, elsewhere), as well as my own as the researcher, all collectively echo the imperative primacy of an Islamic conceptual paradigm. This was the first interpretive act in this study.

A second interpretive act was encompassed in the process of discerning an Islamic paradigm in the first place, as might be the case in discerning any paradigm. Describing ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical dimensions of an Islamic paradigm (in section 2.3) is an interpretive act itself. Such description—occurring within the “latitude of meanings accommodated” in the Islamic message itself (Thobani, 2007, p. 21)—was interpretation of concepts that I, as the researcher, perceived important for this study for “internal consistency” between epistemology, methodology, and methods (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1316). In other words, building an internally-consistency research foundation is necessarily interpretive because it involves human researchers making research relevant to context. Asserting an Islamic paradigm as necessary for conducting research in Islamic educational contexts echoes the point that: “[T]here is a world view that informs Muslim ideology. Any researcher interested in investigating a particular kind of people and the critical role that faith plays within their lives has to engage with some of the essential elements of that ideology” (Mogra, 2010, p. 317). But that ideology—and its related ontological, epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical dimensions—requires

interpretation relevant to a given researcher in a given context, with particular research participants, at a particular time. Therefore, along with being an interpretation itself, an Islamic paradigm is necessarily inclusive of *differences* in interpretation because it does not specify particulars in terms of what Islam *is* but, rather, invites individual researchers to describe Islamic particulars relevant to their own interpretive traditions in light of their own research contexts, questions, and methods of data collection in processes of designing internally-consistent, culturally-coherent research. The particulars a researcher employs to frame research will eventually justify the generation of new knowledge. Islamic interpretive inclusivity is made visible by methodological interpretivism.

Employing interpretivism within an Islamic conceptual paradigm constituted an *Islamic interpretive bricolage* as research design, whereby: “The researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12).<sup>25</sup> The term acknowledges that the study is guided by a conceptual imbrication of both Islamic and interpretivist concepts, ethical imperatives, and methods, where an Islamic paradigm is primary and a critical interpretivist orientation is secondary (see section 3.1 and Figure 3.1. Research Design). While some may see bricolage as a methodological impurity in that it conjoins competing perspectives, and deviation from theoretical lineage in that it draws from more than one, others see bricolage as evidence that qualitative inquiry is relational, processual (Schwandt, 2007), evolving, culturally-relevant, and representing creative intellectual advances suitable for complex contemporary contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11). In this study, bricolage captured methodological complexity as an expression of sociocultural complexity: the 35 Muslim—

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<sup>25</sup> The non-secular perspective defining this conceptual framing may situate it at the borders of the post-qualitative, which Denzin and Lincoln (2018) described as a horizon informed by “postcolonial, indigenous, transnational, global, and the multiple realities [...]” (p. 3)—but this requires further investigation.

Canadian research participants referred to 17 ‘back-home’ cultures in making sense of Islamic pedagogy in Canada. They were members of larger educational communities comprised of children, parents, community leaders, international scholars, and religious leaders, teaching, learning, researching, and evolving at the intersection of multiple cultures. The educators’ perspectives on Islamic education and pedagogy were multicolored interpretations shaped by diverse sociocultural contexts. My own perspectives, too, bear epistemic traces of different cultural worlds in which I have dwelt, studied, and traversed, comprising a blend of secular Western and Islamic spiritual influences. Sahin (2018) described a rationale for reflexive, self- and socially-conscious dialogue between diverse ideas and expressions of education—which contributed to the rationale for constructing this study upon an Islamic interpretive bricolage:

The life-world of young generations of Muslims has been informed by both Islamic parental heritage as well as the wider secular culture. How young Muslims develop their sense of belonging and agency within such a demanding cultural reality needs careful consideration by the community as well as wider society. (p. 12)

Here, Sahin identified diversities in shaping life-worlds as a contemporary reality. The research participants of this study, including myself as researcher, situated ourselves within iterations of Islamic paradigms, including concepts, objectives, and meanings—some shared, some contested—from a sociocultural, historical, religious phenomenon of Islam.<sup>26</sup> Participants’ interpretations—of the interview questions, of educational objectives, of their own uses of pedagogy, as well as my own—were colored by this larger phenomenon, differentially interpreted, with which we identified by virtue of being *Muslim educators*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Chapter 2 describes the conceptual foundations of an Islamic paradigm and Chapter 3 describes how this foundation provided Islamically-relevant methods of data collection and analysis, as tools of social science research.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note the explicit faith-centered identification of the research participants in this study, who taught Islam as a confessional subject. Generalizations cannot necessarily be made for the larger Muslim community in which they were situated, for other Muslim educational communities, or for any other community.

Fidelity to an Islamic conceptual paradigm, as an imperative of employing interpretivist methodology in a site of Islamic education, drove construction of a bricolage as dialectic integration at an ontic level, extending through epistemology and methodology to methods with a shared purpose: to make the fullest meaning possible of the data gathered. Three methods deriving from this Islamic interpretive bricolage included, first, individual semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2017) and, second, engagement of two to four educators at a time in *halaqat*, or dialogic circles of learning and communication (Ahmed, 2014, p. 20).<sup>28</sup> In the second halaqah, I invited the teachers to construct a diagram or drawing of their perspectives on methods of teaching Islam—an artifact. Thus, subsequent research encounters were artifact mediated. This third method had two parts: *artifact construction*, whereby educators sketched or diagrammed their pedagogical perspectives on pieces of paper, and *artifact mediation*, whereby educators discussed their artifact. While educators responded to the invitation to construct an artifact in different ways,<sup>29</sup> the research aim was to employ artifact construction as a process of thinking creatively about pedagogy and purposes of Islamic education; imagining new and relevant pedagogies in light of learning objectives; and probing pedagogical limits.

The data sources in this study, then, included 20 transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews; 10 transcriptions of audio-recorded halaqat; and 9 artifacts (see Table 3.3. Data Corpus). Analysis included transcription, coding, (Saldaña, 2013), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with a theme capturing aspects of the data important in relation to the research questions.

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<sup>28</sup> A halaqah (plural, *halaqat*) is an Arabic term for a traditional dialogic circle, which has social, pedagogical, and, more recently, methodological applications. Ahmed (2014) used halaqah as a research method in reflexively exploring social practices “within an Islamic frame of reference” (p. 20). In this study, I build from this previous work to use halaqah as an Islamically- and contextually-relevant research method. See section 3.3.1.2 Halaqat (Dialogic Circles).

<sup>29</sup> Some drew a picture; others a diagram; others produced text; and others declined to participate, as described in Chapter 3: Methodology (3.3.1.3) and elaborated in Chapter 4: Fieldnotes (4.4.3).

Reflective analytic-memo writing was ongoing throughout the study. The data was triangulated by engaging educators from both formal, informal, and freelance sites of Islamic education; through individual interviews as well as group halaqat; by analyzing the educators' artifacts in relation to their spoken words; and by examining the researcher's analytic memos in relationship to the data corpus (please see Table 3.1. Data Triangulation).

### **1.3.3 Rationale for the Research: Gaps and Calls**

The primary rationale for this research—addressing a gap in the literature on conceptualizations of Islamic pedagogy (Memon, 2011; Sahin, 2013, 2018)—was built upon the foundational importance of Islamic education in communities of Muslim scholars, educators, parents, and students; the central role of pedagogy in Islamic education; and recognition that pedagogies are not meeting their potentials for learning and developing. Educators play key roles in the employment and evolution of pedagogies, which justified this study's focus on their perspectives. The contextual disciplinary focus of this research on *teaching and learning Islam*—as distinct from the education of Muslim children in general—dictated that research would be conducted with educators who teach Islam. A secondary rationale aimed to address a methodological problem: Islamic frameworks have rarely been used as analytic tools in studying Muslim schools and societies: “Instead, they have long been regarded as elements of ‘false consciousness’ or as dogmas to be suppressed by ‘rational’ scholarly thought” (Zine, 2008, p. 58). The research design of this study aimed toward this methodological problem.

Along with Sahin's (2018) call for a paradigm shift in Islamic education, and the central role of pedagogy in such a shift, the significance of studying educators' perspectives and practices of pedagogy within Islamic education includes the demographic weight of the global Muslim population (Ebrahim, 2017), many of whom desire specifically Islamic education for cultural and



religious continuity, the expansion and maturation of Muslim communities within secular ones (Niyozov & Memon, 2011), and the potential that sites of Islamic education play in nurturing children's development in both. While each of these factors contributes to the significance of this research focus on perspectives and practices shaping the nurturance of Muslim children, specific rationales are based upon a gap in the Islamic education literature on pedagogy and clear calls for empirical research to fill that gap.

While pedagogic practice is a foundational aspect of education in Islam—along with content and participants, encompassed within an overarching Qur'anic conceptual system (al-Attas, 1980, p. 7)—it has received the least scholarly attention, especially in the establishment of Islamic schooling in North America (Ajem & Memon, 2011). Scholars have identified significant empirical gaps on pedagogy in the Islamic educational literature (Ajem & Memon, 2011; Memon, 2011; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018, p. 170; Sabrin, 2011); Boyle (2006) noted a dearth of literature on specifically Islamic elementary education. The few extant empirical studies that have examined aspects of pedagogies include Boyle (2006), on memorization, in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria; Hardaker and Sabki (2014) in an adult madrasa in the UK; Rustham, Arifin, & Abd Rashid (2012) on students' perspectives on pedagogy in Singapore; Sahin (2013) on Qur'anic pedagogy and youth identity in Kuwait and the UK; Tan and Abbas (2009) on pedagogy in textbooks, in Singapore; and Vicini (2016), on relational pedagogies in a Gullen community in Turkey. Zine's (2008) study examined pedagogical conditions in Islamic schools, including roles of teachers, discipline strategies, and reproduction of 'colonial classrooms,' which she described as authoritarian, lacking creative, interactive pedagogical strategies, arts, drama, and promoting passive learning. In Canada, Memon's (2010, 2011) studies on Islamic schools yielded some pedagogical insights, including that Islamic teachers aspire to and make room for teaching social

justice, as an aspect of Islamic practice, but the ways in which they do so remains outwardly focused rather than inwardly critical (Memon, 2010). Memon (2011) was an early advocate for existence of an Islamic pedagogical trajectory over time and place, and his work identified the need for an Islamic teacher education program.

Empirical studies specifically on Muslim Canadian educators' uses of pedagogies to meet social and educational objectives in teaching and learning Islam with children learners are scarce. In addition, the potential of pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam as a tool in diversifying epistemology in multicultural communities is significantly understudied. Mainstream Canadian schools and society continue to privilege secular dominant ways of teaching and learning, knowing and developing. Inquiring into subjugated alternatives constitutes part of an "anticolonial project in which the conscious creation of alternative and oppositional knowledge and praxis can occur" (Zine, 2008, p. 71).

In addition to identifying the lack of empirical pedagogical research, scholars have called for investigation into particular expressions of education within minorities from Muslim backgrounds. For example, Gholami (2017) asserted that "such educational spaces and practices offer concrete ideas/strategies that should be taken seriously by theorists, educators, and policy makers" (p. 567). Sahin (2013) highlighted the importance of critically exploring pedagogy (as well as theology) in inquiring what it means to be "educated Islamically in the modern world" (207). In Canadian contexts, there is a "growing number of voices that question the purpose and pedagogy of Islamic schools" (Memon, 2013). Zine (2008) located reclaiming pedagogic aspects of the earliest Islamic educational traditions—derailed by colonialism but often relevant to educational contexts today—as part of the process of decolonizing teaching and learning practices in Islamic schools.

Writing and researching in an Australian context, Abdalla, Chown, & Abdullah (2018) called for “empirical research to substantiate best practices in Islamic schools” (p. 3); Abdullah et al. (2015) called for research on pedagogy that is both relevant to Islamic principles and contemporary society; and Abdalla (2018) identified a lack of research on the nature, scope, effectiveness, and relevance of instruction specifically in teaching Islam within Islamic schools. Taking a meta-perspective, Sahin (2018) identified of the lack of empirical research on pedagogic practice as one of three significant methodological shortcomings that contribute to an ongoing deficit of conceptual clarity in defining the field of Islamic education.

These gaps and calls within the literature on Islamic education constituted the rationale for this study’s empirical focus on educators’ perspectives on pedagogy, which builds upon themes constructed in my Master’s research, a seven-month long sociocultural study looking at Muslim educators’ perspectives on human development and how they enacted these perspectives in social practices in a Canadian mosque school. One theme was that each of the educators used pedagogies in diverse and versatile ways to teach a curriculum that explicitly privileged the reproduction of traditional practices over creative or critical renewal. Although the mosque-school educators emphasized the curriculum as fixed and unchanging—‘orthodox’ to a normative, Sunni interpretation of Islam—their individual pedagogic approaches to the curriculum varied amongst each other and illustrated syncretic blending between traditional and innovative pedagogic practices. The ongoing marginalization of Islamic frameworks illuminating Muslim perspectives (Zine, 2008) constituted a second, methodological, rationale for this study, whereby an Islamic paradigm was centered within the research design.

## 1.4 Terminology: The Art and Science of Clarity

Using terms that transcend disciplines, cultures, and educational contexts, in an age of globalization, may cause shifts in meanings and require clarity. In addition, terminology is never value free. Smith (1999) described that how a researcher cites texts and uses language are often clear theoretical markers. Texts, language, and terminology make visible academic lineages and, simultaneously, trajectories of new knowledge generation. As initiating visibility of an Islamic paradigmatic perspective drawn from the literature on Islamic Education, at the basis for this research, in this section I define some key terms<sup>30</sup> that appear in the literature on Islamic pedagogy and education, and which arose in data collection: culture, religion, spirituality, Islam, Muslim, and Islamic education. The point of defining these terms—even while recognizing their tentativeness—is to provide context and clarity in moving away from monolithic conceptions of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic education toward recognition of rich diversities of interpretation and possibility (Memon, 2016).<sup>31</sup>

Where *culture* weaves together “the fabric of everything we value and need to know—beliefs, morality, expectations, skills, and knowledge—giving them functional expression by integrating them into effectual customary patterns” (Abd-Allah, 2006, p. 2), *religion* has been identified as amongst the most “complex elements of human cultures” (Belzen, 2010, p. 52).

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<sup>30</sup> While many principal concepts are best expressed in their original Arabic, Abd-Allah (personal correspondence, 2018) suggested that English-speaking Muslims, speaking to an English-speaking audience, should express Islamic concepts in English rather than Arabic for reasons of accessibility across linguistic and cultural contexts. Responding to his point, I hedge towards English translations of Arabic terms throughout this study with two exceptions: 1) for concepts like *taqwa* (God-consciousness), which is so important to this study and is best expressed in Arabic, and the dimensions of the human being that are unique to Islamic conceptions, like *fitra* (human nature) and *nafs* (self); 2). where research participants offered key ideas in Arabic. In such cases, I transliterated the Arabic and added an English translation.

<sup>31</sup> Memon (2016) constructed an orientational framework examining theological, orientational/interpretational, cultural/racial/ethnic, and generational differences amongst self-identified Muslims in North America in the context of Islamic education.

Like other aggregates of culture produced over time by “the coordinated action of a plurality of individuals” (p. 10), Islam as a religion can be considered at the level of culture. Religion and spirituality may be more difficult to define because of their focus beyond the corporeal senses: “While it manifests itself in a person’s mental and physical activities, the spirit itself cannot be seen, heard, touched, analyzed or proven” (Dei et al., 2000, p. 70–71). Cognizant of the limitations of language, in this study I tentatively refer to religion as shared faith-based systems of concepts, principles, and practices that aim to facilitate *spirituality* as cognition, emotion, and embodiment integrated in consciousness directed towards experiential awareness of transcendence, divinity, and sacredness. I assembled this definition from literature on Islamic Education, and that of psychology of religion, whose scholars have struggled to clarify the two terms as a necessary starting point for empirical investigation at the forefront of their emerging subfield. For example, Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, and Shafranske (2013) defined *spirituality* as a search for the sacred, with sacred referring inclusively to concepts of God, higher powers, and “other aspects of life that are perceived to be manifestations of the divine or imbued with divinelike qualities, such as transcendence, immanence, boundlessness, and ultimacy” (p. 14). This search constituting spirituality may be individual, dyadic, or collective; it may take place in any venue of human life. Searches for the sacred often occur within established religious institutions, which are “designed to facilitate spirituality” (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15). In other words, because religious institutions center the expansion of spirituality as a central, unified, developmental goal, spirituality may constitute a central function of religious life. Within religious institutions, people participate in rituals, study sacred texts, avoid religiously defined vices and work to perfect virtues (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15). These practices may be considered *spiritual* practices, as a special category of cultural or social

practices, given their interactional focus on divinity. Boyle (2006) described spirituality based on fieldwork in Islamic schools in Yemen as “an awareness of the presence of God in daily life, of divine mystery, of life and death, of transcendence and peace” (p. 493). With spirituality intimately tied to religious practices, a valued focus of Islamic education may be perfecting those practices in deepening spirituality. Working with these definitions, in this study, I further expound spirituality as perception of transcendence embodied in the term *taqwa*, or integrated God-consciousness (Esposito, 2003; Sahin, 2013; Asad, 1980). A primary function of Islam as a religion, then, may be to provide a conceptual, relational, and practical context to foster and develop this integrated consciousness.

*Islam* is a religion informed by the Qur’an and the Sunnah of Muhammad; its name based on an Arabic root word meaning *submission* (Abu-Raiya, 2013) and connoting a “state of peace achieved through surrender to God” (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 6). Panjwani (2004) pointed out that the term Islam is often taken for granted and used without reflection, as if the obviousness of the term guarantees comprehension; instead, he argued the importance of asking: “what conception of Islam underpins the discourse on Islam and education being examined here?” (p. 3). This is an important question to be asked upon engaging in research with the participants of this study and involves considering diverse interpretations of Islam in relation to various ways of being Muslim (Berglund, 2011).<sup>32</sup> In approaching Panjwani’s (2004) question and setting the basic conception of Islam that underpinned this study, I drew from Esack (2012):

‘Islamic’ is that which privileges as its sources of inspiration the Qur’an, the precedent (Sunnah) of Muhammad, Prophets who preceded him, of his companions and family and the

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<sup>32</sup> Empirical research on Muslims’ psychological orientations to Islam suggest that Islam is multidimensional, with beliefs and practices as central dimensions (Abu-Raiya, 2013): Islam, then, must be broadly viewed, whereby “Islam might mean different things to different people, and some people might adhere to some of its elements but not to others” and examining people’s adherence to Islam by looking only at a few aspects, like mosque attendance, may fail to capture “the depth, richness, and multifaceted nature of Islam” (Abu-Raiya, 2013, p. 683).

precedent of other earlier Muslims or movements who also drew their inspiration from these sources. In framing Islam in this manner, I acknowledge both fidelity to so-called normative Islam and to the idea that Islam has always been and continues to be shaped by the faithful and their struggle to give meaning to it. Islam simultaneously *is* while is constantly in a state of *becoming*. (p. 4; italics added)

This definition serves to, first, conceptually anchor Islam in the primary sources—the Qur’an, the Sunnah (way), and Hadith (sayings) of Muhammad. Second, this definition recognizes both the companions and the family, and both Sunni and Shia’ sources of interpretation. Third, the definition highlights Islam as simultaneously shaping and being shaped by people in an ongoing process of meaning-making. Esack’s (2012) definition references interpretational and temporal fluidity that includes situated processes of discursive and social activity, characterized by a multiplicity of voices and ways of participating. This definition also serves to highlight that, rather than a strictly theological phenomenon, Islam is simultaneously a praxis and a faith-based worldview, “deeply tied to social practice through belief and identity” (Rana, 2013, p. 52).<sup>33</sup> But each of these aspects is differentially expressed and contested. Even the seemingly most basic common component of Islam shared by Muslims, the *shahada* or testimony of faith, is not a stabilizing one, as Ahmed (2016) pointed out:

To witness that ‘There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God,’ is, after all, not a settled end in itself; rather, it is the prelude to asking a number of fundamental questions: What is God? What is his Message? What does it mean to living according to His wise purpose? (Also, the Shi’i shahada contains the further asservation, ‘I witness that Ali is the Deputed One [*wali*] of God’—which is a statement that hardly leaves unaffected the meaning of the term ‘Messenger [*rasul*]’ as applied to Muhammad in the first part of the shahada). The very action of submission, obedience, and commitment is simultaneously and concomitantly an action of inquiry, interrogation, and exploration. (p. 138)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This theoretical conception based on the Qur’an, Prophetic mediations, and shared scholarship may be considered a mainstream Sunni conception shared by many, but not all, Muslim scholars of education (for example, Douglass & Shaikh, 2004; Memon, 2011; Zine, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> My purpose in drawing upon Ahmed’s (2016) description, which is within the Islamic Studies not Islamic Education literature, is that it suggests wide scope of perspective within Islam without Islam falling apart as a phenomenon meaningful to a fifth of humanity. His emphasis on inquiry, interrogation, and exploration in relation to Islam were also reflected in the data of this study, including in terms of pedagogy.

So, bearing this fluidity in mind—with God, diversely conceived, as possibly the only thing that Muslims agree upon—I refer in this research to the Qur’an, Muhammad’s Sunnah (way), his Hadith (sayings), and his *Sirah* (life story) as *primary Islamic sources*, because they are prevalent and primary to many (although not all).

*Muslim.* While in basic terms, a Muslim is “an adherent of the Islamic faith” (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 6), the historical, social, and cultural trajectories of people who identify as Muslims are extremely varied (Niyozov & Memon, 2011) and diversity is inherent in individual worldviews (Ebrahim, 2017). Zine (2004) described Muslims as people who actively align with their faith, pointing out a distinction between Muslim as a social designation, which “absorbs many, often secular meanings,” and Muslim as a religious designation, “inextricably linked to practice of the faith” (p. 181). While recognizing varieties of identity, orientation, and experience, Zine (2004) highlighted the salience of the religious designation evident in the definition of the word Muslim, as one who submits to God:

Despite the secularity of many individuals who cast themselves as Muslim, I see Islamic identity as largely connected to spiritual practice of the faith in its multiple forms rather than as simply a “cultural” identity... Moreover, I argue that Islamic identity is qualitatively different from ethnic identity, for example, because it is not simply passed on through heredity but must be claimed through conscious praxis of the faith. (p. 181)

This definition is particularly helpful in a research context whereby participants are educators who actively identify as Muslims engaging the next generation in teaching and learning principles and practices of Islam. It serves to center focus upon praxis of the faith—it is “most productive to think about Muslims as a group of people bound together by both a faith-tradition and social practices” (Rana, 2013, p. 52)—while centering diversity of praxis. Individual, collective, and partial participation in Islamic social practices, changing over lifetimes with changing community dimensions, makes it impossible to generalize about a particular community of Muslims—or even



about a particular Muslim *individual*: each person participates differently across contexts and over ontogenic time.<sup>35</sup>

*Islamic Education.* While the term in a generic sense may include various discursive iterations of Islam and education, this study is concerned with *the education of Muslims in their Islamic faith*.<sup>36</sup> Islamic Education (both words capitalized) refers to the emerging academic field. Islamic education (lowercase)<sup>37</sup> refers to the process of teaching and learning Islam in formal and informal schools, where curricula include reciting and memorizing the Qur'an, learning traditional Islamic practices and Arabic language, and constitute "efforts by the Muslim community to educate its own, to pass along the heritage of Islamic knowledge" (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 8).<sup>38</sup> Beyond an academic subject, Islamic education may contribute spiritual and moral perspectives and identity development to a child's overall education (Halstead, 1995).<sup>39</sup> Surface descriptions will not suffice to frame research that inquires into pedagogy—the beating heart of education—as methods of engaging learners in internalizing Islamic concepts, practices, and

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<sup>35</sup> While each of the participants in this study emphasized their praxis of the faith, only one participant articulated his particular orientation. Bilal, a social studies teacher at a full-time Islamic elementary school, stated: "I view myself as an orthodox Sunni Muslim. Not a reformer, not a Salafi, not a liberal, not—I view myself as an orthodox Sunni Muslim and that is the approach that I want to take" (I1, 4/23, 130–132).

<sup>36</sup> Douglass and Shaikh (2004) aimed to define, differentiate, and delineate these iterations into a typography of Islamic Education that included four types of educational activity: "education of Muslims in their Islamic faith; education for Muslims which includes the religious and secular disciplines; education about Islam for those who are not Muslim; and education in an Islamic spirit and tradition" (p. 7).

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Islamic Studies refers to the academic disciplinary field and Islamic studies refers to a school subject.

<sup>38</sup> Historically, a basic Sunni Muslim education in the faith has included the following subjects: 1. recitation, memorization and interpretation of the Qur'an, 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 (*'ibādāt*) 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) (Al-Sadan, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Husain and Ashraf (1979) defined Islamic education as follows:

[A]n education which trains the sensibility of pupils in such a manner that in their [...] approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam. They are trained and mentally so disciplined that they want to acquire knowledge not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or just for material worldly benefit but to grow up as rational, righteous beings and to bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of their families, their people and mankind. Their attitude derives from a deep faith in God and a wholehearted acceptance of a God-given moral code. (as cited in Halstead, 2004, p. 519)

expressions of faith. Pedagogic inquiries into Islamic education must be based on understanding Islamic paradigmatic perspectives on: 1. the nature of existence; 2. sources of knowledge; 3. the psychology of human beings; and 4. pedagogical implications of those three points.<sup>40</sup> Extending from these important basic descriptions, a critical and creative theoretical conception of Islamic education is primary. Kazmi's (2003) description of initiation into Muslim tradition as a conversation is a useful conception for this study, where *tradition* is considered ontologically, not as "a location in time but a process in time" (p. 268), whereby people construct meaning of the past through present experiences and future aspirations in a dialectical and fluid process. Unlike history, which happens often unintentionally as people act, tradition needs to be maintained by people's active participation; and people only participate if they find the tradition meaningful. Tradition might be understood a conversation of multiple voices and perspectives, which concur, build, and contradict each other: "Voices of dissent and rebellion and voices of alternative conversations are, if one cares to listen, audible just below the noise of the dominant conversation" (Kazmi, 2003, p. 279). Participation in the conversation of tradition requires education. *Education in a tradition*, then, is an invitation and an initiation into an ongoing conversation of multiple storylines from which the learner selects and weaves together a sense of self; whereby the past keeps coming alive with each new present; and where the Qur'an is a dominant theme woven into every aspect of every conversation. This definition of Islamic education includes "having the freedom to interpret and understand the new in light of the Qur'an and to understand the Qur'an afresh in light of the new experiences" (p. 282). This definition of Islamic education recognizes

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<sup>40</sup> A main goal of Chapter 2 is establishing education-related aspects of this Islamic conceptual paradigm—including conceptions of educators and learners, human development, educational objectives, sources of knowledge, and pedagogies as related to each—as drawn from the literature on Islamic Education and that frames the research questions. Chapter 3 describes the methodological manifestations of this paradigm in the process of inquiry and meaningful knowledge construction.

various ways of being Muslim, as various traditions or conversations that flow into a larger conversation:

[T]he Islamic tradition should be seen as the sea that the several Muslim traditions feed, and as Muslim traditions change overtime so does the Islamic tradition. The Islamic tradition should be viewed not as a monolithic structure that towers above all Muslim traditions but rather as multi-faceted, multi-coloured display of human ingenuity in creating meanings in light of the Qur'an. (p. 283)

This perspective on Islamic education as expansive, divinely-inspired human imagination liberates understandings of pedagogies as ways of inviting children to participate critically, creatively, and fluidly in a traditional conversation that, while containing anchoring principles, encourages new ways of understanding those principles.

A point of tension in terms of Islam, Islamic education, and Muslim is that, to some scholars, the act itself of *defining* implies a static and Sunni-dominant orientation, rather than human interpretative endeavors that have evolved over time. Sahin (2017) described how, in attempts to bypass perceived dogmatism in the term Islamic education, the expression 'Muslim education' has been offered as a broader, less religious, less dogmatic orientation. Yet, Sahin (2017) argued that this is a semantic ploy:

'Muslim' education implies that education is interpreted by Muslims who, by self- definition, need to make sense of their world as Islamically meaningful... By necessity, both of the expressions 'Islamic education' and 'Muslim education' require association and engagement with Islam. (p. 131)

Instead, I aim to be reflexive in using the term Islamic education to avoid "a process of ideological reification" (p. 131). Zine (2008) added nuances to the issue in suggesting that while diversity makes impossible to view Muslim communities in monolithic terms, there is a conceptual anchor:

Yet even allowing for this variation, there is a model for behaviour embedded in the Qur'an—a model rooted in the well-documented life of the Prophet Muhammed, whom all Muslims consider the living embodiment of Qur'anic principles. This suggests that there is a definitive 'essence' to Islamic identity as it is informed by religious doctrine [...]. (p. 144)

Identifying the presence of a “model for behavior” and an “essence to Islamic identity”—regardless of how contested, differentially conceived, or disparately practiced—provides conceptual ground upon which to consider Muslim educators’ perspectives on pedagogy. Together, these basic definitions aim for conceptual clarity in framing this Islamic interpretive bricolage.

## **1.5 Chapter 1 Summary**

This research is concerned with thinking more deeply about educators’ purposes of pedagogy in approaching educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education in cultural context. The study began with considering pedagogies as tool for the *reproduction* of Islamic principles and practices (Zine, 2008) and imagining their possibilities for *renewal* (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018; Ramadan, 2013). It culminated with deeper understanding of the poignancy and potential of Islamic pedagogies in the development and contributions of Muslim individuals and communities in Canadian context. Instead of educating Muslim children either to simply reproduce Islamic practices or to eschew them in order to better participate in dominant-culture schools and societies, Islamic pedagogies provide educators and learners tools to rigorously, critically, and creatively both reproduce and renew traditional Islamic material for individual and social development. In inquiring into pedagogies in sites of Islamic education, for fuller development of both educators and learners, simultaneously and reciprocally, this study aims to contribute to the empirical literature on pedagogy in sites of Islamic education in Canada through the perspectives of educators, not only documenting what *is*, but pedagogically exploring what *could be*.

The research design underlines the importance of the researcher’s situated position in inquiring into educators’ interpretations. Initial elements of an Islamic conceptual paradigm

appeared in this chapter in the ways I described the context, what I identified as the statement of the issue, the research questions I asked, where I situate this research within the literature, and the ways in which I used terminology. Chapter 2 provides deeper examination of the critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008) as part of a larger ontological, epistemological, psychological and pedagogical Islamic paradigm, related to the ways in which pedagogies in sites of Islamic education have evolved in sociocultural-historical contexts. Chapter 3 describes the positioning of interpretivist methodology within that Islamic paradigm, and research principles and methods comprising an Islamic interpretive bricolage. The chapter also details criteria for inviting research participants, data-collection processes, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of these three chapters is, collectively, to provide three angles outlining the conceptual and historical depths of an Islamic paradigm as foundational for this research, providing important sensitizing concepts, and rendering it optimally useful to communities of Muslim educators, learners, and scholars. The fact that few scholars have taken the academic risk to situate their work squarely in an Islamic conceptual paradigm may indicate the epistemic hegemony that characterizes the academy as it has developed in Western countries (Grosfoguel, 2010);<sup>41</sup> it may also illustrate the positivist bias towards concrete measurement. Chapter 4 provides fieldnotes on how the different methods yielded data differently and aims to provide a sense of the human experience of data collection. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are each dedicated to one of three themes

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<sup>41</sup> The roots of this phenomenon may be found in Grosfoguel's (2010) descriptions of epistemic racism: "If Islamic philosophy and thought are portrayed as inferior to the West by Eurocentric thinkers and classical social theory, then the logical consequence is that they have nothing to contribute to the question of democracy and human rights and should be not only excluded from the global conversation, but repressed. The underlying Western-centric view is that Muslims can be part of the discussion as long as they stop thinking as Muslims and take the hegemonic Eurocentric liberal definition of democracy and human rights. Any Muslim that attempts to think these questions from within the Islamic tradition is immediately suspicious of fundamentalism. Islam and democracy or Islam and Human Rights are considered in the hegemonic Eurocentric "common sense" an oxymoron" (p. 37).

constructed from the data to illuminate a particular modality of pedagogy. Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review: Contextual Conceptual Frames

In a reciprocal process of civilizational development across diverse historical, cultural, and geographical landscapes, the values of Islam contributed to shaping people and those people, in turn, creatively interpreted the values of Islam. These values also came to bear on education (Sahin, 2017, p. 131): wherever people interpret, express, and live iterations of Islamic values, there are educational implications (Halstead, 2004). Primary Islamic sources identify “the types of learning each Muslim is expected to pursue, the instruments of learning, and the learning process itself” (Obeid, 1988, p. 167). As many participants in Islamic education consider its content material content to have been revealed, there may be some curricular and pedagogical consistency over time (Boyle, 2006; Halstead, 2004). Yet, this does not mean that all sites of Islamic education will have similar curricula, pedagogies, and objectives; instead, “each will draw on the tradition dynamically to create what they conceive of as *an Islamic education*” (Memon, 2013, p. 78, italics added).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine paradigmatic foundations upon which Muslim educators have heterogeneously built expressions of Islamic education and which lend context, iteration, and meaning to contemporary pedagogy. Parallel to Sabra’s (1996) description of pieces of scientific thought as contextually situated by the people who employ them, aspects of Islamic educational thought are also contextually interpreted and expressed in time and place.<sup>42</sup> First, a brief historical overview of Islamic education is provided. Second, in building a conceptual foundation to enable sense-making and contextually-relevant analysis of the data collected in this

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<sup>42</sup> “Recognition of thought always involves, among other things, a cognitive context that itself is location-bound, in the sense of being part of a problem situation that depends on the existing state of knowledge at a given time and place” (Sabra, 1996, p. 655).

study, Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework is described and then elaborated with ontology, epistemology, psychology, and pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam. The literature that comprises this chapter, and the foundation for this research in general, it is drawn from empirical and conceptual research literature written in English, primarily within the field of Islamic Education, rather than the field of Islamic Studies. Within Islamic Education, I focused upon literature concerned specifically with pedagogies in teaching and learning children and youth the religious tradition of Islam, excluding, for example, literature on K–12 schooling of Muslim children in general.<sup>43</sup>

This conceptual framing aims to illuminate foundations of culturally-specific pedagogical practices as dialectically related to the construction of new culture and consciousness amongst participants in Islamic education. First, section 2.1 provides some groundwork in terms of history, dimensions, and critiques of Islamic education, and some concepts relevant to Canadian Muslim students in public schools (2.1.2). Second, I describe the critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008), which frames this research and enables a research design and analytic approach relevant to Muslim educators engaged specifically in pedagogy in teaching Islam. In this section (2.2), I also examine a few concepts extending from the framework that may highlight counter-epistemic-hegemonic potentials in Islamic education and pedagogy. Third, drawing from conceptual and empirical literature on Islamic Education, I elaborate three paradigmatic aspects of

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<sup>43</sup> Where historical nuance was required, I occasionally drew from scholars who have written about Islamic educational history (including, Berkey, 2007; Hefner, 2007; Kadi, 2006; Makdisi, 1981, Rosenthal, 1970) and Islamic science (including Abdalla, 2007, 2008; Sabra, 1996; Saliba, 1987, 2007, 2009). For a fuller understanding of conceptions of the human being, I drew from literature in the emerging field of Islamic Psychology, primarily, Abu-Raiya (2012, 2013); Abu-Raiya & Pargament, (2011); Badri (1979); Haque (2004); Kaplick and Skinner (2017); Keshavarzi and Haque (2013); Rothman and Coyle (2018); and York Al-Karam (2018). When the literature (or, later, research participants) made references to primary sources, I either worked directly with that reference, or I went to its English-language source using Asad (1980) for Qur'anic references and Al-Nawawi (2010) for hadith.



the critical faith-centered framework: ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy (2.3). I conclude the chapter with a brief summary (2.4).

## **2.1 Islamic Education**

In the next three sections, I first sketch a brief pedagogical trajectory across sites of Islamic education over time; second, I overview some concepts relevant to Muslim students in Canadian public schools; and third, I examine some areas of contestation today between secular, liberal and Islamic conceptions of education, as well as tension across interpretations of Islamic education at the level of concept, practice, and field. Together, these three sections foreground the introduction of Zine's (2008) critical faith-based epistemological framework, elaborated by the following three sections: ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical perspectives on Islamic education.

### **2.1.1 A Brief Pedagogical History of Islamic Education**

Comprehensive literature exists on the development of philosophies and institutions of Islamic education as they have developed over time and geographic region,<sup>44</sup> much of which constitute historical and/or anthropological accounts (Sahin, 2018), outside of the field of education. Yet these works serve to peripherally inform this study in providing historical and geographic context to a focus on pedagogy, and close readings reveal aspects of a "pedagogical tradition," which have contributed to shaping instructional methods over time and place (Memon, 2011, p. 288). Said (1979) identified that chronological narrations of humanistic endeavors situated in contemporary and historical contexts can be problematic because beginnings, demarcations, and ends are often false and/or blurred. Kadi (2006), too, recognized that *periodization* is useful but somewhat artificial in terms of a phenomenon like Islam, which is related to "an enormously large

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Ahmed, 1987; Badawi, 1977; Berkey, 2007; Hefner, 2007; Kadi, 2006; Makdisi, 1981; Marshallsay, 2012; Memon & Zaman, 2016; Niyozov & Memon, 2011; Rosenthal, 1970; Zaman, 2002.

geographical area, whose peoples speak different languages, have innumerable cultures, and over the centuries have undergone varied historical experiences” (p. 312). A reflection of this artificiality may be evidenced in commonly-held descriptions of a trajectory of scientific and scholarly advances across Islamic civilizations, characterized as beginning with two centuries of translation of “ancient” science (eighth and ninth centuries; primarily Greek science), followed by rising scientific and intellectual innovation across the next two centuries in an Islamic “golden age,” followed by a decline after the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Abdalla, 2007, p. 62). While some scholars contest the homogeneity of the “decline theory” (Abdalla, 2012), this trajectory continues to frame dominant historical accounts to situate contemporary Islamic education in a context of intellectual stagnation. Hefner (2007) highlighted pitfalls of organizing Islamic education according to different historical periods because it may place too much emphasis on particular events—colonialism, for example—while diminishing the fact that pathways to modernity are complex, messy, and multiple. Cognizant of these chronological concerns, whereby idiosyncratic educational experiences unique to time, place, and discipline, can harden into overarching and somewhat artificial trajectories, here I consider Islamic education as evolving through three ongoing sociocultural-historical *movements*. Each movement contains some educational developments and pedagogical implications that have impacted upon each other in shaping the field: a) early expressions, b) colonialism and decolonial reactions, and c) contemporary Islamic education in Canada.

Early Islamic education began in seventh-century Arabia, when Muhammad started teaching his companions, and unfolded through the pre-modern period, up until the nineteenth century, which witnessed significant educational and intellectual contributions to human history (Halstead, 2004; Kadi, 2006; Saliba, 2007). Colonization of Muslim-majority lands by various European

powers—especially Britain and France, and including Holland, Portugal, and Italy—from the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth form the next movement, whereby traditional systems faced aggressive secular ones (Kadi, 2006). Colonialization triggered consequences including decolonial reactions. The Islamization of knowledge movement, one example, remains in various contested forms today (Ahmed, 2014; Memon, 2013; Niyozov & Memon, 2011). These first two movements provide historical backdrop for the development of sites of Islamic education in Canada, the third movement, when the first Muslim families started arriving in Canada from partially-independent Muslim-majority lands. Expressions of Islamic education are still developing today, in orientationally-diverse communities in North America, in a post-9/11 era (Memon, 2016). Each of these educational movements is *ongoing* in that they continue to shape the ways in which scholars, educators, parents, and students approach education in Islam today. Early pedagogies are still evoked, including those of Muhammad.<sup>45</sup> Colonialism continues in the form of global power imbalances; enduring Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2011), Orientalism (Said, 1979; Esack, 2012, 2013) and its “alter-ego anti-Orientalism” (Sayyid, 2006, p. 178);<sup>46</sup> and epistemic racism and Islamophobia (Grosfoguel, 2010, 2011). Contemporary Islamic education is developing in Canada and remains a work in progress (Memon, 2012, 2013; Zine, 2008).<sup>47</sup> In considering these three movements, I employ a pedagogical lens that contributes to contextualizing

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<sup>45</sup> See section 2.3.3; also, Abu Ghuddah, 2017; Alkouatli, 2018; Boyle, 2006, p. 484; Ajem & Memon, 2011; Sabrin, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Sayyid (2006) described: “What remains common to both Orientalist and anti-Orientalist accounts is a belief in the idea that the history of the West is the destiny of the world” (p. 178).

<sup>47</sup> A phenomenon that Berglund (2011) identified in conducting research in Muslim schools in Sweden—a global struggle between various iterations of “the right interpretation” (p. 509) of Islam for the hearts and minds of young Muslims, public perceptions, and space in non-Muslim societies—may have resonances in Canada. In educating children into varying interpretative traditions, questions of who decides what aspects of the vast and varied Islamic traditions are fundamental, relevant, and necessary to reproduce? These questions remain largely unanswered. They were not amongst the research questions of this study. Yet, these Canadian educators seemed to exercise significant degrees of personal choices in selecting which aspects of Sunni Muslim traditions to share with children, sometimes going beyond the curriculum.

the development of pedagogies in Islamic schools in one city in British Columbia.

### 2.1.1.1 Early Islamic Education

Scholars trace the roots of Islamic education back to Muhammad's learning circles, composed of members of the earliest Muslim community (Ahmed, 1987; Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 83). Muhammad's source material was verses of the Qur'an, considered the direct speech of God, which Muhammad taught as they were revealed to him (Abu Ghuddah, 2017; Sabrin, 2010). Thus, Muhammad was considered simultaneously a student of the Qur'an *and* a teacher, a designation with which many contemporary Islamic educators identify today (Alkouatli, 2015).<sup>48</sup> Memorization of the Qur'an was proceeded by enactment before new memorization began again (Ramadan, 2007); people wrote the verses and scribes recorded Muhammad's words (*hadith*) and actions (*sunnah*) (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004, p. 13). Although most scholars have suggested that Muhammad himself was illiterate, literacy infused the dialogic teaching and learning groups surrounding Muhammad, which sprung up in his home and corners of the mosque.<sup>49</sup> Scholars referred to these learning groups in various terms, for example, a *halaqah* being a small, dialogic circle, a *majlis* as a gathering for discussion, and a *madrasa* as a place for study. Each nurtured "the values of intellectual engagement, friendship and sense of a 'learning community'" (Sahin, 2018, p. 19) and set an educational tone for the community.

His assembly (majlis) was destined to set the pattern for educational instruction during the subsequent centuries. His mosque, where he habitually convened his majlis, was not only the seat of the first educational institution in the Muslim history, it also came to set a tradition for the mosques as such to be also seats of learning. (Ahmed, 1987, p. 321)

This description evokes the mosque locations and social natures of Muhammad's educational

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<sup>48</sup> In this study, educators also described themselves as such. See section 4.2 Educators Perspectives on their Roles.

<sup>49</sup> For example, some scholars have described that an enclosure or porch, called the *suffah*, connected to Muhammad's mosque in Madinah, functioned scholastically, where memorizing chapters of the Qur'an, reciting the Qur'an correctly (*tajwid*), and other Islamic sciences were taught under Muhammad's supervision (Ahmed, 1987).

gatherings. Beyond the regular lessons, which often took place after the prayer times, Muhammad devoted additional time to teaching informally by socializing with his companions, discussing their questions, issues, and concerns (Abu Ghuddah, 2017). From the earliest days, education was important for both genders; girls participated in education and religious training with many becoming recognized scholars (Berkey, 2004, p. 202).

Pedagogies in the majlis of Muhammad<sup>50</sup> seem to have been 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, mature, and express their talents (Ramadan, 2007). Sabrin (2010) described this earliest form of Islamic education as centering a “case-based learning approach where students practically apply knowledge through an apprentice-style relationship with their teachers and cooperative group work which allows them to participate in their own moral and cognitive growth” (p. 3). Similarly, mentorship towards self-development was evident in the words of the educators in this study.

After Muhammad passed away in 632<sub>CE</sub>, and Muslims began to move out of the Arabian Peninsula, the advanced study of religious sciences, often in the form of Muhammad’s transformative learning circles (*halaqah*), continued to be organized in “homes, mosques, or shops under the auspices of a master scholar (*shaykh*)” (Hefner, 2007, p. 6). New Muslims needed authentic instruction, so Arabic language study was added to Muhammad’s initial curriculum (Kadi, 2006). The Qur’an, hadith, and other components of Islamic education were standardized, translated, written, and transmitted. Islamic scholarship developed. Panjwani (2004) described:

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<sup>50</sup> These are discussed further in section 2.3.3.2 Pedagogic Themes in the Primary Sources

Within a hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims were ruling over a vast empire. The Qur'anic assurance that they were the best community (The Qur'an, 3:110) was nourished and confirmed by this situation, which continued for another thousand years or so. During this time, Muslims had become diverse and internally divided, faced tough enemies, even suffered military defeats, but never were they shaken in their belief about the superiority of their religion and themselves as its followers. (p. 4)

If confidence in faith was one feature this time period, intellectual innovation was another. The spread of Islam into new cultures meant that existing information in those places—either internally produced or externally acquired from Greek, Persian, Chinese, and Indian empires—needed to be analyzed from Islamic perspectives (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). A group of scholars (*ulema*) emerged to evaluate, reject, accept, or Islamize knowledge: “to legitimize the dynasties, judge the appropriateness of the transmitted as well as of the translated and borrowed knowledge” (p. 9). Along with encountering foreign knowledge and grappling with how it might fit within an Islamic worldview, new geographical locations brought new challenges and stimulated the construction of new knowledge in response. Two particular details of ritual prayer—precise timing and direction—demanded scientific solutions to praxis in new places and motivated complex scientific thinking (Saliba, 2009). Precision in these two rituals is described in the Qur'an as, first: “Be ever mindful of prayers, and of praying in the most excellent way<sup>51</sup> [...]” (2:238); and, second, direction

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<sup>51</sup> While some commentators interpret “praying in the most excellent way” to mean the middle prayer, or the mid-afternoon prayer, other commentators interpret it as the most noble kind of prayer, with full heart and devoted attention (Asad, 1980, p. 93). Either way, emphasis on the importance of prayer motivated attention to precise calculation of prayer times. Saliba (2009) gave the example of calculating the mid-afternoon prayer, the most difficult to calculate because its timing is not connected to obvious solar declination like sunrise or sunset. Instead, the beginning of the time of the prayer was when the length of a gnomon, or a person's height, was the same as the shadow and the end was when the length of a shadow doubled. Later, Muslims redefined the formula to be: “ $s_1 = s_n + g$  where  $s_1$  is the shadow length,  $s_n$  is the length of the shadow at noon for the specific locality, and  $g$  is the height of the gnomon. The end of that prayer was accordingly defined to occur at the time when the shadow  $s_2 = s_n + 2g$ ” (Saliba, 2009, p. 150). The height of the sun at noon had to be specifically calculated depending on the location's latitude and the sun's declination at that longitude. Ptolemy, building on the calculations of Greek astronomers Aratosthenes and Hipparchus before him, had already reported a measure of the sun's declination; yet early Muslim astronomers opted to recalculate their measures. They found that the Greek astronomers' calculations were grossly off the mark—which prompted the Muslim astronomers to question and recalculate other Greek sources—and they came up with more refined measures (Saliba, 2009).

of prayer: “Turn, then, your face towards the sacred sanctuary [the Kaaba at Mecca]; and wherever you all may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]” (2:144).<sup>52</sup> Problems particular to the proper practice of ritual prayer—the height of the sun at the mid-afternoon prayer, the direction of and distance to Mecca from various locations—prompted early Muslim scientists to build upon existing Greek knowledge and develop their own complex astronomical and mathematical solutions, as formulas, laws, theories, and instruments like the astrolabe, which could then be put to other uses and solve other problems. For example, Saliba (2009) described an astronomer of the 9<sup>th</sup> century who created a mathematical projection of geographical maps with Mecca at the center, whereby the reader could determine both the direction and the distance between a given city and Mecca.

From approximately the eighth century to the beginning of the modern era, an *Islamic civilization* spanned a region “from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to the Indus Valley and from southern Arabia to the Caspian Sea” (Sabra, 1996, p. 655). Expressions of localized Islamic education manifested in the intellectual endeavors of people situated within a tradition characterized by a common Arabic language and Islamic religion, “as an ever-present point of reference” (p. 669). Ease of movement and extraordinary communication across this civilization (Sabra, 1996)—facilitated, in part, by the annual Hajj pilgrimage bringing people and their ideas together—contributed to the development of Islamic education and the unification of diverse societies through “texts and methods of instruction,” which were “remarkably uniform across the

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<sup>52</sup> To calculate the direction for prayer, the *qibla*, Muslim scientists had to calculate the precise angle along the local horizon of a given city so that its citizens as individuals, and their mosques as institutions of prayer, were facing Mecca. This forced Muslim mathematicians and astronomers to work with spherical trigonometric triangles, as the Greeks had previously attempted. They built upon early Greek formulas to innovate Sine and Cosine laws, “together with a whole battery of trigonometric identities and equations,” (Saliba, 2009, p. 154) in order to solve the qibla problem.

Sunni Muslim world” (Berkey, 2004, p. 204). A student or scholar from the easternmost reaches of the Islamic Empire might find an academic position in Damascus or Fez (Berkey, 2004). During this time, scholars of Islamic sciences, the ulema, were held in such high social regard that they were sometimes called the ‘heirs of the prophets.’ In other words, in the absence of the Prophet, the ulema were the inheritors of religious authority and “the arbiters of the religious tradition” (Berkey, 2004, p. 203).<sup>53</sup> Two pedagogic features of the ulema’s practices in the advanced levels of Islamic sciences stand out as unique. First, the teacher prepared the student to participate in a scholarly conversation, which was the essence of intellectual life, as both a reader and a writer, “in an interlocking nexus of texts and commentaries on those texts” (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, and independent interpretation (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). Another prominent pedagogic feature was a student’s close personal and intellectual relationship with a more experienced scholar, which fostered a student’s growth in social and academic status in the absence of a formal degree system (Berkey, 2004).

Islamic education was articulated over time in three primary institutions: the mosque, the kuttab, and the madrasa (Kadi, 2006). Initiated as places of prayer, mosques have played important roles in Muslim educational life since the earliest days of Islam. Muhammad was reported to have cared so much for the mosque in Medina that he perfumed it and once stopped to remove some mucus from the wall (Abu Ghuddah, 2017). In addition, the mosque connected people to each other, to Muhammad, and to the nascent religion of Islam. Mosques also played important social

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<sup>53</sup> Respect for Muslim scholars as heirs of the Prophet continues today; Berkey (2004) described that when a scholar dies, all of creation mourns his or her passing, “even the birds of the air and the fish of the sea” (p. 203).



roles, functioning as places of learning, marriage, army mobilization, and housing for the homeless (Al-Sadan, 1997). Traditionally, mosque-school syllabi focused upon memorizing and correctly reciting the Qur'an, fiqh [theory of Islamic law, basics of the religious creed, and the sunnah, hadith, and biography of Muhammad (Ahmed, 1987). Later, auxiliary disciplines connected with Arabic language were added, including poetry and oratory and also some of the “‘foreign’ sciences, logic, and medicine” (Kadi, 2006, p. 314). Mosque teachers were religious scholars who continued Muhammad’s tradition of sharing knowledge in halaqat learning circles, most often attended by adults but open to all ages. Mosque scholars often traveled to gain more knowledge from other scholars; knowledge attainment was initially recognized orally but later became formalized into a written license from scholar to student (Kadi, 2006). Through their resident scholars, mosques across Muslim-majority lands gained “lofty reputations and become very influential: often armed with adjunct libraries from gifts and bequests, and illustrious teachers from all over the Islamic world, they attracted scores of bright and dedicated students” (p. 314). The first of such mosques was the Prophet’s mosque in Medina, where some of his companions taught after him. Other subsequently important Sunni mosques included the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; the Zaytuna Mosque in Tunis, the Azhar Mosque in Cairo, which remains influential to this day, and the Shi’a Imam ‘Ali Mosque at Najaf, Iraq (Kadi, 2006). Over time, across Muslim-majority and minority communities, the mosque has continued to offer Islamic education to all ages (Al-Sadan, 1997). In this study, educators identified the mosque as important beyond teaching/learning Islamic knowledge including for building community, learning nuances of the acts of worship through practice with elders, and gaining insight into aspects of Islamic etiquette.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Yaseen, Amira, and Bilal, respectively. See section 7.2.2 Environment as Educator.

The second institution of pre-modern Islamic education was the *kuttab*, or place of writing, a designated learning space outside of the mosque, possibly in the open air or in a tent, which provided elementary education including Qur'an memorization and recitation, "reading, writing, spelling, vowelizing letters, arithmetic, and some basic religious duties, like the rules of ablutions and prayer" (Kadi, 2006, p. 313). Attendance was voluntary and student ages varied. Although *kuttab*s developed within the first hundred years of Islamic history, they continue to function in many places today, sometimes in competition with, and sometimes complimentary to, modern schools (Berkey, 2004, p. 203). By the eighth and ninth centuries, the growing complexity of religious knowledge, including the development of the four Sunni legal schools (*madhahib*), meant that places of Islamic learning needed to expand and evolve.

A third institution, the *madrasa*, or place of study, emerged in the tenth century due to these increasing complex educational needs, with systematic curricula and facilities for students to devote themselves to their studies (Hefner, 2007). Many *madrasas* included topics of arithmetic, algebra, astronomy, logic, language, and rhetoric, as comprising "the intellectual equipment" of the student (Sabra, 1996, p. 664). In the *madrasa*, scientific research was not undertaken for its own sake but was interpreted, judged, and presented to educated Muslims (Sabra, 1996). Initially built by members of the ruling elite, *madrasas* evolved into Islamic colleges (Kadi, 2006). The Qaraouiyine Mosque in Fez, for example, is considered the world's first degree-granting university and was started by a woman in 859 CE (Sahin, 2018). While *madrasas* shared some similarities with mosques as institutions of learning, including their primarily religious curricular orientation, *madrasas* were specifically created for the purpose of education, which had implications upon every aspect of organization from building design to funding structures, usually endowments provided by influential founders, which were often women (Kadi, 2006). In addition, unlike the

scholars of mosques, the faculty of madrasas were salaried; the students lived at the madrasa itself, often receiving a free education from the madrasa's endowment. The spread of the madrasa system over vast geographical distances led to a standardizing of traditional knowledge and religious authority, enforced through orthodoxy, which called into question who counted as a religious authority and what counted as Islamic knowledge (Hefner, 2007)—questions which continue to be asked today. From their earliest days, sites of Islamic education were political (Berkey, 2004), often sites of struggle between state, society, and religious authorities (ulama): “Kings, viziers, and civilian elites patronized madrasas to demonstrate their own high standing” (Hefner, 2007, p. 8). In addition, educational institutions were used to promote sectarian orthodoxy, including, at the frontiers of the expanding Islamic empire, amongst new Muslim converts (Hefner, 2007, p. 8).

Mosque schools and madrasas in the pre-modern world shared modes of instruction including repetition, memorization, and note-taking, which were used in citing materials verbatim during disputation; texts were subjectively analyzed, beginning with the teacher's interpretation followed by probing the students understanding and ability to problem solve (Kadi, 2006). Over time, a written cannon of knowledge came to play an important role in a student's overall education, which complimented rather than displaced the emphasis on oral pedagogies that remains central to Qur'anic study to this day (Hefner, 2007). The pursuit of religious knowledge was simultaneously critically important and persistently informal (Berkey, 2004). In madrasas, as in mosques, personalized scholar–student relationships were central, whereby an individual student would seek out specific scholars, guided by their reputation, scholarly lineage, spiritual and intellectual brilliance, and specific area of expertise—regardless of their professorship at a particular institution (Hefner, 2007). Rather than a degree, a student would be awarded a certificate, or *ijazah*, which was formal recognition of his or her qualification to teach within the

lineage of the scholar. The scholar linked the student to a chain of transmission reaching back through time to the Prophet and contributed to preserving particular aspects of Islamic scholarship. Hefner (2007) described this personalized, informal, and networked learning as persisting until well into the modern period, where it underwent transformation. Others posit that it continues today.

The success of Islamic education in these pre-modern times, which enabled intellectual heights reached by Islamic civilization (Saliba, 2007), may have been due to the methods used in education: “These methods were genuine and derived from the very nature of the Islamic sciences—highly textual, memorized, personally transmitted—which at that time led the rest of the sciences in a religion-based civilization” (Kadi, 2006, p. 323). In summary, traditionally, education was deemed important across the lifespan, textual in nature (Berkey, 2004), and enshrined in three primary institutions of the mosque, kuttāb, and madrasa (Kadi, 2006), which laid the foundations of educational thought, pedagogy, contents, and ethics of teaching and learning Islam (Günther, 2006).

This early history of Islamic education and scholarship has been marginalized in Western perspectives over the course of colonial expansion and sustained by an ongoing narrative built upon several myths. The first myth is that science and religion are contradictory in Islamic religious and civilizational expressions, as they are considered to be in Christian ones. Yet, in this early period of Islamic education, religious dictates actually motivated scientific innovation as previously described in terms of prayer timing and direction. Creative and productive intellectuality in sites of Islamic education attracted European students, “who were prevented by the medieval Church from engaging in free and critical inquiry” (Sahin, 2018, p. 9). A second, related, myth is that Muslim scientists simply regurgitated Greek science; neither building upon

nor extending it. Yet Islamic ritual requirements posed problems that the Greeks had never encountered, and they illustrate departures from Greek science of Islamic intellectual endeavors. The assessing and recalculating of earlier Greek formulae by Muslim scientists led to both correction of previously incorrect formulae and the creation of new ones, which speaks to both myths: the separation of religion and science—where religion was at the very basis of Muslim scientific advancement<sup>55</sup>—and the myth of Muslim scientists simply passing along previous Greek knowledge, which has been described as a postal metaphor: “The ‘historical’ contribution of Islam is to ‘post’ the classical heritage of Greece and Rome to its rightful heirs in Renaissance Europe” (Sayyid, 2006, p. 177). In addition to being considered a postal or translational rather than constructive period of history, Islamic scholarship is under-emphasized within Western perspectives on history: “The translation movement, perhaps one of the most powerful yet overlooked intellectual movements in history, masterfully rendered the ancient texts into accessible scholarly works that influenced the course of history” (Abdalla, Chown & Abdullah, 2018). Just as this time period is under-emphasized in European history, Sahin (2018) suggested that it may be exaggerated and idealized both within popular Muslim discourse and in contemporary sites of Islamic education. Nevertheless, the 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries comprised a generative period that integrated the revealed religious sciences (*naqliyaat*), auxiliary sciences including language and logic (*aliyyat*), and the philosophical and natural sciences (*aqliyaat*) (Sahin, 2018, p. 9). The postal metaphor sets up a third myth: that the European Renaissance developed independently of outside (Muslim) influences. Traces of evidence to the contrary, of

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<sup>55</sup> Saliba (2009) emphasized: “In regard to the relationship between religion and science it is important to note in passing that this mere redefinition of prayer times is an elegant testament of the ability of religious pronouncements to accommodate natural phenomena such as the varying shadow lengths at different terrestrial climes, rather than see this relationship as monolithically antagonistic” (p. 150).

significant cultural and intellectual imports from “the Muslim world into the West for over 1,000 years,” may be glimpsed in contemporary use of English words derived from Arabic, including “algebra, admiral, cipher, amalgam, alcohol, alcove, coffee” (Haque, 2004, p. 359). In time, the European students (Sahin, 2018) who were attracted to these Muslim learning institutions and exposed to ancient Greek philosophical and scientific heritage went on to create institutions of higher learning, which contributed to reformation, science-based, secular Enlightenment, and Renaissance humanism, eventually surpassing the original Muslim learning institutions.

#### **2.1.1.2 Colonialism and Decolonial Reactions**

Two educational shifts, one beginning around fifteenth century, the other a few hundred years later, contributed to diminishing the quality of traditional Islamic education. The first was a gradual narrowing in focus of educational curricula to the training of religious scholars and jurists (Nasr, 2012; Sahin, 2013). “Other disciplines, such as Islamic medicine, mathematics, and the like, which had at times been taught outside the madrasas, simply ceased to be taught formally in many places and were taught only in individual circles” (Nasr, 2012, p. 9). There are various explanations for this first shift. Sahin (2013) cogently illustrated that while histories of Muslim attitudes towards education ran a spectrum from liberal through conservative, early Muslim attitudes exhibited an open educational approach. This open approach gradually closed: “reification of religious authority took place at the expense of the role of human agency, which was reduced from creative engagement to passive reception” (p. 192). The Crusades, Mongol invasions, and the Black Death may be further contributing reasons behind declines in scholarship after the 12<sup>th</sup> century (D’Oyen, 2008). Hefner (2007) suggested that marginalization of the tradition of philosophy and historical empiricism from “most of the Muslim world’s madrasas” (p. 30), which had provided an intellectual basis for Muslim engagement with the philosophical systems of other cultures, may

have contributed to this atrophication. Karamali (2017, p. 13) described a desire to *preserve revelation*, rather than a rejection of science or reason, as motivating perspectives on philosophy. Philosophy and *tasawwuf* (Sufism) are two topics within Islamic education broadly that are characterized by enduring tension today. Both involve complex and, at times, contested relationships with revelation and the formal discipline of orthodox theology (*kalam*); both may have implications for contemporary Islamic education. Contrary to common perception, Karamali (2017, p. 13) argued that the philosophical sciences were well received by the academic madrasa community (ulema), but that their academic focus was upon revelation because human philosophical abilities are innately established whereas revelation was an event that happened and would need to be faithfully understood and applied in order to be retained. In other words, “Human reason would remain with us whether we preserved it or not, but divine revelation would only remain if we preserved it” (Karamali, 2017, p. 14). Thus, the madrasa community dedicated itself to preserving revelation and smaller, less prestigious, institutions developed for scientific and philosophical inquiry, including informal scholarly networks that hosted some of the most famous Muslim scientists. Karamali (2017, p. 13) suggested that while the madrasa community kept informed about those developments and did not hinder them, its own focus was on preserving the words, meanings, intellectual rigor, and application of revelation, and developed sciences for each.

In terms of *tasawwuf*, Winter (2016) argued that it likewise occupied a complimentary and necessary position in epistemic relationship to formal theological learning (*kalam*). While the madrasa was the center of this formal learning, it “coexisted in complex ways with the Sufi lodge,” as a center of *tasawwuf* and the “scene of a very different pedagogy, which far from being marginal was often much more attuned to the concerns of popular piety” (p. 31). Their interaction might be considered as an inner Islamic metabolism—“of a complexly symbiotic dual

epistemology”—which maintained ongoing renewal of the faith, whereby “inner experiences” did not contest theological truths but supplied “a more authentic proof for them” (p. 33).

Although their relationship has been questioned at times, both the madrasa and the Sufi lodge drew from the Qur’an, as an authentic root; each was the other’s traditional counterpoint, and together they created an educational balance in medieval society (Winter, 2016, p. 33). Yet, these two dialectics with their productive tensions have been effectively derailed by both modernists and fundamentalists, as Winter (2016) described:

Under post-traditional conditions, presided over by modernizing and centralizing ministries of education, the old binary model of Islamic education may today be described as shattered. The dominant state religious curricula, generally aiming to promote a quietist civic faith, have not filled the gap left by the great *madrasa* institutions of the past; still less have they compensated for the spiritual and aesthetic loss entailed by the closure of initiatic institutions, such as the Sufi lodges [...]. (p. 33–34)

Here, Winter described that the dynamic tension between types and expressions of Islamic education—required in constituting pedagogical holism—has been dismantled in today’s Muslim schools and societies. Both state schools in Muslim-majority countries and Islamic schools in diaspora tend instead towards a “vague but emotive sense of Muslim belonging” without fostering rigor and “the deep dialectical reasons for adherence” (p. 34). A result may have been that, gradually, scholars in institutions of Islamic learning narrowed their focus, with some scholars suggesting that whatever Muslims ought to know was best understood at the time of revelation and by the companions of the Prophet (Haque, 2004, p. 359–360). Traditionalists believed that new knowledge would lead to innovation in religion (*bida*), a practice considered forbidden (*haram*) in Islam.

Other scholars have contested aspects of this “decline theory,” pointing out that decline across all scientific disciplines, in all places, was unlikely (Abdalla, 2007, p. 61). Instead, while decline occurred in some branches of Islamic scholarship, new developments continued in others



until the sixteenth century, after which industrialized Europe set new standards for comparison (Abdalla, 2007; Sabra, 1996).<sup>56</sup> Drawing from Ibn Khaldun, a historian who lived in North Africa in the late 1300s, Abdalla (2012) discerned at least two nuances that lend dimensionality to the decline theory: first, that scientific activity and instruction diminished in North Africa and Spain as Muslim communities themselves disintegrated; second, that scientific activity characterizing cities in the Near East, like Baghdad, moved to different cities, like Cairo.

Regardless of whether, why, and when decline occurred, Muslim scholars and educators had few resources to resiliently and critically engage Western education and epistemology when they arrived as part of the colonial project in the nineteenth century (Hefner, 2007). “When the colonial powers arrived, they easily introduced educational institutions in Muslim lands based on a different worldview than the Islamic one” (Nasr, 2012). The arrival of colonial powers, and their educational systems, in Muslim-majority countries constitutes the second shift in the diminishment of Islamic education. 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). Colonialism changed the nature of local education, including affecting the ways in which Islam as a religion was taught and learned (Ahmed, 2014); “many of the academic ‘Islamic’ disciplines were either neglected or recast in terms often alien to their origins” (Nasr, 2016, p. 20). Husain and Ashraf (1979) described the gradual development of 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

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<sup>56</sup> For further discussion and disputations on theories and causes of this decline, see Abdalla (2007, 2008, 2012), Iqbal (2012), Sabra (1996), and Saliba (1987).

educational institutions failed to nurture in Muslim students' awareness of their own cultural, religious, and linguistic heritages. Alien to prevailing Islamic forms of schooling, Western colonial systems offered some advantages in terms of math, science, engineering, and military technology, capturing the attention of some Muslim rulers (Nasr, 2012). In the early days of the colonial period, although some Muslim rulers saw distinct advantages to this new Western educational system, they initially hoped to contain it within communities of the elite (Hefner, 2007): "Rulers in Cairo, Istanbul, and Tehran were also concerned that the new schooling might spread subversive Western ideas. The state kept new schools in quarantine, then, at a safe distance from the 'ulama and masses" (p. 29). Yet, many parents, too, recognized the advantages of colonial schooling, governed by European curricula, and as ways of equipping their children with skills for the future:

Parental demand rather than top-down supply was the driver for this great educational transformation. Muslim parents could not be swayed from their goal of giving their children practical skills as well as a vivid sense of their faith. Although the pattern varies from country to country, most parents show a similar preference today. (Hefner, 2007, p. 31)

In other words, some parents recognized the direction in which the educational future was unfolding, and simultaneously wanted religious literacy for their children; they wanted "their children to be modern and employable as well as religious" (Hefner, 2007, p. 27),<sup>57</sup> which further marginalized classical Islamic academics and pedagogies as elite members of the colonized communities were educated in Western systems (Nasr, 2016, p. 20). This dichotomy became characterized by a power differential—an empowered Western system and a weakened Islamic

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<sup>57</sup> While Hefner (2007) identified this phenomenon in places including Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, and Turkey; Nasr (2012) referenced Algeria, Egypt, India, and Pakistan, pointing out that countries that were not formally colonized fared better. Both pointed out that the divide between secular, Western and Islamic schools continue to exist today. The basic components of the argument were articulated, albeit in a contemporary Canadian expression, in Ruby's description of 'two theories' of Islamic education, with which parents today grapple, in deciding between Canadian public and full-time Islamic schools for their children (see section 7.2.2 Environment as Educator).

system—and created a schism in societies across Muslim-majority communities that continues to this day. “Pulled from two different directions, they could not fully comprehend or master either civilization” (Haque, 2004, p. 360). Not only was this bifurcation in educational systems alien to Muslim worldviews characterized by *tawhid* (divine unicity),<sup>58</sup> but the compartmentalization of subjects within Western educational frameworks was foreign, too. The fragmentation of knowledge into autonomous disciplines of knowledge contributed to the fragmentation of consciousness; “ethics and religion were reduced into two of the various spheres of knowledge, independent of economics, politics, psychology and all other fields of social sciences” (Safi, 1999, p. 6). Both led to compartmentalization in the minds of students, which is crippling in an educational system based on *tawhid*, or unity (Nasr, 2012, p. 11).

Reactions and responses varied to the confusion wrought by colonialism, “a total eclipse of Muslim military, political and intellectual life. [...] The result was that for the first time Muslims felt a need to defend their religion against an ‘other’ that claimed worldly superiority over them” (Panjwani, 2004, p. 4). Apologetic perspectives arose, setting up oversimplified conceptions of an ideal Islam and an Islamic golden age from which Muslims have deviated; over time, these perspectives have persisted within Muslim communities (Panjwani, 2004). In terms of how to deal with colonial education systems, perspectives amongst scholars, educators, social leaders, and parents differed, some advocating for educational reform “as a means of survival, while others advocated resilience to change as a means for preserving identity. In the end, the reformists won” (Kadi, 2006, p. 323). While the reformists succeeded in facilitating the development of secular

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<sup>58</sup> As the unity and uniqueness of God, *tawhid* has expressions in ontology, epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy. It was a particularly important concept in this study, emphasized by many of the research participants as both an objective of Islamic education and a pedagogical organizing principle. Muslims historically have evoked *tawhid* as a “powerful symbol of divine, spiritual, and sociopolitical unity” (Esposito, 2003).

schools in Muslim communities—with today’s ‘international education’ and Western-based research in Muslim-majority contexts as contemporary tentacles of the colonial project (Abdi, 2018)—those advocating for the preservation of Muslim identities succeeded in creating schools that continued the teachings of Islam based on revised features of traditional madrasas. “Appealing to matters of piety, identity, and the marginalization of the Muslims by the West, their efforts—which continue today—created schools meant to replace the secular and national government public schools” (Kadi, 2006, p. 323–324). While Safi (1999) described colonial powers as being “fairly successful in destroying traditional social and political structures and altering Muslim consciousness by introducing new institutions and patterns of social organization and interaction, and by transplanting modern education system in Muslim societies” (p. 1), he pointed out that the new European curricula essentially *reintroduced* sciences that had been neglected in the first shift that contributed to diminishing the quality of Islamic education, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry. In addition, “they also included subjects which brought new interpretations and meanings of human experience, such as history, philosophy, and social sciences” (p. 1).

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 scholars and educators in various countries to this day. One of them is the Islamization of knowledge, a project that aims to reinstitute divinity at the center of all educational activities, rather than the individual (al-Attas, 1979; Nasr, 2012; Panjwani, 2012; Shamma, 1999; Tauhidi, 2001; Zine, 2008). The Islamization of knowledge project aimed to Islamize sources, methodologies, and expressions of knowledge and pedagogy (Ahmed, 2014). It is “based on the premise that all knowledge can and needs to be understood from within an Islamic worldview”

and it arose as a diverse epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical response to Muslim encounters with new local knowledge, external ideas, colonialism, and other “encroaches into Muslim psyche and society” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 14). They suggested that it is not possible to understand modern Islamic Education as a discipline without examining the rise of the Islamization of knowledge. Different schools of thought have used Islamization to critique each other. Some scholars have argued that Islamization of knowledge is a reactionary approach to modernity that needs to be replaced with an approach that reconstructs knowledge and methodology from within an Islamic paradigm (Ahmed, 2014). Some see it as a process of sacralization of the modern, secular, and profane and, thus, as binding all people of faith, not just Muslims (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). Ahmed (2014) pointed out that, like other movements in indigenous knowledge, the Islamization of knowledge movement “is part of postcolonial repositioning within the social sciences and thus naturally has a critical and political dimension (p. 3). Most iterations of Islamization share educational goals aiming to address educational and social failures in Muslim-majority countries, many of which are sourced in revealed religion. From the premises of the Islamization of knowledge project, many Muslims see Islamic education as a point of resistance, revival, and renewal; a shield against the onslaught of Western culture and the consequent de-legitimization of Islamic and other ways of knowing (Niyozov & Memon, 2011; Zine, 2008).

The educational atrophication in Muslim communities, as discussed above, predates the encounter with Western colonialism. The latter, however, has largely inspired and shaped the emergence of reactionary “Islamic renewal and reform” initiatives in Muslim societies since that time (Sahin, 2018) and sites of Islamic education have developed since colonial times in contexts colored by this discourse of intrinsic intellectual inferiority. In situating “a crisis at the heart of

contemporary Muslim societies” (Sahin, 2018, p. 24) in an absence of critical reflection in education, a way to address this crisis may be through a self-critical educational transformation, including awakening an early critical and creative spirit of integrated exploration through pedagogy. Sahin (2018) summarized: “The critical/reflective educational heritage of Islam shaping its devotional spirituality needs to be reclaimed so that young Muslims have a better chance to develop proper Islamic literacy, mature faith formation and engage creatively with the world around them” (p. 4).

### **2.1.1.3 Contemporary Islamic Education in Canada**

Since its inception in the seventh century Hijaz, Islamic education has operated in many forms, including as an “as an overarching epistemological and ethical framework; a secular school subject; weekend tuition; and an informal socialization process through mosques; media; the internet; and other Muslim transnational activities” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 25). Along with local expressions of Islam, sites of education are often impacted by evolutions and events in Muslim-majority communities overseas. Contributing to the development of Islamic schools in North America was the migration of Muslims from Muslim-majority countries and a “worldwide phenomenon of Islamic resurgence” (Safi, 1999), of which the Islamization of knowledge was just a part. Memon (2011) identified the initiation of Islamic education in North America as coming from the Nation of Islam in the 1930s and developing over the following 40 years into a substantial network of Islamic schools. In the 1970s, many Muslim immigrants started arriving in Canada and the USA from South Asia, parts of Africa, and the Middle East, building upon the foundation established by the earlier African–Canadian Muslims (Memon, 2011).

When Muslim people arrived in North America, in the 1970s, they were simultaneously impressed with the vibrancy and freedom of culture and concerned with social issues that included

violence, sexual promiscuity, and drug use (Safi, 1999). These concerns prompted many Muslim parents to “search for alternative schooling and social activities for their children, and hence brought them closer to Islamic centers, and highlighted the importance of community” (p. 3). As Muslim populations grew in Western countries, numbers of mosques also grew (Panjwani, 2017); which served as centers of community engagement where Muslims participated in spiritual and social activities and cohered around matters of common concern. Muslims of diverse backgrounds came together to discuss shared social issues, which, in the context of the mosque, were often translated into religious issues. Considering the experiences of British Muslims, Panjwani (2017) described: “Out of such discussions emerged organizations that started to campaign and advocate for ‘Muslim issues’” (p. 600); and may have contributed to the construction of a “publicly enacted Muslim identity” (p. 598). Safi (1999) described that in the United States, “[T]he comprehensive role of the mosque, exemplified in the Madina Mosque built by the Prophet of Islam and his companions, was restored. In America the mosque reclaimed its true meaning and comprehensive role as the center of the Muslim community” (p. 2).

In Canada, the first Islamic school was built in the late 1970s in Ontario, followed by schools in major cities across the country and spikes of growth in the mid-1990s and post-9/11 (Memon, 2011); by 2010 there were 60 full-time Islamic schools (Memon, 2013). In the western Canadian city where this research was conducted, there were at least four full-time Islamic schools, at the time, approximately 15 established mosques and many other smaller places of religious gathering, many of which offered complimentary Islamic education after school and on weekends. Muslim communities evolving within Western cultural contexts and the events of 9/11 motivated a new era aiming for integration of individuals, communities, and educational systems (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). Manifestations of this integration in Canada include new generations of youth who

express both Islamic identity and a sense of Canadian belonging, as well as increasing religious observance and identity, and political awareness and participation (The Environics Institute, 2016). These new generations tend to be less emotionally attached to the original countries and cultures of their parents and primarily identify with the only homes in which they have ever lived (Safi, 1999). “Pious youth want little of the “‘village Islam’ of their parents, preferring to pledge allegiance to the global *ummah* [...] the question becomes which among the rival versions of global Islam one chooses to join” (Hefner, 2007, p. 28).

While the intellectual scope of many mosque schools may have narrowed over time (Nasr, 2012, 2016, p. 9), some scholars see them as potentially profound sources of individual and social development and suggest revisiting the “idea of the classical madrasa and what it has stood for traditionally, namely, as an institution standing at the apotheosis of authentic Islamic intellectual inquiry” (Nasr, 2016, p. 21). The scope of such schools may be expanding. Scholars describe that new forms of Islamic education in Muslim communities are emerging (Kadi, 2006) and while the development of satisfactory Islamic education is always a work in progress (Zine, 2008), its evolution may also be inspired by dissatisfaction. Memon (2012) described some Muslim Canadian parents as being “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” (p. 201). This has led to some creative educational solutions, including homeschooling, summertime enrichment camps, and Muslim boy/girl scouts.

Yet many teachers working in varied sites of Islamic education are not professionally qualified as teachers. Aiming to address this issue, the Islamic Teacher Education Program (ITEP) was launched in 2010, initially in partnership with Ontario Institute for Studies in Education



(OISE) at the University of Toronto and comprised a one-year online professional learning program for Islamic school educators. Its curricular structure was built around a primary question—What defines the “Islamic” in Islamic schools?—and encompassed aims of education, exploration of curriculum content, instructional strategies as shaped by overarching Islamic educational principles and values. Bringing together school leaders and classroom teachers from over 37 countries, and providing accessible and affordable education and professional development, ITEP was one of only a few such programs around the world. Its innovative aim was to “equip participants with a common metalanguage concerning Islamic pedagogy to enable conversation with contemporary predominantly Western educational discourse” (Memon, Chown & Alkouatli, in progress). Yet, founder Nadeem Memon reflected that two particular challenges stemmed from the aim of inclusivity in the face of differing educational backgrounds, needs, priorities, and professional aspirations. First, in order to remain inclusive, the study mode was necessarily flexible and the program did not maintain the rigor of a university-accredited program. Second, there was an absence of a strong theoretical underpinning for the program, which was partially due to an intentional decision to avoid essentializing or prioritizing one interpretational approach (Memon, Chown & Alkouatli, in progress). Despite these challenges, ITEP responded to a need within the Islamic educational community and left a gap when it ceased functioning in 2017.<sup>59</sup>

Today’s Muslim children are members of intersectional, diasporic Muslim communities, who are learning and developing as minorities in a settler, dominant–secular, multicultural, Canadian sociocultural environment. Striving to maintain Islamic identities within this dominant-culture environment, Muslim youth face discrimination, Islamophobia, and critical and

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<sup>59</sup> A shadow of ITEP remains online at <https://www.facebook.com/IslamicTeacherEducationProgram/>

contradictory voices from within Muslim communities—some calling for stasis and others calling for change in sites of Islamic education. Muslim social politics are often reflected in the disparate practices within Islamic schools (Zine, 2008). The Islamization of knowledge movement may have illustrated a contemporary tension in the “trend of relating the idea of Islam to other social, political and intellectual ideas” (Panjwani, 2004, p. 1), but this tension may date back 14 centuries to the very inception of Islam as a life methodology itself, when early Muslims made distinctions between practices that were ‘Islamic’ and practices that were not. In a post 9-11, Western-dominated global world, where over 23 percent of the global population identifies as Muslim (Pew, 2015), these tensions are particularly salient. Which Islamic knowledge should be foregrounded and put towards which ends? And who decides? These questions continue to be debated today. Differing answers from different educators, serving different communities, settled in differing contexts, with differing educational needs and objectives, mean that expressions of Islamic education are always locally specific.

Scholars have suggested that the establishment of formal or informal Islamic schools may be useful not just for Muslim cultural continuity but also for wider plural societies. Rather than simply reacting to the threat of secularism, sites of Islamic education are situating themselves as necessary compliments to secular systems and collaborating “in the process enriching their circles of interest and engaging with the rest of the world in a dialogue, which is useful to all (Kadi, 2006, p. 324). Thus, contemporary Islamic schools may be sites of counterhegemonic resistance, identity development, and generation of cultural capital, rather than defensive cultural survival; as empowering alternative conceptual systems “with possibilities for broader social transformation” (Zine, 2008, p. 13). The mission of contemporary Islamic Education may be to “reintegrate the

fragmented consciousness of modern man [*sic*]<sup>60</sup> by once again repositioning divine revelation at the core of human consciousness, the binding and nurturing core which the secular project has managed to destroy” (Safi, 1999, p. 6). Along with the importance of ongoing critical analysis of global conditions in which sites of education are situated, scholars have also emphasized the importance of internal social critique (Niyozov, 2010; Sahin, 2013; Waghid, 2014) and the reclamation of the “historic roots of Islamic pluralism and tolerance” (Zine, 2008, p. 22). Thus, sites of Islamic education stand at an important intersection, between secular liberalism and religious Islamic traditions—from which they both draw and extend. While their first purpose may be to educate young Muslims in iterations of Islamic principles and practices, ultimately, sites of Islamic education are “forges from which will flow the ideas and actors for the Muslim world’s future” (Hefner, 2007, p. 5).

### **2.1.2 Muslim Students in Canadian Public-School Contexts**

Today, most Canadian Muslim children attend secular public schools for reasons including low cost, high quality, and integration into Canadian society (Memon, 2013; Niyozov, 2010). Educators in this study reported that most of the children attending complimentary Islamic and mosque schools on weekends attend Canadian public school during the week.<sup>61</sup> In addition, given the intimate links between schools and society, even children attending full-time Islamic schools are exposed to trends and issues playing out in public schools. Partially supported by the provincial Ministry of Education, Muslim-school educators in this study described attending professional development sessions. The next two sections aim to contextualize the dominant-culture social and educational context in this city, within which Muslim educators engaged children. First, I will

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<sup>60</sup> I use [*sic*] to denote both grammatical errors and gender-biased language throughout this dissertation.

<sup>61</sup> In fact, 23 of the 35 educators who participated in this study taught Islamic material to children and youth attending Canadian public schools. Only 12 of the educators taught full-time Islamic elementary school students.

provide a glimpse of evolving pedagogic approaches in public schools and the concept of teacher's pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1989). Second, I will briefly review literature on Muslim students' experiences in North American public schools and provide an overview of the concept of asset pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014).

### **2.1.2.1 Pedagogies in British Columbia Schools**

In British Columbia, at the time this study took place, public schools were currently experiencing a renaissance of sorts, driven by an awareness that past-pedagogies of didactic instruction resulted in student disengagement, frustration, and boredom and, simultaneously, that “only the well-educated can possibly thrive in the world that is coming” (Barber, 2014, p. 7). In preparing young people to graduate from high school equipped for “college, career and citizenship” (p. 7), the provincial government gradually rolled out a new curriculum, starting in 2015, based on researcher- and teacher-recommendations. The new curriculum boasted flexibility in creating space for teacher innovation<sup>62</sup> and was based upon three integrated elements emphasizing higher-order learning: *content*, or what students are expected to know; *competencies*, or what students are expected to do; and *big ideas*, or what students are expected to understand (BC government, 2019a). The authors of the redesigned curriculum described it as concept-based and competency-driven, placing “more emphasis on the deeper understanding of concepts and the application of processes than on the memorization of isolated facts and information” (BC government, 2019b). Learning by “doing” constituted a focus of this new curriculum in aiming to develop core competencies foundational to all learning, identified as *thinking* (critical and creative), *communication*, and *personal/social* proficiencies that students need to engage in “deep, lifelong

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<sup>62</sup> Educators in this study reported that the flexibility of the new curriculum enabled them to add Islamic content in authentic ways, see section 6.4.1 Curriculum Integration: Islam in the Day-to-Day

learning” and “directly support students in their growth as educated citizens” (BC government, 2019a). The government’s vision described families helping children develop core competencies at home, before starting school; at school, where students progressively become competent “in more complex and varied contexts” (BC government, 2019a); and students’ development beyond graduation, across personal, social, educational, and workplace contexts. While literacy and numeracy featured in the new curricula, equally important were abilities including: “problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, thinking in different ways, and building effective relationships and teams” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 8). Pedagogy was central to this new curricular and educational agenda, focusing on learning relationships between students and with teachers; tapping intrinsic motivations for both teaching and learning; engaging in real-world problem-solving and action; and leveraging digital technology for pedagogical acceleration. This may be accomplished, at least theoretically, by mastering processes of learning in becoming life-long learners, individually and collectively, by understanding the learning process itself, reflecting on it, connecting learning to student interest, enabling peer teaching, and constantly revising and redesigning learning strategies (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 11). The end goal is the creation of new knowledge that students connect to the world, using “the power of digital tools to do things that matter beyond school” (p. 11), whereby students become active contributors to knowledge-based, technology-driven societies. These primary objectives of Canadian public schools are important to bear in mind when considering educational objectives in sites of Islamic education, in later chapters, as well as Muslim educators’ responses and pedagogies.

Operationalizing new pedagogies in deep learning requires teachers to have pedagogical ability, including repertoires of strategies and methods of relationship-building with students (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 15). Here, Shulman’s (1987) landmark argument—that “there

exists an elaborate knowledge base for teaching” (p. 7)—is noteworthy and it provides a framework to examine the content, character, and sources for such a knowledge base. In promoting students’ comprehension, reasoning, reflection, and transformation, Shulman (1987) emphasized that the teachers’ *management of ideas* within classroom discourse, characterized by content mastery and pedagogical skill, was as important as a teacher’s *management of students* in a classroom. This management of ideas is particularly relevant in an Islamic educational context, where children go to learn Islamic ideas that often run contrary to some of those found in the dominant culture. Pedagogical skill, emotional valence, and spiritual dynamism characterizing educators’ presentation of ideas feature as important in the educators’ words in this study. Shulman (1987) identified categories of knowledge as including: content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum knowledge; knowledge of participants in education and conceptions their characteristics; knowledge of educational contexts; knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values; and pedagogical content knowledge. These seven categories emerged as a useful set of sensitizing concepts during the fieldwork of this study, upon each of which educators had clear and varied perspectives. Particularly interesting is Shulman’s (1987) designation of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), as an amalgam of educational elements unique to a particular discipline, site, and individual participants. In transforming “other types of knowledge (subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of context) into viable instruction” (Abell, 2008, p. 1408), pedagogical content knowledge represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the interests and abilities of learners for instruction. In addition, as part of a master teacher’s repertoire, Shulman (1987) identified responding flexibly to change—in the mood, interest, capabilities of individual students and the class as a whole. In this study, Shulman’s

(1987) categories of knowledge base, pedagogical content knowledge, and criteria for good pedagogy were particularly profound. Islamic education appears to be the domain of people with particular insights, practices, and passions about the Islam from which they develop their pedagogical craft.

This brief survey of pedagogical emphases in British Columbian public schools aims to provide context in examining the pedagogies that Muslim educators described employing in Islamic schools, both complimentary and formal, in recognition of the fact that many Muslim children in BC, who attend complimentary Islamic schools on the weekend, attend public schools during the week.

#### **2.1.2.2 Accommodations, Asset Pedagogies, and Cultural Relevancies**

Although Shulman (1987) pointed out the importance of characteristics of learners and their contexts, scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that he did not go far enough in recognizing the importance of culture in methods of teaching and learning (p. 466). She was amongst the first educational researchers to propose a theory of culturally-focused pedagogy as part of a movement of asset pedagogies proposed to resist the North American tradition that academic success must come at the expense of students' home languages, literacies, cultures (Paris, 2012), and psychosocial well-being (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Scholars including Au and Kawakami (1985) with Hawaiian students, Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) with Mexican-American students, and Ladson-Billings (1995) with African-American students, examined ways of teaching and learning that included student culture, knowledge, and expertise in the classroom. These scholars adopted an *asset* pedagogy approach, arguing that every culture consisted of languages, values, and practices that could enrich the educational experiences of *all* students. Ladson-Billings (1995) offered the concept *culturally relevant pedagogy*, aiming to, first,

enhance academic skills, concepts, and long-term academic achievement; second, enhance cultural competence in terms of honoring students' own cultural practices and principles, while simultaneously helping them gain access to the wider culture; and, third, raising sociopolitical consciousness to critique social structures. While these three concerns are widely shared amongst theorists, the field of asset pedagogy has evolved to emphasize different areas of cultural relevance including pedagogy, content, and learning styles (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008). However, a critique is that researchers and practitioners essentialize groups based on shared race, culture, or ethnic background (Dutro, et al., 2008; Sleeter, 2012), which can lead to teaching “prescriptively according to broad, underexamined generalities” (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 23).

A later iteration of asset pedagogy, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017), aimed to address those tendencies in extending the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. They argued that the term *relevant* does not go far enough in sustaining students' cultural practices and sharing practices across difference; it has failed to remain dynamic and critical in constantly-changing cultural communities. Along with emphasis on “a critical centering of the valued ways of youth” in education (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 13), culturally sustaining pedagogy offered two contributions that may be pertinent in consideration of Muslim students. First, *culture* is emphasized as “dynamic, shifting, and encompassing both past-oriented heritage dimensions and present-oriented community dimensions” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 90). To remain vibrant and equitable, a plural society needs both (Paris, 2012). In sustaining students' heritage and community practices, teachers simultaneously support students in accessing dominant cultural practices. Paris and Alim's (2014, 2017) second major contribution was acknowledgement of the need for teachers to support students in turning their gazes inward to critically examine their own heritage and community practices, and the ways in which they might reproduce systemic



inequities, like sexism, classism, and racism. Scholarship in Muslim education, Niyozov (2016) claimed, has insufficiently engaged with difficult questions around theological, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic diversity. Within Muslim communities in North America, Islamophobia may have diminished participation in political, social, and cultural life as well as intra-community self-critique (Kalin, 2011), masking gender inequalities and power imbalances (Abbas, 2011), justify a sense of self-preservation rather than open discussions of pluralism (Niyozov, 2016).

While asset pedagogies aim to foster successful academic and social experiences in school by responding to diverse home and community cultures, teaching in ways that build upon students' backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), some have suggested that student heterogeneity makes asset pedagogies a professional imperative for public-school teachers (Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). A well-developed theme in the asset-pedagogy literature emphasizes that students of non-dominant cultures should not have to lose their cultures in order to succeed socially and academically in public school classrooms (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). This theme is less developed specifically in terms of non-dominant *epistemologies*, including Islamic ones, although some scholars working with Muslim students have suggested that students should not have to lose their Islamic ways of knowing and being with successful participation in public Western education (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Ipgrave, 2010). While religious diversity is an aspect of increasing student heterogeneity in North American public-school classrooms, including in British Columbia, religious literacy and teacher-preparation have not kept pace (Aronson, Amatullah & Laughter, 2016; Guo, 2015; Magaldi-Dopman & Park-Taylor, 2014). Seward and Khan (2016) reported two distinct challenges facing Muslim students in American public schools: "difficulty implementing Islamic practices into their school and everyday life and coping with Islamophobia" (p. 4).

Implementing Islamic practices is an aspect of maintaining *Islamic continuity* within public schooling, which research conducted in Canada, the USA, and the UK highlighted as important to many Muslim families (Guo, 2015; McCreery, Jones & Holmes, 2007). Yet, schools are often embedded in societies characterized by tension and fear of Muslims (Seward & Khan, 2016; Woodley, 2015). Inside Canadian public-school classrooms, Eurocentric practices, content, and values dominate; teachers are often white, middle-class, and female (Guo, 2015; Niyozov, 2010; Zine, 2007). Research on Muslim students' experiences in public schools across Canada, USA, and Europe echoes with requests for accommodations<sup>63</sup> to enable practices meaningful to students; reports of entrenched Islamophobia; needs for improved relationships with teachers; and calls for expanded knowledge amongst school staff of Islam, Muslims, and diversities within. More research is needed on ways in which public schools may or may not be serving children and youth who identify as Muslim (Goforth & Hassan, 2016; Schlein & Chan, 2010), including in terms of asset pedagogies. Meanwhile, a question remains as to whether or not Canadian public-school educators are prepared to engage in Islamically-relevant, -coherent, and -sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms, while, at the same time, working with Muslim students on developing critical reflexivity of their own traditions.

### **2.1.3 Dimensions of—and Challenges to—Islamic Education**

Sites of Islamic education are centered within inter-and intra-community tensions, including

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<sup>63</sup> The term *accommodation*, widely used in asset pedagogy literature on Muslim students in public schools, originated in the practice of reasonable accommodations in labor jurisprudence (Conway, 2012). Over the last decade, the term has been used to refer to “requests made by religious believers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, for ‘reasonable accommodations,’ or exceptions to laws or social norms made to accommodate their religious beliefs” (Conway, 2012, p. 196). The first clause of Quebec’s Bill 94 defined *accommodation* as, “adaptation of a norm or general practice, dictated by the right to equality, in order to grant different treatment to a person who would otherwise be adversely affected by the application of that norm or practice” (Bill 94, 2010).

systemic Islamophobia; integration of valued Islamic principles and social practices with secular, liberal school ones (Halstead, 1995); and pressures of religification, whereby Muslims are defined solely in contested religious terms (Panjwani, 2017) and expected to be and behave in certain ways, both within Muslim communities and within the surrounding secular community. As religious minorities in an age of ongoing colonialism and faltering multiculturalism, young Muslims may experience these tensions whether they attend full-time Islamic schools or secular public and private ones. Niyozov and Pluim (2009) identified a need to know how Islamic education itself might be able to prepare students to deal with such issues and diverse epistemological perspectives in heterogeneous societies, including “individual autonomy, pluralism, and multiculturalism” (p. 670). In exploring this potential, it is first necessary to examine dimensions of Islamic education and some of the challenges leveled against it by schools, society, and academia at the tier of the concept, process, practice, and field. Together, these dimensions and challenges confront Islamic education at a deep existential level: What exactly *is* Islamic education? Is it a worthy educational initiative in contemporary, plural, globalized societies? Does it embody positive pedagogical practices? Can it be considered an authentic academic field of study? These challenging questions contextualize the research context of this study and require attention at the outset of this literature review, which aims to provide a conceptual basis upon which to examine educators’ uses of pedagogies in sites of Islamic education as they are evolving in Canadian communities.

#### **2.1.3.1 Concept: What Constitutes Islamic Education?**

‘Islamic education’ is a contested concept of varying dimensions. Some scholars have suggested that the word *education*, as commonly understood in English, must be elaborated by three Arabic–Islamic concepts that embody distinct but overlapping dimensions of educational processes: *ta’lim*, as instruction of content knowledge; *tarbiyah*, nurturing holistic individual development in

relational community; and *ta'dib*, or social and moral development (Cook, 1999; Ebrahim, 2017; Halstead, 2004; Sahin, 2013, 2017; Waghid, 2014).<sup>64</sup> Waghid (2014) pointed out that these three concepts do not have singular meanings; rather their meanings are fluid and shaped by conditions that can contribute to minimalist and maximalist expressions.

Ta'lim, meaning *to know or learn*, relates to exchanges of knowledge through teaching and learning (Cook, 1999). A minimalist conception of ta'lim would be to commit material to memory, likely along with medieval scholars' exegetical interpretations, and to consider that material fixed and immutable (Waghid, 2014). A maximal conception of ta'lim would not necessarily dispense of memorization but would use it to make further meanings and deeper understandings through deliberation and even disagreement, with others' interpretations. In this conception, "no scholar has absolute jurisdiction over what counts as legitimate or not, but rather that meanings are shared, experienced and deliberated upon on the understanding that new understandings may emerge" (Waghid, 2014, p. 337).

Tarbiyah, meaning *to nurture, grow, to rear*—"the gradual, stage by stage developmental process informing an organism's growth until the complete actualization of its potentials" (Al-Iṣfahānī, 2003, as cited in Sahin, 2017, p. 132)—shares the same Arabic root word as lord or sustainer (*rabb*) and relates to spiritual, moral, and ethical nurturing (Cook, 1999). Sahin (2017) defined tarbiyah as a balance between the authority of an educator and the autonomy of a learner in a "person-centred process that includes all activities that contribute to one's upbringing: physical and spiritual nourishment, care and guidance" (p. 132). Tarbiyah is sometimes used to refer to human development, although ta'lim, tarbiyah, and ta'dib, collectively, may be more accurate in

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<sup>64</sup> Scholars of Islamic Education differ in their emphasis of these constituting concepts. For example, al-Attas (1980) puts forth ta'dib as centrally denoting education and Sahin (2013) emphasizes tarbiyah, as encompassing both ta'lim and ta'dib, amongst other educational concepts.

tapping holistic dimensions of human development, where ta'lim might emphasize cognitive processes and ta'dib spiritual ones in dialectic engagement with ritual individual and social practices. While tarbiyah involves the socialization of young Muslims into a body of inherited principles and practices, a minimalist approach would entail uncritical acceptance without deeper understandings of reasons underlying principles and practices, whereas a maximalist approach would include critical reflection, questioning, and reasoning (Waghid, 2014).

Ta'dib refers to the development of *refined social etiquette practices*, suggesting social or moral development (Cook, 1999) or, as Memon (2010) described, the development of “faith-conscious behavior” (p. 114). The root word *adab* “refers to the manners and moral principles that need to be observed by teachers and students” (Sahin, 2017, p. 133). Adab includes both *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *‘amal* (action) in a reciprocal teleoic cycle: “[I]n Islam there is no worthwhile knowledge without action accompanying it, nor worthwhile action without knowledge guiding it” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 13). While minimal approaches to ta'dib might lead towards narrow prescriptions of social rules, maximalist approaches might tap the deeper purposes behind the social etiquette practices in a positive feedback loop, whereby moral, ethical, social-etiquette practices are outward expressions of evolving inner consciousness that move in harmony together in cycles of refined action (Alkouatli, 2015) and constitute the “actualization of the purpose of knowledge” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 16). In radiating concentric circles, maximalist expressions of ta'dib might include working towards social justice for all people and understanding that “ownership of goodness is not the reserved property of any single group” (Waghid, 2014, p. 339). Al-Attas (1980) identified adab as itself standing “sufficient as the precise term to denote

education” (p. 11),<sup>65</sup> which would make it simultaneously an objective of Islamic education and a means towards that objective. Memon (2013) highlighted a connection between adab and pedagogy: “Through the overarching conceptualization of *ta’dib*, al-Attas provides a framework for the purpose, content, and methodology of an Islamic pedagogy” (p. 77). Sahin (2018), however, critiqued al-Attas’ centering of the concept of adab, which could be, at its most minimal, described as a set of coercive moral practices in which children are trained. As al-Attas was one of the only Muslim scholars to have outlined a philosophy of Islamic education, recent scholars may have relied too heavily upon al-Attas’ (1980; 2005) work and Sahin (2018) contended that some have misinterpreted adab in the “literal recovery of an imagined essence of Islamic pedagogy preserved by the past, pious ancestors, *the salaf*, in the Muslim tradition” (p. 2). Instead, Sahin (2018) directed pedagogical attention to *tarbiyah*, as a key educational concept “in a holistic, embodied and reflective process that facilitates human flourishing and the transformation of the human condition in its diverse psychical, cognitive, spiritual, moral and emotional articulations” (p. 2), thus suggesting emphasis on holism in human development. Yet, to understand *ta’dib* as training in moral practices alone may be to miss its wider significance as part of a dialectic with consciousness in human development (Alkouatli, 2015). This research takes *ta’dib*, *tarbiyah*, and *ta’lim* together as a comprehensive conceptual foundation for understanding Islamic education with its unique objectives of learning and developing, including the instrumental definition of “producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behaviour and a strong knowledge of and commitment to the faith” (Halstead, 2004, p. 519).

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<sup>65</sup> Al-Attas’ (1980) description of adab is characterized by a metaphor whereby the Qur’an itself is “God’s invitation to a banquet on earth, in which we are exhorted to partake of it by means of acquiring real knowledge of it” (p. 14). Adab is the human approach to participating in that spiritual banquet in a manner befitting its lofty nature. A Muslim educator’s role, then, might be considered as preparing children—bodies, minds, hearts—to partake in that spiritual banquet.

Conceptions of Islamic education are constructed upon a foundation of concepts, principles, and practices that al-Attas (1980, p.7) described as a Qur’anic conceptual system. Al-Sadan (1997, p. 107, citing Al-Ghazali) described Islamic education as composed of four aspects: 1. acquisition of sound knowledge and experience of God and the Islamic principles that serve this aim; 2. moral education which will help the individual to know and assimilate the divine attributes of God; 3. physical education which will help the individual to build a healthy body with a minimum of bad habits; and 4. scientific education which will provide the individual with the knowledge, experience, and skills of subject matter. Similarly, Nasr (2012) outlined distinct principles as foundational to Islamic education. First, that human beings have rights and responsibilities as being both servants and leaders of humanity: “Education must begin with a spiritual understanding of who human beings are, for we are ultimately spiritual beings. We are in this world for a purpose, and we have a responsibility towards the Creator and to His creation” (p. 13). This coincides with the first of Ajem and Memon’s (2011) seven principles of Islamic pedagogy is “Conviction of the primal purpose and universal trust assigned to humankind” (p. 21). While every person is individually accountable to God for his or her words and actions in for caring for one’s self, each other, and other creatures, educators have additional responsibilities that originate in the God-given trust (*amana*) to live, learn, teach, and develop according to God’s ordinances. This principle requires educators to teach equitably across differences in gender, social class, race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religious orientation (Ajem & Memon, 2011).

A second principle offered by Nasr (2012) is that Islamic education must be permeated with a theistic sense of wonder, “in nature, in the beauty of creation, while seeking at the same time to understand how things work [...] Why is this leaf of a tree green? Why does it become yellow tomorrow morning and pink the next day?” (p. 16). Teachers must model and mediate this sense

of wonder. Third, education is ethical, and knowledge can never be separated from ethics because knowledge—worldly and religious—is sacred and can lead to “certain perfections in the soul” (p. 16). Sahin (2017) elaborated Nasr’s (2012, p. 17) descriptions of the unity of knowledge and ethics in describing *moral self-understanding* as one of the primary objectives of Qur’anic pedagogy, anchoring a wider conceptual system of moral and ethical principles aiming for compassion in service of social justice and common good. Fourth, seeking knowledge and education is a lifelong endeavor: “life itself is one long educational experience;” teachers also continue to learn (Nasr, 2012, p. 18). Fifth, education is open to all and encourages social mobility. Traditionally, Islamic civilizations offered fluidity of movement within society based mostly on education and scholarly attainment related to religion. Descriptions of these principles suggest that Islamic education aims for holistic and balanced human and social development across the lifespan.

In terms of the educational material comprising Islamic education, al-Attas (1980) described a Qur’anic conceptual system as composed of apparent and perceived signs, which point to more obscure signs. In other words, one thing, or word, is a sign that is apparent and inseparable from another not equally apparent. This Qur’anic conceptual system is reflected in the Hadith and the Sunnah and in the empirical world itself. Moreover, the “Qur’an is the final authority that confirms the truth in our rational and empirical investigations” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 7). Understanding our own place within this Qur’anic conceptual system, in relation to the central position of God, and embodying this understanding in ethical action, constitutes *education* in Islam and its ultimate objective (al-Attas, 1980). Muhammad’s central role in mediating a Qur’anic conceptual system, as the first system of Islamic education, cannot be underestimated, even today (Alkouatli, 2018). As the ultimate educational role model and guide—“My Lord educated me, and so made my



education most excellent” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 15)—Muhammad represents both the outcome of a perfected Islamic educational process and the approach that outcome.

The concept of *education* in Islam holds an integrated and overlapping position with other concepts within an Islamic conceptual system (al-Attas, 1980), within which everything and every concept holds a distinct and ordered place in relation to every other thing and concept. In considering Islamic education as one concept in such a constellation of concepts, it is important to remember its fluid nature. Niyozov and Memon (2011) asserted that Islamic education “needs to be seen as an evolving, diverse and contested phenomenon, not only between meeting the needs of tradition and modernity, but also the needs of a diverse Muslim community (ummah) with various interpretations of Islam” (p. 7). These distinct and contested perspectives on Islamic education contribute to the paradigmatic basis of this research and make visible sensitizing concepts crucial for the design, data collection, interpretation, and analysis of research that aims to be meaningful to Muslim educators, learners, community members, and scholars.

#### **2.1.3.2 Process: Education or Indoctrination?**

Beyond contestations within Muslim educational communities over definitions of Islamic education, the very concept is problematic from some liberal perspectives, according to Cook (1999): Islamic education is based on unprovable propositions that are, often, not open to critical scrutiny, thus running contrary to secular, liberal definitions of education. “If schools seek to initiate students into a particular Islamic conception of the world with the intention of committing them to those beliefs, this is not education, according to secularists, but indoctrination” (p. 352). Similarly, Halstead (2004) described two aspects of the nature of knowledge in Islam as “major constraints” (p. 520)—namely, its divine origin and its divine objectives, including attaining to “certainty.” Certainty is problematic:

[...] the more so when this certainty is a matter of religious belief, for it excludes the possibility of subjecting these beliefs to rational critical investigation, which might erode their certainty. It does not allow for knowledge (at least ‘revealed’ knowledge, although of course the very categorization is problematic) to be open to revision when new evidence comes to light that challenges its reliability. (Halstead, 2004, p. 526)

The tension here is that existing knowledge, from a liberal perspective, should always be open to critique and revision. A pedagogical consequence of a desire to stay true to revealed principles, according to Halstead (2004), is “to play down the importance of certain skills within education, such as questioning, verifying, criticizing, evaluating and making judgments, in favour of the uncritical acceptance of authority (p. 526). Thus, he concluded, Islamic education is open to accusations of indoctrination. Indoctrination is particularly problematic from secular, liberal perspectives because it is premised upon denial of personal independence and control over one’s own life.

Some Muslim scholars dispute the claim of indoctrination at the level of educational philosophy (Sahin, 2013; Waghid, 2014; Zine, 2008), although some accept it at the level of pedagogy, as described below. These scholars contend that *criticality* is not only an integral aspect of an Islamic conceptual system, it is integral to true faith. Ahmed (2016), Ramadan (2004, 2013), Waghid (2014), Sahin (2013, 2017), and Zine (2007, 2008) have all argued for critical approaches to Islamic education—in different ways and degrees. Ramadan (2013), for example, located *certainty* in Islamic principles, asserting that critical revision and renewal in Muslim educational communities must occur in interpretation and application. Waghid (2014) prescribed three “acts of justice” that contemporary Islamic education must include: supporting learners in questioning and critical discussion; creating space for disagreement; and, ultimately, recognizing an individual’s free will as derived from a line in the Qur’an that reads: “There shall be no coercion in matters of faith” (2:256). Asad (1980) commented on this verse: “the spiritual value of man’s

[sic] faith depends on its being an outcome of free choice and not of compulsion” (p. 765). These perspectives render indoctrination a conceptual impossibility. Nasr (2012, p. 21) advocated that the first step in Islamic education must be teaching children how to evaluate, analyze, transform, and/or reject. Critical evaluation may have been a quality of early Islamic education (Ramadan, 2007; Sahin, 2018); although it may not have been encouraged to grow and flourish, many scholars assert that it is increasingly urgent in a modern Islamic education:

[D]ialectical engagement enriched classical Muslim thought as it enabled a synthetic and integrated Muslim educational self-understanding to flourish. *It cannot be stressed highly enough that contemporary Muslims need to have confidence in their tradition and revive this early Muslim spirit of learning and critical education in order to engage creatively with the challenges facing them*” (Sahin, 2018, p. 15; italics in original).

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—may be a critical aspect of survival for Muslim communities existing today within larger predominantly non-Muslim cultures.

From another perspective, Al-Zeerah (2001) located tension at an academic paradigmatic level, providing an example in terms the shortcomings of constructivist *paradigms* rather than *methods* in research designs. She explained: “The constructivist paradigm is relative and temporal; those assumptions cannot accommodate transcendent and metaphysical, fixed and permanent principles of the unseen and the hereafter. Such a paradigm definitely cannot encompass the wholeness of the Islamic belief system” (p. 46). This lack of ability of secular perspectives to encompass the whole of reality meaningful to Muslims is one of the premises undergirding the critical faith-centered epistemological framework, whereby Zine (2008) asserted that knowledge emanating from divine revelation “must be incorporated into research and knowledge production as part of the way faith-centred people read and make sense of the world and their place in it” (p.

54). While scholars debate the veracity of knowledge of various types as competing truth claims, spiritual knowledges and knowledge deriving from incorporeal sources have been most often dismissed as “elements of ‘false consciousness’” (p. 58) because they cannot be verified through inquiry involving the corporeal senses. Zine (2008) argued that divine sources of knowledge are historically intrinsic to a wide diversity of worldviews and have contributed to scientific progress, including in Saliba’s (2009) example of religious rituals motivating the development of concepts and formulae in mathematics and physics. In terms of Islamic education, knowledge from divine sources drive motivations, objectives, curricula, and pedagogies. Omar (2011) pointed out that for practicing Muslims, who see Islam as a way of life based upon “universal principles” from the Qur’an and Sunnah, although “Islam does not require the elimination of all other identities, it clearly places Islamic tenets and identity at the centre” (p. 6). Although they fall beyond the scope of a secular social science perspective, rather than considering divine sources of knowledge as false or irrational, a critical faith-centred perspective engages these knowledges as originating “beyond the limits of rational, or scientific exploration” yet still valid approaches to “apprehending metaphysical knowledge and to linking social, cultural, and political practices to the physical realm” (Zine, 2008, p. 68). As such, some Muslim scholars have suggested that secular charges of indoctrination are colonial constructions, aimed at devaluing and marginalizing revealed knowledge, along with spiritual aspects of human and social development (al-Attas, 1980; Nasr, 2012; Safi, 1999; Zine, 2008). Yet in decentering Eurocentric ways of knowing to make space for marginalized ways of knowing, there is always a risk that those marginalized ways of knowing could prove to be just as hegemonic (Zine, 2008).

Other scholars have contested the indoctrination claim leveled at Islamic education by arguing that *all schooling* aims to initiate students into particular value-laden ways of being,

knowing, and conceiving of the world, with the intention of committing students to those ways. Even societies who have rid their schools of overt religious value systems still teach ethical-moral values. One difference is that these values and their initiation often pass as normal, neutral, and transparent. Omar (2011) described a dominant culture in Canadian schools and society as claiming neutrality—camouflaging “certain groups’ values as universal” (p. 128)—while simultaneously favoring that dominant culture. Zine (2008), too, argued that secular Eurocentric knowledge “represents the hegemonic way of knowing in public schools” (p. 40), which, in Canada, masquerades itself as universal and neutral despite the fact that it is distinctly culturally nuanced. Even more insidious is that “by virtue of its exclusivity it imparts superiority and invalidates other ways of knowing, especially those which are religiously centred” (Zine, 2008, p. 41). Safi (1999) offered some historical context to this issue using the example of US public schools, suggesting that moral stagnation occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century, when teaching and learning moral values was left to parents and churches and deemphasized in schools in favor of information-gathering and skill-building. He described: “Many educationists thought that value inculcation amounted to indoctrination, and hence was inappropriate for secular schools. A secular school’s mission [...] should be limited to teaching students how to think and make decisions, and hence allow them to adopt their own values and beliefs” (p. 5). Expecting children to learn moral values on their own, denied guidance by school authorities and parents, who were themselves struggling to comprehend moral orientation in a rapidly-changing world, Safi (1999) argued, proved to be both unrealistic and ineffective. Hefner (2007) also touched upon this moral struggle stating: “We in the West would be truer to our own moral history were we to recognize that our schools and politics, too, bear the imprint of struggles over how children and citizens should ethicalize and behave” (p. 35). In other words, while Islamic education may tend towards

dogmatism in the clear inculcation of moral-ethical values, secular, liberal public schooling has historically tended in the opposite direction and might do well to make visible, interrogate, and educationally build upon its own culturally-based, moral-ethical foundations.

Niyozov and Pluim (2009) argued that, ultimately, “Muslim education as a concept, whether in public or Islamic schools, needs to be discussed seriously, openly, and fairly” (p. 670), with the discussion taking into account the various competing forces today’s student face. In regard to such discussion within sites of Islamic education, Hefner (2007) highlighted a fault line between the “question of scholastic unitarianism versus epistemological pluralism” (p. 35), asking:

Is the purpose of Islamic education to teach fidelity to a fixed and finished canon? Or should religious education offer a high-minded but general religious ethics that looks outward on creation and encourages a plurality of methods for fathoming and engaging its wonder? (p. 35)

The seeds of a way forward may exist within this dilemma itself, as the first part is concerned with *content* (“a fixed and finished canon”) and the second part with *methods* (a plurality of methods for engaging the wonder of creation). This may be translated into a dilemma over *content* versus *pedagogy*, which, I suggest, rather than being mutually exclusive, might complement each other. As Ramadan (2007, 2013) pointed out, timeless principles must be reinterpreted for application in different times and places. Pedagogies may bring new life to principles. Hefner (2007) described this: “In Muslim countries, the search for a workable public ethics has often come to focus on the meaning and functions of Islam, and the methods for their educational inculcation” (p. 35)—arguably, the methods by which material is taught and learned may contribute to constituting the meaning and function of that material. Rather than describing Islamic educational content as a “fixed and finished canon” (p. 35), instead, it might be considered as comprising particular principles—fixed, but not finished, in Islamic primary sources—with deep conceptual work required between educators and learners in making sense and relevance of these principles in

particular place and time. In terms of a plurality of methods for educational ‘inculcation,’ a review of the literature on Islamic Education in pre-modern, colonial, and contemporary periods suggests that while methods have always been plural, they have also been based on enduring pedagogical principles (Ajem & Memon, 2011). Halstead (2004), referencing Badawi (1979), pointed out that several characteristics of traditional Islamic education seem progressive by today’s standards, including “a close personal relationship between teacher and taught, elitism was discouraged, undue attention was not paid to examinations and pupil grouping was less rigid” (p. 526). Thus, it may be possible for Muslim educators to both remain faithful to a “fixed” canon of principles, while simultaneously engaging in their rigorous reinterpretation relevant to contemporary time and place in a process of reoccurring “finishing.” Sahin (2018) noted that “Islamic and Western educational cultures now inform the wider educational experience of millennial, European Muslims” (p. 6). In other words, rather than viewing Islamic and secular liberal approaches to education through a distorted and binary lens of fundamental incompatibility, Sahin (2018) argued for a “reciprocal dialogue [...] within a wider context of inter-relationality” where “every genuine encounter is also an opportunity for being moved and redefined by one another” (p. 6).

### **2.1.3.3 Practice: Critiques of Pedagogy**

Critiques of the practices of Islamic schooling—including pedagogies and the teachers employing them—are abundant. Some are conceptual, some empirical; some come from teachers, parents, and students within Islamic educational communities themselves, some come from scholars who point to a source of the problem at a philosophical level. For example, Halstead (2004) described that while the founders of Islamic schools have been happy to respond to the “perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling” (p. 24) in aiming to preserve Muslim children’s identities, they have not given serious thought to the philosophical and epistemological

foundations of Islamic schools, and the ways in which students might make sense of them. Wan Daud (1998, as cited in Halstead, 2004) described contemporary discussions on Islamic education as based upon “weak theoretical foundations, simplistic interpretation, and intemperate application, which do not do justice to its true ideals and heritage” (p. 24). Ajem and Memon (2011) made the point that while approaches to teaching are undergirded by a worldview, perspective, or philosophy of education, many Muslim teachers’ principles of pedagogies do not match Islamic educational philosophies, instead, they are “rooted in educational philosophies antithetical to an Islamic epistemology” (p. 2).

Other critiques are leveled at the relevance of the pedagogies used in relation to the lived experiences of young Muslims. Abdalla’s (2018) study of teaching and learning Islam in Australian Islamic schools reported students’ concerns about classroom instruction in equipping them with knowledge and skills relevant to their lives. He described a lack of genuine open engagement on topics of concern and interest to them, a lack of integration of a variety of perspectives on a given issue, and a lack of investigation of underlying reasons behind religious principles, as “Islamic reasoning” (p. 266). Other critiques suggest that contemporary pedagogies are not cognitively, emotionally, or imaginatively stimulating; instead, they can be didactic and often dull. Rustham, Arifin, and Abd Rashid (2012) identified a primary concern: pedagogical strategies are information-intensive and may prompt students to “gather large amounts of information on a subject but it does not enable them to properly use this information” (p. 153). Selçuk (2015) argued that educators, in focusing on transmitting information of a legal nature and emphasizing doctrinal aspects of Islam, have failed to embrace the unity of cognition and emotion: “This underlying belief that cognition and emotion must be separated has had a harmful and destructive impact on Islamic religious education. Teaching needs to integrate the intellect with



feelings in order for learning to be meaningful” (p. 257). He asserted that effective Islamic education must center children’s ways of thinking, feeling, and imagining.

Rufai (2010) conducted analysis on Islamic-based pedagogy and evaluation as recorded in accounts of Islamic traditions and concluded that dominant methods of teaching and evaluation in today’s Muslim schools—much of it imported or imitated from Western, secular pedagogical principles—are not only unfaithful to traditional Islamic educational methods, but may be ineffective. AbuSulayman (1991) presented a critique of pedagogy in arguing that common methods of instructing *young* Muslims in basic Islamic principles and practices have become a type of indoctrination incommensurate with children’s psychological and developmental needs because those methods were originally intended for *adults*.<sup>66</sup> Instead, some of Muhammad’s methods involved encouraging children’s participation in Islamic practices in age-appropriate ways: holding his young grandson while preaching on the pulpit; allowing the two of them to climb on his back in prostration while he was leading prayer at the mosque; playing with them and showing affection (Abu Ghudah, 2017; AbuSulayman, 1991).

Many of these critiques of pedagogy seem to cohere in teachers’ uses of pedagogies. Al-Sadan (1997) pointed out that many teachers are unprepared to specifically teach Islamic subjects and he located the problem in teacher education programs. Memon’s (2010, 2011, 2013) work has specifically focused around teacher education and what it means to teach Islamically, through an Islamic pedagogy. Memon (2011) specifically called for standardizing pedagogies used in Islamic schools based upon Islamic educational principles while simultaneously drawing from theories,

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<sup>66</sup> It is inappropriate, AbuSulayman (1991) argued, to apply to children today patterns of education traditionally suited to adults back then. For example, while warning and reprimanding the “strong and supercilious souls” of 6<sup>th</sup> century Quraish tribespeople were common pedagogical approaches, Muhammad’s methodology with children was characterized by love and gentle playfulness, “removing causes of fear from their souls” (p. 184).

principles, and strategies in the field of education more generally.

#### **2.1.3.4 Field: Is Islamic Education a Field of Study?**

While scholars have for some time debated whether *Islamic Education* can be considered an independent academic field (Halstead, 2004; Kadi, 2006; Niyozov & Memon, 2011; Panjwani, 2004; Thobani, 2007), Sahin (2018) lamented insufficient clarity regarding the conceptual parameters of a field of Islamic education, claiming that the roots of the problem lie in the lack of conceptual depth and clarity in attempts to demarcate such a field. While a majority of scholars have described distinct Islamic positions on education, others have suggested that “education never actually developed into one of the disciplines of learning that Islamic civilization nurtured, as it did, for example, in fields such as theology, law, philosophy, and astronomy” (Kadi, 2006, p. 318). This may be because education-specific principles—drawn from the Qur’an and embodied in Prophetic messages—appear across fields and have characterized Islamic traditions historically (Halstead, 2004; Niyozov & Memon, 2011). Azmi (1993) described that “Unlike other subjects, such as legal sciences and scholastic theology that have become subjects in their own right, many educational ideas are found in isolated utterances scattered through or subsumed under the writings of legal sciences, theology and philosophy” (p. 27). In other words, educational thought has not been isolated and studied as an independent science based on theological, psychological, and epistemological concepts—conceptual foundations of Islamic education are underdeveloped—therefore, a comprehensive, systematic educational philosophy has not evolved. Failure to recognize Islamic Education as a field may also be because, as Halstead (2004) described, “Above all, traditional Muslim education was not an activity separated from other aspects of society; it was rooted in the community it served, responding to its needs and aspirations and preserving its values and beliefs” (p. 526).

Sahin (2018) described another methodological problem in defining the field of Islamic education as the absence of a “rigorous ‘educational hermeneutics’ with which to discern the central educational and pedagogic vocabulary in Muslim core sources and narratives of education embedded within the Muslim religious, spiritual and intellectual heritage” (p. 1). In other words, while education specific principles have characterized diverse Islamic expressions, scholars have lacked the hermeneutical means to recognize and identify them. Some of these distinct educational principles, which have inspired various intellectual traditions in diverse Muslim societies over time, were identified by Thobani (2007) as including: the uninhibited pursuit of knowledge and wisdom for the good of all; the nurturing of holistic personhood with potential for limitless growth; engagement with fundamental, existential questions; and appreciation of the diverse interpretations of these principles themselves. Sahin (2018) proposed the articulation of an academic, interdisciplinary field of *Islamic Education Studies*, to capture critical engagements involving “thinking educationally about Islam and Islamically about education” (p. 7). Two points important to his proposal are that, first, whether the field is named Islamic Education or Muslim Education, both necessitate engagement with Islam, and both must be regularly critically checked so as to avoid ideological reification. Second, the term ‘Islam’ may be more inclusive than the term ‘Muslim,’ pointing out that many non-Muslim scholars over time have contributed to the formation of Islamic educational thought over time (Sahin, 2018). After a critical examination of current literature, Sahin (2018)<sup>67</sup> argued that the term ‘Islamic Education Studies’ might offer a “distinctive academic framing that incorporates an interdisciplinary empirical and scholarly

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<sup>67</sup> Sahin (2018) concluded that much of what has been written about Islamic Education has been from historical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives, rather than educational ones (p.1).

inquiry strategy capable of generating a body of knowledge and understanding guiding the professional practice and policy development in the field” (p. 1).

Situated within a larger body of conceptual literature on Islamic Educational philosophies and pedagogies (al-Attas, 1980; Halstead, 2004; Memon & Zaman, 2016; Nasr, 2012; Obeid, 1988; Sahin, 2013, 2017, 2018), the education-specific principles described above might be considered as outlining the field of Islamic Education, illuminating Islamic perspectives on teaching, learning, and developing, and identifying principles of pedagogy. From a pedagogical perspective, the lack of an articulated and codified theory of Islamic education does not diminish the significance of the trajectory of pedagogical principles and practices that can be discerned from the earliest days of Islamic education (Abu Ghudah, Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018; Al Sadan 1997), including through the previous scholarship of Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Sina, (Günther 2007; Memon, 2011), as well as Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jilani and Ibn Al-Arabi, to the contributions of contemporary Islamic educational theorists (al-Attas, 1980, 2005; Nasr, 2012). This trajectory reveals “serious deliberation throughout Islamic history of the place and purpose of learning” (Memon, 2011, p. 288) as well as distinct pedagogies and practices. The argument that Islamic Education is not an academic field in its own right may serve to diminish the work of scholars who have been studying the education of Muslims in Islam for decades, across a variety of disciplines. It may also serve to diminish the importance of informal or alternative education in Muslim communities<sup>68</sup> and to diminish the overarching salience of education that enabled religious perpetuation, intellectual, and cultural thriving over generations. Yet many Muslim scholars are pushing back against the delegitimization of Islamic Education as a field (Abdalla, Chown, &

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<sup>68</sup> The delegitimization of knowledge, especially indigenous knowledge, constitutes a discipline unto itself and some Muslim scholars have positioned some of their work within the indigenous knowledge movement (for example, Ahmed, 2014).

Abdullah, 2018; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018; Sahin, 2018). Motivating scholarly interest in Islamic Education is a rich, historical trajectory of Islamic knowledge production, including a historically-overlooked intellectual period, whereby Muslims translated ancient texts into Arabic, elaborated and built upon them, and rendered them accessible to Western Europe; followed by a period of disruption; followed by increasing numbers of Muslims migrating to non-Muslim-majority communities, founding Islamic schools, and instigating renewals in the practices of education in Islam, as described throughout this chapter.

This contestation itself may be part and parcel of contemporary heterogeneous communities where different educational objectives, expressions, and motivations exist side by side. Moreover, these contestations may provide impetus for growth in both secular and Islamic Education. Halstead (2004) summarized:

[W]hereas the liberal educationalist will discuss individual development in terms of the development of personal and moral autonomy, in Islam it will be discussed in terms of the balanced growth of all sides of the individual's personality, including the spiritual and moral, leading to a higher level of religious understanding and commitment in all areas of life. The liberal educationalist will see the most justifiable form of society as an open, pluralist, democratic one, whereas in Islam the best society is one that is organized in accordance with divine law. ... *There must be a place for both equally in any kind of educational provision.* (p. 522; italics added)

Appreciating heterogeneity in educational provision in secular democracies is part of moving away from Eurocentrism towards multicentrism, from epistemic hegemony to inter-epistemic interaction in horizontal mode (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 36). This is the topic of the next section. The discourse on whether or not Islamic Education is an academic field is part of what Ahmed (2014) identified as a “continuum of postcolonial scholarly discourse both within the Muslim world and in Muslim diasporas in the global North on the role of Islamic education” (p. 1), which provides discursive context for the development of Islamic education and pedagogy (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). It touches upon a larger phenomenon, which is the lack of serious engagement with educational

cultures, philosophies, and practices outside Western, Eurocentric academic expressions (Sahin, 2018).

Focusing upon pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam, this research study is situated squarely within this discourse and within Islamic Education Studies as a field, within the larger field of education, while acknowledging that it is emerging and interdisciplinary (Sahin, 2018). A founding premise is that educational expressions of Islam, as a historically-, socially-, and culturally-situated conceptual system (al-Attas, 1980), reproduces (Zine, 2008) and renews (Ramadan, 2013) itself across generations and cultures, with dialectic implications upon teaching, learning, and the development of a unique Islamic consciousness. In summary, Panjwani (2004) outlined some criticisms in approaches to Islamic education that this study aimed to avoid, including, first, presenting a particular interpretation of Islam as an ideal and a solution to all secular educational problems; second, presenting aspects of theoretical Islam as Islam rather than as “simply a projection of whatever is valuable to the authors at the given time” (p. 6); and third, failing to “provide any feasible and creative solutions to the problems of education” (p. 6).<sup>69</sup> Muslim educators and researchers must complement “the conception of Islam as an ideal with the role of human agency in interpreting these ideals” (Panjwani, 2004, p. 6), which includes grappling with the ways in which educators and learners, past and present, have differentially interpreted Islamic traditions. Yet, as educators engaged in teaching and learning Islam, we are often functioning in the realm of the theoretical ideal, in aiming to teach children Islamic ideals and

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<sup>69</sup> Aiming to avoid these theoretical pitfalls is, first, to make visible what is valuable to me, as the author, now: pedagogies that enable exploration of Islam in ways that are not only culturally relevant to a particular person in place and time, but as optimally nurturing of whole-person development in place and time. These values are expressed in section 3.1.1 Researcher’s Social and Epistemic Locations: Design Implications. And, second, to present educators’ perspectives on Islam acknowledging that will necessarily be shaped by each person’s interpretive situation in time and place.

embody them ourselves. We must do so in ways that include analyzing together various flawed human attempts to live those ideals—past and present, ours and others’—as well as aspects of ideals that ought to be lived differently today.

## **2.2 Critical Faith-Centered Epistemological Framework**

This research is framed by the seven principles of Zine’s (2008) Critical Faith-Centered Epistemological Framework, which was initially designed to enable detailed and relevant analysis in sites of Islamic schooling in Canada, and more widely within marginalized communities, based upon the perspective that holistic education—attending to the development of the body, mind, and spirit—is necessary for individual and societal health. In centering religious and spiritual perspectives as important aspects of cultural context—with cultural context as a basic starting point of qualitative research (Hammersley, 2013; Pascale, 2011)—the critical faith-centered epistemological framework highlights perspectives meaningful to research participants. Zine (2008) described: “To understand the realities of faith-centred Muslims in a diasporic context, we must first understand the central importance of religious practice to them. The critical faith-centred perspective attends to the saliency of faith and spirituality in framing the world views” (p. 55). The framework was designed upon broad moral and discursive foundations of peace, social and environmental justice, unity, and accountability—guiding precepts drawn from the Qur’an, governing theory and praxis (p. 186)—from which Zine (2008) constructed seven specific principles. In brief, these principles are:

1. A philosophy of holism, or connections among the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification.
2. Historically and culturally situated analyses of religion and spirituality are an integral component of understanding human social, historical, and personal development.
3. Religious and spiritual world views and/or contestations of those world views continue to shape human social, cultural, and political development.
4. Religion and spirituality occupy a central place in the understanding of various academic disciplines and subjects such as economics, politics, philosophy, gender, culture, education,

and anthropology and are valid and legitimate sites for the analysis of social, existential phenomena.

5. Religious and spiritual identities represent sites of oppression and are connected to broader sites and systems of discrimination based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism. However, religion has at times been misused and become complicit in oppression.

6. Religion and spirituality can be sites of resistance to injustice and oppression, providing a space for critical contestation and political engagement.

7. Not all knowledge is socially constructed, but knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin. Beliefs in prophets, revelation, messengers, angels, spirits, jinn, and so on must be incorporated into research and knowledge production as part of the way faith-centred people read and make sense of the world and their place in it. (pp. 53–68)

The principles contained within the framework are intended to be broad enough to encompass various orientations towards spiritual engagement, including different sectarian orientations within Islamic perspectives and different religious orientations. While most scholars inquiring into Islamic education reference Zine’s work in general, and her framework in particular, Memon (2009, 2011, 2013) used it to frame doctoral research tracing the historical growth of Islamic schools in North America, as sites of resistance to discrimination and Eurocentrism; the framework enabled decolonial exploration of the values shaping the visions of these schools. Brown Spencer (2009) also used the framework in an anticolonial ethnographic study on the social, spiritual and political role the Black Oneness Churches play in Black communities. In its religious inclusivity and in creating discursive space for epistemically-marginalized voices in empirical research, the framework makes an important contribution to academic scholarship particularly, but not only, for faith-based communities (Brown Spencer, 2009).

### **2.2.1 In this Study**

Zine (2008) referred to the critical faith-centered epistemological framework as an emergent paradigm and described its four foundational Qur’anic principles as “discursive anchors” (p. 51), emphasizing the flexibility, fluidity, reflexivity, and recursivity of discourse rather than the rigidity



of theory. They were used as such in this study. Zine (2008) pointed out that while providing “foundational principles and epistemic boundaries” (p. 47), a discursive framework also allows for the development and elaboration of paradigmatic concepts through the process of empirical research. As part of an inductive, interpretative process, Zine (2008) described:

In this type of discursive analysis, particular knowledge gained in the field is related back to the discursive frame as part of an epistemological engagement with the philosophical and ideological grounding the framework provides. This process of engagement allows for dialogical interface between the data and the framework. (p. 48)

Here, Zine (2008) described the usefulness of discursive frameworks in general, and her framework in particular in guiding this study. I specifically used the framework to understand educators’ perspectives of pedagogy at intersections of religion, culture, education, and human development; to design and conduct research meaningful to participants in such sites; and to collect and interpret data generated, including data that might fall outside the purview of secular ontological perspectives. In doing so, I built upon the framework in at least three discursive ways.

At its most basic, this framework serves as a conceptual starting point for considering pedagogy beyond primary definitions of teaching and methodologies of instruction (Memon & Alhashmi, 2018, p. 169). As pedagogic principles—and pedagogy itself—are always culturally and historically contextual, Islamic pedagogy has distinct ontological and epistemic perspectives on the human being as theologically and socially situated, with implications on social and environmental relationships and agency in relation to knowledge (al-Attas, 1980; Memon, 2013). Zine’s (2008) framework provided a basic conceptual vocabulary for investigating pedagogies situated in cultural, educational context, which constituted a “dialogical interface between the data and the framework” (p. 48). In engaging in research and analysis with members of a community that defined itself “on the basis of adherence to a common faith” (p. 49) and, moreover, were actively engaged in educating the next generation in that faith, I needed an interpretative

framework that would do several things: encompass the paradigmatic dimensions of the faith; legitimize them within academic social science; bring into focus the ways in which these paradigmatic dimensions have themselves been the recipients of epistemic oppression, along with the people who cherish them; and, finally, highlight the ways in which they might be used as tools of decolonialization.

Bringing the framework into dialogue with literature on Islamic Education enabled elaboration of concepts with relevant ontological, epistemological, psychological, and pedagogical concepts derived from that literature. I built upon the framework in ways specifically relevant to the roles of Muslim educators and learners, learning objectives, and uses of pedagogies in sites of Islamic education, which make visible ontological, epistemological, and psychological perspectives within Islamic Education that are very different to dominant Eurocentric ones.<sup>70</sup> I also identified points within the framework that welcomed further expansion of inter-epistemic concepts. These concepts served to contextualize contemporary sites of Islamic education in Canada, as both evolving from historical colonial contexts through which expressions of Islamic education and pedagogy have developed, but also extending beyond the challenges of colonialism, highlighting *ongoing engagement* between Eurocentric and Islamic ways of teaching, learning, and developing to envision new pluriversal futures. A critical faith-centered epistemological framework contributed to perceiving pedagogies in sites of Islamic education as counter creative acts that support learning and developing in ways different to dominant, secular, Eurocentric ways.

Finally, I used the framework to operationalize an interpretivist methodology that called for cultural contextualization. In bringing to the fore spiritual and religious perspectives crucial to

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<sup>70</sup> Concepts that elaborate Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework, drawn from the literature on Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology, together, comprise the sensitizing concepts of this study, described in section 2.3: Paradigmatic Elaborations on Teaching, Learning, and Developing.

understanding Islamic expressions of teaching, learning, and developing in cultural context and to analyzing educators' perspectives on pedagogy, this discursive move aimed to expand upon dominant secular perspectives. Situating an interpretivist methodology within a wider, Islamic paradigmatic frame—in other words, making the Islamic paradigm *conceptually prior*—was part of centering faith-centered epistemologies as “valid locations for the production of academic knowledge” (Zine, 2008, p. 58)—not for unequivocal validation of those locations or the knowledge they produce but for rigorous critique as part of inclusion as social scientific knowledge.

While expanding focus beyond the framework to include paradigmatic dimensions of Islamic Education, I also narrowed focus to the level of methods in justifying my selection of two that were particularly relevant to the Muslim educators participating in this study and to the community of Muslim scholars whose work framed this study: halaqah, as dialogic circles with Islamic frames of reference (Ahmed, 2014), and artifact-mediated halaqah, as ways of expanding pedagogic expressions beyond the verbal. Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered framework carved space out of an otherwise secular social science context to inspire the selection of these methods.

In this study, I used each of the seven principles of the critical faith-centered epistemological framework in specific ways. Two of the principles (1 and 7) served to illuminate aspects of ontology and epistemology that are highly relevant to an Islamic research context. Principle 1 identified: “A philosophy of holism, or connections among the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification” (p. 54). Thus, spiritual and material, cognition and emotion, ideology and praxis—all contribute to a wholeness of being that Islamic practices aim to simultaneously unify and develop. This concept of holism—*tawhid*—defined as unity encompassing diversity is so central to Islamic education that, traditionally, it informed every

aspect from ontology, epistemology, psychology, and pedagogy; from conceptions of holistic human development to integrated educational and developmental objectives (described in section 2.3.1). Principle 7 identified that “knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin” (p. 65), which is fundamental to perspectives of being and becoming. These two principles, elaborated in section 2.3.1 and 2.3.2., propelled the critical faith-centered epistemological framework into the realm of the paradigmatic, encompassing ontology as well as epistemology, with implications, via conceptions on the educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education, on pedagogy. As Zine (2008) pointed out, “Islamic frameworks have rarely used as analytical tools for the study of Muslim societies” (p. 58), yet they are desperately needed for rigor and relevance in qualitative social science in producing knowledge useful in Muslim communities. In short, without these two principles, few aspects of Islamic Education would make analytic sense. A large part of the balance of this chapter is elaborating these two principles and examining their implications as reflected in research on sites of Islamic education and expressions of pedagogy.

Principles 2 and 3 identified the roles that religion and spirituality play in human and social development (discussed in section 2.3.1.3). In order to understand trajectories of human and social development, as expressed in a particular time and place, religious perspectives and/or contestations of religious perspectives must be considered. Principle 2 states, “Historically and culturally situated analyses of religion and spirituality are an integral component of understanding human social, historical, and personal development” (p. 54) and Principle 3 elaborates: “Religious and spiritual world views and/or contestations of those world views continue to shape human social, cultural, and political development” (p. 55). Highlighting the importance of historical and cultural context in religious perspective, these principles draw analytic attention to such context as

it contributes to human and social development.<sup>71</sup> In inquiring into Muslim educators' perspectives on pedagogy, these two principles emphasized the historically, culturally, and religiously contextual nature of pedagogical encounters and perspectives.

Where principles 2 and 3 required the researcher to consider historical and cultural context in individual and community perspective, principles 5 and 6 widened the scope of vision beyond the bounds of a community to include the ways in which religion and spirituality have been, and continue to be, constructed as sites of both oppression and resistance to oppression as minority communities within dominant secular ones. Principle 5 states: "Religious and spiritual identities represent sites of oppression and are connected to broader sites and systems of discrimination based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism. However, religion has at times been misused and become complicit in oppression" (p. 58). This principle draws attention to the oppression that many Muslims experience in ongoing coloniality and increasing Islamophobia. It interrogates the ways in which broader systems of oppression situate sites of Islamic education, while, simultaneously, acknowledging that religion itself can also be used in oppressive ways inside and outside of a particular community. Principle 6 constructively extends upon this idea, suggesting that these sites can also be sites of resistance: "Religion and spirituality can be sites of resistance to injustice and oppression, providing a space for critical contestation and political

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<sup>71</sup> Psychologists concerned with the study of religion and spirituality have made similar claims, arguing that "a mainstream psychology that overlooks the religious and spiritual dimension of human functioning remains incomplete" (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones & Shafranske, 2013, p. 10). While acknowledging the challenges of defining and studying phenomena as complex, messy, and elusive as religion—recognizing and maintaining diversity while avoiding fragmentation, which calls for multiple concepts, theories, and methods—they asked: "How can we fully understand community life if we overlook the place of religious institutions and individuals within communities? [...] How can the core concepts of positive psychology—from forgiveness and gratitude to growth, transformation, and love—be understood without attention to their religious and spiritual roots and expressions? How can we grasp human resilience if we neglect some of the most common ways people deal with major life stressors?" (p. 10).

engagement” (p. 61). These two principles called for consideration as to how oppression operates both externally and internally to a particular site of Islamic education; they also called for elaboration in terms of the ways in which colonization and decolonization relate to Islamic education and pedagogy.

Principle 4 states: “Religion and spirituality occupy a central place in the understanding of various academic disciplines and subjects such as economics, politics, philosophy, gender, culture, education, and anthropology and are valid and legitimate sites for the analysis of social, existential phenomena” (p. 57). In this study, I used Principle 4 to inform the methodological approach as an Islamic interpretive bricolage centering Islamic perspectives in contextual analyses of social phenomena, in this case: pedagogies in sites of Islamic education. This principle highlighted the necessity of evoking all the principles of the faith-centered framework in embarking upon fine-grained analyses of phenomena in ways meaningful to the community in which they occurred. As Zine (2008) described, no other existing framework allowed for the analysis she needed to do in sites of Islamic education. Principle 4 methodologically anchored and legitimated the importance of religion and spirituality in understanding and analyzing social phenomena (discussed in Chapter 3).

Taken together, these seven principles served as a conceptual pivot between a larger Islamic paradigmatic perspective on the research context, and a secular interpretative one. It served several specific requirements inherent in this integrated interpretative approach. First, it provided a framework of principles that allowed for legitimate analysis of faith-based perspectives and for their interpretation as legitimate knowledge. Second, it identified that such knowledge has been subjugated in the secular social science academy, as part of a larger project of ongoing colonialism, and offered the principles themselves as tools of epistemic resistance. Third, the framework created

space for dialectical contradictions in making visible secular and spiritual, internal and external, human and social, historical and cultural, oppressive and liberatory. Zine's (2008) framework thus made space for these concepts to be explored and critiqued on more equal terms. She described:

It is possible, then, for faith-based knowledges and traditions to enter academic dialogues and inquiries not as static dogmas but as contextualized and historicized paradigms of thought and as ontological discourses that are referenced in metaphysical realities. They are not intended to operate as new grand narratives; rather, they can function in a dialogical manner with other discourses and paradigms that have more secular foundations. Faith-based knowledges are not inherently oppositional; they can, though, refine secular knowledges through a variety of empirical and ideological engagements (just as they can themselves be refined). (pp. 58-59)

This description justified situating the framework as conceptual pivot between an overarching Islamic paradigm and interpretivism as methodology in an Islamic interpretive bricolage as the research design of this study (section 3.1). In creating dialogic space between paradigmatic perspectives, the framework enabled nuanced analysis in complex communities situated in multiple social worlds.

### **2.2.2 Anticolonial Foundations Aiming for Inter-Epistemic Expansions**

Zine (2008) constructed the critical faith-centered epistemological framework during empirical research with Islamic communities in Canada to fulfill an analytic need: "to build an epistemological framework that utilized faith-based knowledge as a lens for a particular reading of the world" (p. 49). The framework parallels that of Dei and Asgharzadeh's (2001) Anticolonial Discursive Framework and overlaps in three particular areas: a shared perspective of holism, the imperative of including marginalized knowledges in the academy, and a commitment to identifying and countering contemporary colonial conditions (Zine, 2008). Dei and Asgharzadeh's (2001) Anticolonial Discursive Framework approached a distinction between a postcolonial perspective, where scholars often use Western models of analysis and theory, and an anticolonial perspective, whereby scholars use "alternative, oppositional paradigms based on the use of

indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference” (p. 301).<sup>72</sup> (In this study, I did aspects of both.) Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) argued that the processes of producing and validating knowledge in the academy are often colonial ones that aim to fit learners into existing hegemonic structures rather than foster the creation of counter-culture knowledge. They cautioned awareness of the colonizing tendencies of asserting the authority of Western canons, “at the same time as local knowledges are deprivileged, negated, and devalued” (p. 299). Local knowledges, experiences, and practices that are meaningful to marginalized communities constitute power in processes of decolonization. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) described: “In the absence of an understanding of the social reality informed by local experiences and practices, decolonization processes will not succeed. It is the envisioning of knowledge as power and resistance which is essential for decolonizing praxis” (p. 299). Thus, Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) contended that the value of theory lies in its ability see and understand human complexity and to offer “a social and political corrective” in bringing about transformation in social life. They aimed to formulate an anticolonial discursive framework that would simultaneously problematize conceptions of theories that had little bearing on the lived realities of people “whose academic and political interests are in contradiction to hegemonic social orders” and offer ways of understanding social realities from “the vantage point of the marginalized and subordinated” (p. 298).

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<sup>72</sup> An additional distinction, in engaging with the concept of countering coloniality, is what Mignolo (2011) described as both decoloniality and postcoloniality meaning and originating in *decolonization*; they developed along different genealogies; and “both carry their respective meaning toward decolonial futures” (p. xxiv). *Decoloniality*, as disengaging and delinking from Western epistemology, is an epistemic and political project from the perspective of the receiving end of coloniality, the underside (p. xxv). *Postcoloniality* emerged particularly from British colonization (Egypt, India, Palestine, and later other former British colonies except for the Caribbean). The two are “complementary trajectories with similar goals of social transformation” (p. xxvi) aiming to unveil colonial strategies. While deep inquiry into decoloniality, postcoloniality and anticoloniality is beyond the scope of this study, the countering of ongoing coloniality arises in some of the literature on Islamic Education and in the work of some scholars who see decolonial potential in sites of Islamic education, including Ahmed (2014) and Zine (2008).



Building upon this anticolonial basis, an aspect of criticality intrinsic to the critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008)—and which consequently colored my own research design—is that it aimed to counter the hegemony of secular ways of knowing, which Zine (2008) described as: “The hegemony of Western knowledge in Muslim societies—a consequence of European colonialism” (p. 19). Originating in the colonialism of five countries: England, USA, France, Germany, and Italy,<sup>73</sup> as 12 percent of the global population (Grosfoguel, 2010), this epistemic hegemony is based upon “epistemic racism,” as a foundational form of racism that considers all knowledges beyond Western knowledge to be inferior (p. 29). “Racism, as we sense it today, was the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge: that certain bodies were inferior to others, and that inferior bodies carried inferior intelligence and inferior languages” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 143). The myths surrounding early Islamic scholarship,<sup>74</sup> which have hardened into normative Western discourse, illustrate a historical precedent for the perspective that “the ‘West’ is considered to be the only legitimate tradition of thought able to produce knowledge and the only one with access to ‘universality,’ ‘rationality’ and ‘truth’” (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 29).<sup>75</sup> This epistemic hegemony has endured via scholarship and research. Pascale (2011), for example, pointed out that science, like modernization itself, was a tool of colonization that contributed to decimating cultures, erasing other ways of knowing, and devaluing specific groups of people, and that “the intellectual empires of the 19th century have

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<sup>73</sup> Keeping in mind that colonial relations cannot be limited to classic English or European colonialism alone; they arise from unequal relations of power, privilege, and domination (Mignolo, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Described in section 2.1.1.1 Early Islamic Education.

<sup>75</sup> Epistemic racism as part of the colonial project was cogently described as follows: “The co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge is eliminated because now all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the orient to occident. ... By way of this strategy, scientific thought positions itself as the only valid form of producing knowledge, and Europe acquires an epistemological hegemony over all the other cultures of the world” (Castro-Gómez, as cited in Mignolo, 2011, p. 80).

outlasted the geographic ones” (p. 15). Epistemic hegemony also endures via international education, whereby, “the first impositions of European education on the rest of the world started with the advent of colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Americas” (Abdi, 2018, p. 11). The substitution of functional, *local*, educational systems with European ones constituted intentional cognitive colonization as part of the larger colonial project.

Exploring the depth and breadth of coloniality/decoloniality is beyond the scope of this study, yet, the historical development of today’s epistemic hegemony in general is pertinent context for considering contemporary Islamic pedagogies in particular. Dominant Western scholarly perspectives, ongoing since the 16th century, continue to argue that *Islamic knowledge* is inferior to Western knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2010), which shapes discussions on Islam, Islamic Education, and Islamophobia. “The production of Islamicate knowledge has become more or less colonized by the western/modern episteme” (Sayyid, 2006, p. 178). This phenomenon may be illustrated in the erasure of Muslim intellectual ingenuity, including in psychology, where Muslim scholars have writing about human nature and the self since 800 CE (Haque, 2004, p. 360), and in the evolution of Islamic schooling the world over through historical, sociocultural, political, and psychological colonization, with direct impacts upon Islamic educational philosophies, sites, objectives, and pedagogies. “Epistemic racism in the form of epistemic Islamophobia is a foundational and constitutive logic of the modern/colonial world and of its legitimate forms of knowledge production” (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 32). While coloniality may have once been characterized as epistemologically and ontologically Christian, over time it has become epistemologically secular (Mignolo, 2011, p. 15; Nasr, 2012, p. 9), which compounds

marginalization of Islamic epistemologies.<sup>76</sup> In the context of the UK, for example, Gholami (2017) described how dominant discourse describing an educational setting as *Muslim* “opens up a social and political space in which certain types of action can occur, including fundamentally undermining the educational integrity of the setting in question” (p. 266). This dominant discourse illustrates the colonial context in which such schools are situated. In terms of full-time Islamic schools, Gholami (2017) elaborated: “Problematic practices of an ‘Islamist’ nature which may exist in a handful of schools are projected onto ‘Muslim education’ as a general (and religious) category, glossing over the diversity of educational provision—often dynamic and innovative—in Muslim contexts” (p. 567). In other studies of mosque schools, scholars have acknowledged that while a small percentage may contribute to narrow or extremist interpretations of Islam, misunderstandings are propagated in Western communities, often through the media, of objectives and pedagogies in sites of Islamic education that amplify negative perceptions (Boyle, 2006; Burde et al., 2015). In these ways, ongoing epistemic hegemony shapes expressions of Islamophobia (Grosfoguel, 2011) that come to bear on today’s sites of Islamic education, including those in Canada (Zine, 2008).

Yet within this climate, sites of Islamic education hold creative potential as spaces where subjugated knowledge can be revitalized and new knowledge created, with revitalizing and reclaiming as parts of an anticolonial process (Zine, 2008, p. 229). Ahmed (2014) emphasized the importance of going “beyond race and gender equality to equality of thought/worldview; challenging a colonial concept of ‘progress’ that privileges ‘knowledge’ as constructed in the global North” (p. 562). In examining how sites of Islamic education may also be sites of

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<sup>76</sup> Mignolo (2011) described that while coloniality had its foundation in theology, secularism “displaced God as the guarantor of knowledge, placing Man and Reason in God’s stead” (p. 15).

multicentrism (Dei et al., 2000), where hegemonic knowledge is decentered to make room for other ways of knowing, Muslim educators' pedagogies may be potent tools in aiming "to challenge, resist, and ultimately transform the status quo cultures in which they are embedded" (Zine, 2008, p. 13). As such, Islamic pedagogies might be considered as "counter-creative acts" as practices "that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10). Expanding beyond the boundaries of secular, Eurocentric epistemic hegemony is not a question of multiculturalism, as Grosfoguel (2010) pointed out, but one of a rigorous and creative pluriversality, further defined as "the *inter-epistemic interaction* in horizontal mode" amongst people of "different epistemic traditions of thought," rather than "mono-epistemic imperial/colonial interaction" (p. 36; italics added).

An aim in employing a critical, faith-based epistemological lens on this research was to contribute to resisting, and building resilience against, the "onto-existentially debilitating" effects of enduring coloniality (Abdi, 2011, p. 5)—often expressed in contemporary Canada as conjoined epistemic hegemony and Islamophobia, which can lead to the marginalization of Islamic epistemologies and pedagogies. An additional aim was to, simultaneously, bring into focus the potentials of pedagogies in sites of Islamic education, as tools for individual and social transformation and as counter-creative acts contributing to more horizontal inter-epistemic interaction. This lens helped make visible the significance of traces of a colonial past, a contested present, and potentials for a decolonial future, countering the hegemony of secular ways of knowing by inviting Muslim educators' perspectives on their pedagogies in lived context, pedagogies based largely on faith-centered epistemologies, some of which transcend, some of which contradict, secular perspectives on dimensions of human beings and objectives of education and development. Recognizing and examining Islamic pedagogies, and the meanings

they hold for educators, learners, and scholars, may hold potential for conscious revitalization in Muslim educational communities, as well as in the secular, heterogeneous, cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Thus, while epistemic hegemony was a key contextual point to note, in this study, horizontal and expanded inter-epistemic interaction was a key aim.

### **2.3 Islamic Paradigmatic Elaborations on Teaching, Learning, and Developing**

Islamic education is composed of *process*, as one of three integral and interwoven elements, along with *content* and *recipient*, or learner (al-Attas, 1980).<sup>77</sup> These processes can be understood as value-laden pedagogies containing conceptions of learners (Olson & Bruner, 1996, p. 23), which those learners may come to internalize (Daniels & Shumow, 2003, p. 506). The ways in which contemporary educators conceive of learners, human development, and objectives of Islamic education may have implications upon their pedagogical processes. Zine's (2008) fourth principle—within various academic disciplines, including education, religion and spirituality may be valid sites for the analysis of social, existential phenomena—directs attention to the roots of Islamic education as deep within Islam as a faith tradition. In understanding Islamic education and human development, analysis of the specific cultural contexts and religious paradigms in which they are situated is primary. Framing inquiring into educators' perspectives on pedagogy, then, begins with examining pedagogic expressions within Islamic traditions and considering ontology and epistemology within those traditions themselves (Mogra, 2010, p. 317; Nasr, 2012, p. 7–8): “Islamic pedagogy and epistemology as practiced and theorised remained intrinsically tied with

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<sup>77</sup> Nasr (2012) provided an example of the learner at the center of an expanded conception of education when he described, “Every educational philosophy is based on the subject who is being taught and educated as well as the view of the objective realities that are to be taught. ... Who is man, men and women, *insān* [human being]? What are we here for? What is the ultimate goal of life?” (p. 12).

Islamic education tradition. Therefore, to understand Islamic epistemology and pedagogies, it is crucial to understand Islamic tradition” (Diallo, 2012, p. 175).

This section of the literature review explores the ontological, epistemological, psychological, and pedagogical foundations of education in Islamic traditions to contextualize this study of pedagogy. In making analytic sense of the literature on these paradigmatic aspects of Islamic Education, the critical faith-based epistemological framework (Zine, 2008) contributes heuristic principles in bridging secular, social scientific considerations of education and those from traditional Islamic perspectives. Yet in order to address specific complexities within Muslim educators’ perspectives on Islamic education and pedagogy, some aspects of the framework require elaboration. In the three sections that make up this section (2.3), I specifically draw upon the first, second, third, and seventh principles of Zine’s (2008) critical faith-centered framework and elaborate them with relevant concepts in the conceptual and empirical literature.

Ontological foundations are based upon a philosophy of holism, described in the first principle as: “connections among the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification” (Zine, 2008, p. 53). The second principle relates to faith-centered ways of understanding human development in sociocultural context: “Historically and culturally situated analyses of religion and spirituality are an integral component of understanding human social, historical, and personal development” (p. 54). In other words, analyzing expressions of religion and spirituality contribute to understanding how individuals develop in sociocultural communities. The third principle extends upon the second, whereby Islamic worldviews shape learning and development: “Religious and spiritual world views and/or contestations of those world views continue to shape human social, cultural, and political development” (p. 55). In order to understand what and how Muslim educators are aiming to educate and develop, we need to understand these

developmental foundations and the cultural contexts in which they are situated. Emerging literature on Islamic psychology, while primarily conceptual, illuminates unique Islamic perspectives on psychological compositions of the human being and objectives towards development. In terms of epistemology, the seventh principle (Zine, 2008) is critically important to this study in identifying that knowledge can come from various tangible and intangible sources: “Not all knowledge is socially constructed, but knowledge can emanate from divine revelation [...] as part of the way faith-centered people [...] make sense of the world and their place in it” (p. 65). Below, I examine descriptions of sources of knowledge in the literature as relating to Islamic education and pedagogy. In terms of pedagogy, Zine (2008) situated it between rhetorical and textual practices, shaped by official epistemology and everyday practices of schooling. Additional aspects of pedagogies unique to teaching and learning Islam have evolved over time and place into one of the most active areas of Islamic Education (Memon & Alhashmi, 2018). Evoking ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical aspects of education in Islamic traditions, drawn principally from Islamic Educational scholars’ understandings of primary sources, is to contribute to illuminating paradigmatic aspects of Islamic approaches to teaching, learning, and developing. The purpose is to provide a conceptual backdrop to the educators’ perspectives and uses of pedagogies in this study.

### **2.3.1 Holism in Being and Becoming: Ontological Foundations**

Some scholars argue that in order to understand Muslim educational expressions, the underlying Qur’anic paradigm needs to be understood, whereby God is the source and fountainhead of all knowledge, expressed in the Qur’an (Mogra, 2010, p. 319) and “the immutable source for direction in all human endeavor” (Cook, 2010, p. xi). Thus, at the very ontological center of an *Islamic* conceptual paradigm is God alone. The unity of divine reality, tawhid, is a central

Islamic concept, defined as unity encompassing diversity: all “aspects of life whether spiritual or temporal are consolidated into a harmonious whole” (Cook, 1999, p. 340). Safi (1999) described: “[T]he unity of the divine, revelation, creation, truth, and humanity into a universality of good will and intention is the hallmark of Islam itself” (p. 8). It is also the hallmark of the human being because innate recognition of divine oneness is a deeply embedded aspect of human nature. Winter (2016), quoting the classic scholar Suhrawardī, described true Islamic learning as “an escape from the city of reason to the wilderness where God can be found” and education not as accumulation of information, facts, premises, and proofs, but the “the deepening of our ontological consciousness” (p. 30). This ontological consciousness may imply at least two important points for contemporary educators; first, that ontology in the form of a Qur’anic conceptual system must bear upon content and process in expressions of Islamic education; and, second, that consciousness of this conceptual system is a unified educational and developmental goal, beyond instrumental teaching and learning.

The Qur’an and Muhammad’s words (hadith), actions (sunnah), and life story (sirah) constitute Islamic primary source texts, and the rest of creation unfolds in diversity encompassed within divine unity. Most Muslims attest that the Qur’an contains the words of God and Muhammad’s life depicts the illustrations of those words. Like a harp: “the wind ‘plays’ him, while his mortal personhood contributes nothing; the Voice which ‘draws out’ is therefore the pure sound and presence of the Unseen” (Winter, 2016, p. 30). In other words, Muhammad consolidated and perfected the manner and form of tawhid (al-Attas, 2005). The Qur’an is open to many interpretations, with Muslim scholars over history citing its verses as examples of rational induction and to dispel mysticism and others highlighting mystical elements, its divine origin, and theophanic nature (Winter, 2016, p. 31). Thus, Muslims are dispersed across a wide



epistemological spectrum, but anchored in tawhid, as characterized by the contradictions that diversity brings as important aspects of the whole. Contradictions are balanced between the demands of the mind and the soul and cohere in “the ability to encompass opposing ideas so as to integrate and create a synthesis and an original idea” (Al Zeera, 2001, p. xviii). The central conception of tawhid translates into ontological dimensions of holism and comprises the first principle of the critical faith-centered epistemological paradigm (Zine, 2008): “A philosophy of holism, or connections among the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification” (p. 52). Spiritual and material, cognition and emotion, ideology and praxis—all contribute to a wholeness of being that Islamic practices aim to simultaneously unify and develop. Zine (2008) described how this holistic ontology relates to epistemology:

That a spiritual essence is embedded in everyday acts is central to maintaining the articulation of the spiritual, material, and intellectual states of being as holistic and mutually constituting elements of Islamic ontology. From an epistemological standpoint, this forms the basis of understanding of how faith-centred Muslims make sense of the world and their place in it. (pp. 53-54)

This principle of holistic unity colors ontological aspects of Islamic education, including unified developmental and educational objectives; psychological dimensions of the participants of education (teachers and learners); and particular conceptual understandings of human development. Each will be explored in turn.

### **2.3.1.1 Unified Objectives of Islamic Education**

*Learning objectives* in Islamic education contribute a broad context for examinations of pedagogy. While each different contemporary site of Islamic education will have different specific learning objectives, today’s sites also differ from traditional sites (even if Muslim educators continue to use them as sources of pedagogical inspiration). Niyozov and Memon (2011) pointed out that the education of Muhammad’s time had different goals than today, responding to different challenges.

As Muslim societies, over time, diversified socially, culturally, and politically, educational structures also diversified. This diversity has implications on objectives of learning and development, whereby different forms and sites favor different emphases. For example, a general objective might be nurturing a good person to contribute to creating a good society, with definitions of ‘good’ drawn from Islamic primary sources (al-Attas, 1980; Obeid, 1988). Other objectives identified in the literature include awakening religious intuition and enabling participation in local culture (Badawi, 1977), developing and harmonizing multiple dimensions of identities (Niyozov & Memon, 2011), and fostering understanding of Islamic principles, “while at the same time cultivating the intellect of the young and preparing them for plural encounters” (Thobani, 2007, p. 21). Al Zeera (2001) described the focus of Islam as a faith tradition as explicitly geared towards the development of the human being, with ultimate goals being: “Purification of the soul by the moral and ethical teachings of the Qur’an and sharpening of the mind by reasoning and reflection on God’s creation, the universe, and the self...” (p. 53). The central objective of Islamic education, in many interpretations of Islamic traditions, is to foster the development of a God-conscious human character—“to produce Godly, moral humans” (Obeid, 1988, p. 173). Thus, while localized educational objectives may differ across different sites of Islamic education, the importance of seeking traditional Islamic knowledge and social etiquette (Nasr, 2012, p. 8, 14), learning how to participate in the ritual practices, and engaging with the Qur’an in terms of word meanings, correct recitation, and memorization, are enshrined in the primary sources (Marshall, 2012, p. 180).

Given both the unity and the diversity of objectives, there are at least four points to be elucidated from the literature, which, collectively, serve to frame subsequent investigation into pedagogical processes. First, sites of Islamic education are driven by unique and specific educational objectives, above and beyond vocational training or “equipping pupils with such

secular talents as the ability to compute and to read and write the indigenous language” (Obeid, 1988, p. 174). Sahin (2017) described that Islamic education aims to nurture embodied moral and spiritual dimensions to guide individuals throughout the duration of their lives. In other words, an Islamic school is a place to practice, master, and, ideally, internalize ritual practices and their constituent principles for use across the lifespan. A second point is that the objectives of Islamic education and human development converge: *learning* specific principles and practices is intended for a specific form of Islamic *development* (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018). The ways in which to attain to the objectives are also synonymous: mastering and internalizing principles and practices of Islamic traditions for application. Enhancing ways in which individual educators might nurture this application lies in the domain of pedagogy. A third point is that morality extends inclusively beyond the bounds of a Muslim community. Along with learning and developing as Muslims, scholars identified that children also need to develop as valuable members of pluralistic societies, which introduces specific educational objectives including collaboratively living, working, and contributing to those societies (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). They asserted that Islamic education needs to balance its “idealization of the self and rejection of the ‘internal and external other’ with examining the self and appreciating the other” (p. 26). This point corresponds with the sixth principle of the critical faith-centered framework (Zine, 2008) in that religious identities can and must function as *intra*-community “sites of resistance to injustice and oppression, providing a space for critical contestation and political engagement” (p. 61). The fourth point is that sites of Islamic education bear the responsibilities of cultural survival. Ensuring that children master local interpretations of Islamic principles and practices, in order to contribute to the construction of their communities, is pressing need for Muslim children living in predominantly non-Muslim cultures. Indeed, the continued existence of Islam as part of plural Western cultures depends upon the next

generation. Couched in terms of social, cultural, and religious reproduction, an explicit objective of Islamic education is for children to learn and apply traditional Islamic practices and principles—learning “how to be Muslims in the manner of their Muslim predecessors” (Kadi, 2006, p. 324). Zine (2008), for example, described Islamic schools as sites for the “social reproduction of Islamic identity” (p. 15). But a second, implicit, objective may be internalization of these principles and practices for social, cultural, and religious *renewal* relevant to a particular cultural and historical moment. Within primary Islamic sources, a saying attributed to Muhammad noted that Islam will undergo continual renewal (Esposito, 2003). Ramadan (2013) elaborated this renewal as “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 underscores the importance of dynamism and change: while understanding and implementing principles and fundamentals is a primary task of Islamic education, doing so in ways relevant to contemporary times and new places is an imperative. Thus, along with functioning as sites for reproduction, Islamic schools may also function as sites for renewal, in forming the basis for individual and social growth and development (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018). Niyozov and Memon (2011) described Islamic education as embodying a process of negotiation between the past, which secures a student’s sense of identity, and the present, which promotes a student’s ability to respond flexibly to change. It is both a vehicle for transmitting and extending cultural heritage and a tool for innovation and social change (Halstead, 2004). Ramadan (2007) described how the earliest Muslims balanced application of primary-source principles with new contextual challenges by using their “critical intelligence, their common sense, and their legal creativity to find new answers

that remained faithful to Islamic principles but fit the new context” (p. 199).<sup>78</sup> Thus, reproducing principles of cultural pasts while renewing their applications in cultural futures may be dual and central objectives to sites of Islamic education and *pedagogy* might provide educators and learners with options to creatively and compassionately engage with traditional material to engender new ways of being and becoming Muslim.

### **2.3.1.2 Psychological Dimensions of Being Human**

Along with objectives, pedagogies are often informed by perspectives on the roles, psychological dimensions, and development of both the teacher and the learner. Ways in which a teacher conceives of a learner may shape a teacher’s actions, reactions, and interactions with students (Killoran, 2003). While the discipline of human development is situated within the overarching field of educational psychology, developmental aspects of Islamic education may draw from the overarching and emerging field of Islamic Psychology, particularly, conceptions of the human being who teaches, learns, and develops. Muslim psychologists offer Islamic conceptions of the human self. While one of the objectives of knowledge includes nurturing children into good adults who will lead righteous and productive lives building a good society in this world and achieve benefits in the world to come (al-Attas, 1980; Halstead, 2004), the meaning of ‘good adults’ is located in an Islamic perspective on the human being. Nasr (2012) described a Qur’anic verse as defining human beings by identifying our shared origins and destinations: “Verily, we come from God and to God we return” (Qur’an 2:156). He explained: “That verse defines who we are, really,

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<sup>78</sup> Ramadan (2007) continued: “The fundamentals of Islam’s creed (al-aqidah) and ritual practice (al-ibadat) were not subject to change, nor were the essential principles of ethics, but the implementation of those ethical principles and the response to new situations about which scriptural sources had remained vague or silent required answers adapted to particular circumstances. The Prophet’s Companions had understood this, and he had imparted to them both the knowledge and the confidence required to go ahead and observe the world and its vicissitudes, certain that they now had the spiritual and intellectual means to remain faithful to their Creator’s message” (p. 199–200).

and also where we come from and where we are going” (p. 12). In light of this statement, conceptions of the human being reflect a tawhidic perspective on educators and learners as participants in a lifelong journey of education.

Over the past 50 years, Muslim scholars and psychologists, dissatisfied with the limitations of mainstream, secular, Western psychology in meeting the needs of Muslim patients, have been examining ways to define and realize the integration of Islamic perspectives on the human being with Western perspectives on psychology.<sup>79</sup> Badri (1979) was amongst the first to recognize that secular Western models of psychology were insufficient for Muslim psychologists working with Muslim patients. For example, individuals with mental-health-related issues within Muslim communities often seek out *imams* (religious scholars/leaders), yet these imams are not often trained in mental-health care (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013). The urgency of developing Islamically-relevant psychological frames for Muslims—especially those living in non-Muslim contexts—was cogently described by Keshavarzi and Haque (2013): “The centrality of religious practice in the lives Muslims renders the outcome for any psychological treatment a function of the degree to which the intervention is skillfully applied within the context of the religion” (p. 231). They contended that validated integration of a person’s spiritual frame of reference and its own ability to heal can be “a powerful mechanism for change” (p. 236).

While an Islamic theoretical framework of psychology has yet to be established, scholars working within this emerging field have elaborated frameworks of the human self using basic research approaches and scholarly analyses of Islamic source texts (the Qur’an, Hadith literature,

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<sup>79</sup> Psychological scholars and practitioners have been refining a view of the human being derived from Islamic primary sources in order to optimize diagnosis, treatment, and healing (including, Abu-Raiya, 2012, 2013; Ali, 1995, Badri, 1979; Haque, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Skinner, 2018; York Al-Karam, 2018). Haque (2004) asserted: “It has become imperative that the Islamic worldview on issues related to psychology is introduced in the mainstream literature” (p. 358).

and early primarily-Sunni Muslim scholarship, particularly, to date, Al-Ghazali), which are particularly useful towards understanding human development in Islamic education.<sup>80</sup> Rothman and Coyle (2018), for example, inquired: “What are the core principles and concepts regarding the conceptualization of the person from within an Islamic paradigm?” (p. 1732). Working with key informants—people with “academic or religious expertise related to Islamic conceptions of human psychology” (p. 1733), including a mix of academic scholars in Islamic Studies and psychology and non-academic religious scholars—Rothman and Coyle (2018) conducted a grounded theory analysis to devise an Islamic model of the soul. This model corresponds with other literature on aspects of the human self within Islamic perspectives. It is useful in guiding this study, as part of a larger Islamic paradigmatic framework, in understanding the ways in which Muslim educators conceive of themselves and learners with implications upon pedagogy. Islamic Psychology, then, offers a valuable vocabulary of concepts that describe the human being.

Distinct conceptions of human nature cohere in the term *fitra*,<sup>81</sup> described as a primordial quality and natural disposition characterized by purity, goodness, and “instinctive cognition of God” (Asad, 1980, p. 847), inherent to every human without exception. Fitra is considered “internalized morality and pure, original state of belief before a systemization by theology” (Polat, 2017, p. 808). Sahin (2018) identified some distinctly holistic attributes of human nature, including developmental interaction with transcendence via the Qur’an with consequences on both individuals and society:

Human nature is imbued with competence for self-transformation and dynamism; thus, it has an educational character [...] the Qur’an not only affirms this dynamic educational character

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<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Ali (1995); Haque (2004); Kaplick & Skinner (2017); Keshavarzi & Haque (2013); Polat (2017); Rothman & Coyle (2018); York Al-Karam (2018).

<sup>81</sup> Identified in the Qur’an (30:30): “And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with *the natural disposition* which God has instilled into humans [*fitra*]” (italics added).

of human nature, but is itself composed and articulated within a distinct transformative educational style that ultimately aims to guide humanity to transform itself for the better. Through meticulously arranged divine pedagogies, the Qur'an inspires, challenges and guides humanity on a journey of self-transformation through which human beings achieve personal fulfilment, to become agents of achieving a balanced, faithful society. (p. 2)

Here, the individual, social, and transcendent work together towards transformation.

Beyond *fitra*, interacting elements of the human being include, first, the *nafs*, a term used to refer to the lowest part of the human self, similar to the ego, attracted to worldly desires, which must be disciplined, refined, and purified (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1741). Some liken the *nafs* to an animal—wild if untrained, but useful if disciplined (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013, p. 239). Given its ability to be developed, the *nafs* can take on different qualities including: “tranquil, reproaching, evil-commanding” (Abu-Raiya, 2012, p. 222). The second major human psychological dimension is the unity of ‘*aql* (cognition or intellect) and ‘*qalb* (emotion or heart) (al-Attas, 1980, p. 2). The heart has been described as the place where consciousness resides (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1742) in the form of this cognition/emotion unity. Abu-Raiya (2012) drew upon Al-Ghazali’s definition of the *qalb* as a “spiritual divine entity . . . which is the essence of a human-being and its knowing, thinking, and comprehending part [...]” (p. 222). The ‘*aql*, in turn, is the rational faculty of a person, “home to logic, reason, and acquired intellectual beliefs” (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013, p. 239). Regarding the unity between intelligence (‘*aql*) and emotion (*qalb*), al-Attas (1980) described: “‘*Aql* is synonymous with *qalb* in the same way as *qalb*, which is a spiritual organ of cognition called the ‘heart’, is synonymous with ‘*aql*’” (p. 2). A third human dimension is the *ruh* (soul or spirit), the pure, non-individual aspect of the human being, which has an inclination towards growth and functions as an access point to God-consciousness (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1743). Key informants in Rothman and Coyle’s (2018) study described the *ruh* as the unchanging and pure part of the soul where God’s imprint resides within



the fitra. Functioning as a direct access point to God, the ruh is “where the human being can potentially receive divine knowledge, guidance, and healing” (p. 1736). Rothman and Coyle (2018) highlighted an aspect of their model, theoretically distinct from secular, Western theories of human development, as: “the center of consciousness within the human being is inherently connected to a primordial, divine consciousness” (p. 1743).

While the ruh is considered to be unchanging, the other dimensions of the human being are always in flux—the nafs, the qalb, and the ‘aql—and action within them can serve to either awaken or obscure the ruh. Indeed, these dimensions are shaped and refined by participation in Islamic social, contemplative, and religious practices, which constitute “a large part of the Islamically adherent lifestyle” (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013) and constitutes the very fabric of Islamic education itself. In other words, Islamic education ultimately aims to guide individual self-purification in a trajectory of development: “the Islamic tradition, as guided by the Qur’an and Sunnah, encourages and maps out a path for the human being to pursue this trajectory” (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1743). Thus, human development in light of these changing dimensions is necessarily a *self*-development (Sahin, 2013). This framework sheds light on dimensions of the human participants in education, with implications on teacher-student relationships in the process of mastering tools of this self-refinement (Polat, 2017), the comportment of the teachers as developmental role models, and their pedagogies.

A critically important concept offered in the literature on Islamic psychology is that of *transference*, which might be considered along the lines of elevation of consciousness between people, or entrainment. Keshavarzi and Haque (2013) described it in the context of psychological treatment:

A huge part of the process of change includes transference of what is contained in one heart to the other. The closest equivalent of this, in psychological terms, would be the

psychodynamic concept of transference; however, the transference of the heart happens on a spiritual level. Thus, the concept or idea of taking someone as far as you have gone yourself becomes highly relevant here. [...] The idea here is that, to permit an emotional and experiential connection with God, one must spend time with one who has attained this level of proximity to God. (p. 244)

This description is startling in its unique perspective on conceptions of a human being, aspects of spiritual development, and qualities and roles of an educator. It constituted a significant sensitizing concept in discerning the contours of Islamic pedagogies.

In terms of conceptions of educators and learners, both move along a life-long journey of learning and development, and both share an overarching educator. Marshall (2012, p. 180) highlighted the inseparability of human beings from God-as-educator (96:1–5) and source of education, knowledge, and intelligence (16:78)<sup>82</sup> This relationship between human learner and divine educator has implications pedagogy and the role and relationship of the teacher with the students. In encouraging those who learned directly from him to share his teachings with others, Muhammad outlined an implication of the epistemic principle of God as educator in that a child may possess insight over an adult, a student may understand more deeply than a teacher, a less-well versed scholar may recognize a piece of knowledge missed by a senior scholar (Abu Ghuddah, 2017).<sup>83</sup> Thus, teachers are always also students, which holds potential for leveling the power dynamic in the classroom, at least when it comes to the humility of seeking and receiving knowledge. In the presence of a divine educator, teaching and learning becomes multi-directional;

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<sup>82</sup> “Read in the name of your Sustainer, who has created (2) created the human being out of a germ-cell! (3) Read—for your Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One (4) who has taught [humans] the use of the pen (5) taught the human being what s/he did not know!” (96:1–5) and “It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye know nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections that you may give thanks to Allah” (16:78).

<sup>83</sup> An empirical dimension of this principle was evidenced in the Jamma Mosque School study (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018): each of the teachers’ referenced their own learning and developing as unfolding *in parallel* with the students. The source of these sentiments was in the teachers’ perceptions of themselves as learners in the tutelage of a divine educator; God as the source of knowledge. Amira said, “God is our *Rabb*, and *Rabb* means He is our *educator*. He is educating us to be in a better attitude” (p. 8).

teaching and learning are always happening together, mutually and concurrently. A point of interest in the exemplary Islamic educator/student relationship is that God's education of Muhammad took place "so far from the schoolroom that he is 'unlettered'" (Winter, 2016, p. 30). A pedagogical implication of this point is that it identifies the importance of Islamic education taking place across contexts, far and beyond the confines of the classroom alone.

Given the social, cultural, and religious value granted the material to be taught and learned, the role of the educator is crucial. Muslim teachers are expected to be the most excellent teachers (Al-Sadan, 1997), in a spiritual as well as professional sense: "[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). A primary philosophical perspective of the Muslim teacher as a "change agent," whose role is to catalyze an inner change in the learner towards her development into a person who will do justice to herself, to her community, to the environment, to humanity, and, ultimately, to her Creator (Rufai, 2012, p. 59). Sound moral character is described in the literature as a primary objective of learning and development (Obeid, 1988) and at the center of Islamic pedagogies (Abu Ghuddah, 2017; Sabrin, 2010; Vicini, 2016). Halstead (2004) pointed out in their special responsibilities in nurturing spiritual and moral development in the young, teacher' "personal lives, beliefs, character and moral integrity are as important as their academic expertise" (p. 426). Thus, personal interaction with and imitation of a teacher may be as educative as direct instruction (Halstead, 2004); this seems to have been a quality of Islamic education since Muhammad first taught it<sup>84</sup> and enshrines the role of the educator in

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<sup>84</sup> Three characteristics of Muhammad that he is reported to have exhibited as an effective teacher, are, first, knowledge *of* human beings, including how people learn and develop; second, knowledge in general—something to teach; and, third, a personality that attracts the students' hearts and minds (Abu Ghuddah, 2017). Ali, Muhammad's cousin, described Muhammad's character, saying, "He was always cheerful, easy-going and approachable. He was not stern or insensitive. He did not yell or use foul language. He did not seek the faults of others or over praise them.

conceptions of Islamic education and human development (Al-Sadan, 1997; Halstead, 2004; Mogra, 2010, p. 319).

In summary, contemporary scholars working to theorize the emerging field of Islamic Psychology have much to offer Islamic Education, starting with a conceptual framework of “human nature with Islamic integrity” (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1732) and considerations of *who* is educating, *who* is *being educated*, *how*, and to *what ends*.

### **2.3.1.3 Trajectories of Human Development**

The critical faith-centered epistemological framework identifies the significant roles that religion and spirituality play in human and social development. The second principle states, “Historically and culturally situated analyses of religion and spirituality are an integral component of understanding human social, historical, and personal development” (Zine, 2008, p. 54) and the third principle continues: “Religious and spiritual world views and/or contestations of those world views continue to shape human social, cultural, and political development” (p. 55). Al-Attas (1980) articulated the relationship between individual and social development as people comprising society, of which education is the substrate, and the development of both are Islamic imperatives. To understand trajectories of human and social development, as expressed in a particular time and place—and to design pedagogical engagements that propel learning and development forward—religious perspectives and/or contestations of religious perspectives must be considered. Together,

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He ignored what he did not like and never left you hopeless of his generosity or turned you back empty handed...” (as cited in Abu Ghuddah, 2017, 741). Muhammad’s attributes as an educator set a sacred precedent that many Muslim educators today endeavor to study and understand (see, for example, Mogra, 2010).

these principles direct analytic focus towards conceptions of human and social development at the intersection between Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology.

Empirical research on human development within Islamic communities, as connected to Islamic education, and related to Islam as a faith tradition is nascent. Alkouatli and Vadeboncoeur (2018) conducted an exploratory, sociocultural study inquiring into Muslim educators' perspectives on human development at a mosque school in Canada and corresponding engagements in social practices. They found that educators' perspectives on the objectives of human development converged with educational objectives and involved an individual's internalization of Islamic principles and practices for application in life. They also found that all of the social practices in which educators engaged children at the mosque school were intended for this unified development.

Despite the scarcity of empirical literature on human development, the conceptual literature from Islamic Educational perspectives is established, hinges upon internalization of an Islamic conceptual framework (Wan Daud, 2013), and emphasizes a range of human dimensions (Cook, 1999; Obeid, 1988; Zine, 2008). Nasr (2012), for example, described Islamic education as encompassing, "physical exercise to contemplation of God, and everything in between" (p. 20). A description of education from the first world conference held in Mecca, in 1977, stated:

A process that should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality ... spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively, and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. (as cited in Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 90)

This unified nature of individual and social faculties reflects a wider, holistic perspective in that "the material, intellectual, and spiritual realms do not form an artificial trichotomy; rather, they are seen as intrinsically connected and mutually interdependent aspects of being" (Zine, 2008, p. 53). Although balanced human growth may be hampered if intellectuality is favored at the

expense of spirituality, attempting to the two within an individual is considered a “main cause for the disintegration of the human personality” (Ashraf, 1993, as cited in Cook, 1999, p. 346).

In conducting content analysis on the Qur’an, aspects of the Sunnah, and early Islamic scholars, Obeid (1988) extracted an Islamic theory of human development that identified developmental trajectories across the lifespan. The Qur’an described embryonic development as beginning with biological conception and progressing through prenatal stages of growth in the womb. The soul originated previously and enters the body around 120 days gestation. Growing through childhood, adulthood, and old age, the process of development continues until death, yet the soul transcends death. At every age, development is oriented towards fostering relationship with God through participation in aspects of private and social life, with the aim of refining moral character: “The other aspects of human personality—the physical, intellectual, and social—are expected to contribute to the individual’s moral development” (Obeid, 1988, p. 158). This primary focus on moral and character development significantly colors human developmental objectives, brings them into concert with educational ones, and illuminates purposes behind pedagogy.

Obeid (1988) identified three forces that combine to shape processes of ontogenic development. The first includes predetermined factors set by God—an individual’s biological characteristics, time of death, and personal sustenance during life, as described in the Qur’an (17:30),<sup>85</sup> which might be considered as raw material for development. The second force is a person’s agency, expressed in choices, behavior, and activities (Obeid, 1988). While means are divinely provided, individuals bear the responsibility of making choices in evolving themselves towards ideals of human development. The role of an educator is to support a person towards

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<sup>85</sup> “Behold, your Sustainer grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills: verily, fully aware is He of [the needs of] His creatures, and sees them all” (Qur’an, 17:30)

making choices, behavior, and activities that reflect Qur’anic ideals and that make good use of divine abundance. In all aspects of development across the lifespan, the intentions for development—as well as the means, methods, and objectives—should be for the benefit both the Creator and creation (Obeid, 1988). Particular activities might be considered *developmentally generative* if they succeed in fostering an individual’s connection with God as the source of development. In physical development, for example, the primary sources emphasized cleanliness of body, clothes, and living spaces; eating nutritious foods in moderation; avoiding alcohol and drugs; and engaging in exercise and sports. These activities are intended to keep a person fit for engaging in acts of worship, assisting those in need, and defending the security of the community. Activities for intellectual development include extending one’s knowledge by learning from the wisdom and experiences of others; striving for comprehension; engaging in decision-making and logical thinking; and employing previously-acquired knowledge to make sense of new situations and make ethical decisions as they arise (Obeid, 1988). Imitation without critical questioning is discouraged; people are encouraged to think and question (Obeid, 1988; Qur’an, 5:107; Ramadan, 2007; Sahin, 2018; Waghid, 2014). Social etiquette activities are ways to simultaneously embody and increase faith, while solidifying social bonds with other people. These practices vary with particular local culture, but some that are emphasized in the Qur’an include respect, gratitude, and assistance to parents; care for orphans, people who are sick and in need, neighbors, and travelers; and maintaining wider familial relationships. Obeid (1988) identified, “Of particular importance are the virtues of repentance, benevolence, patience, forgiveness, cooperation, and mediation” (p. 161). At the same time, people are encouraged to avoid particular practices, including “venting anger, drinking alcoholic beverages, gambling, and engaging in adultery” (p. 161). With moral development as the overarching aim, “achieving righteousness becomes the Muslim’s central life-

long quest” (p. 160). Increasing conscious awareness of one’s words and actions, and refining them towards various Qur’anic ideals, is a major goal of development that continues across the lifespan (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018).

Sahin (2013) offered a Qur’anic view of human development whereby each person has agency, indeed responsibility, in shaping themselves in a lifelong, open-ended growth process of self-reform and purification. Rather than “linear, invariant stages of progression” (p. 201), there is always the possibility of regression, reducing themselves to the lowest of the low (Qur’an 95:5). Similarly, Obeid (1988) emphasized that rather than a series of distinct developmental stages, development is regarded as a continuous process across the lifespan. As life-long learners, the ultimate aim of self-development is in becoming God-conscious, expressed by the concept of *taqwa* (Sahin, 2013), a basic Islamic principle and an inner vision that helps people reach their ultimate human potential (Esposito, 2003).<sup>86</sup> By equipping people with agency and awareness of being answerable for their actions, “God placed part of the responsibility for human development on the individual” (Obeid, 1988, p. 167). In an Islamic theory of human development, people are both *motivated* and *equipped* to seize responsibility for their own learning and development;<sup>87</sup> they have the instruments of development—including sense organs, cognition, emotion, consciousness and a soul—as ways of gathering knowledge and making sense of it (Obeid, 1988, p. 168). These instruments enable people to observe, memorize, make meaning, and understand, thus, education

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<sup>86</sup> Woven throughout Islamic education and pedagogy, the concept of *taqwa* is described in detail in section 3.1.2.

<sup>87</sup> An example of agency and motivated self-development may be illustrated in an anecdote involving the famous eighth century jurist Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, when he was a young man, a student (Ahmed, 1987). Ibn Hanbal was running through the streets to reach one of his classes when an older man stopped him and said: “Are you not ashamed of running like this? How long do you intend to run along with the children?” Ibn Hanbal answered: “Until I die!” (p. 328).



and pedagogy ultimately aim to support a learner in mastering these instruments of self-development.

Along with predetermined factors and agentic choice, a third force for human development includes natural and social attributes of the environment in which an individual grows and develops, with the social being primary (Obeid, 1988). Identifying the social environment as a force for human development is important for educators engaging children in pedagogy and creating classroom environments to nurture learning and development (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018). Many of the Islamic rituals have significant individual *and* social dimensions—for example, ritual congregational prayer, fasting in Ramadan, and detailed social etiquette practices. Beyond rigid prescriptions of social etiquette, or simplistic imitation of people perceived as good or correct, the emphasis in the literature is upon seeking out spiritual exemplars, or more-experienced Islamic others as human catalysts in the development of character and God consciousness as involving embodied senses, cognition, and emotion.<sup>88</sup> Educators and parents, as co-constructors of children’s social worlds, play key roles in creating conditions for development, and affection is a primary condition because children need love and attention to thrive. Obeid (1988) located the importance of affection between adults and children in a description of Muhammad, playing and cuddling with his grandchildren and other children. Once, he put his grandchild on one knee and a friend’s child on the other and said, “Oh, God! Have mercy on them

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<sup>88</sup> One of the earliest examples of people traveling in search of knowledge and adab was a group of youth who left their home, somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, and journeyed to Medina to learn directly from Muhammad. As reported by both Muslim and Bukhārī, they stayed in Muhammad’s company for 20 days, upon which time Muhammad felt that they were homesick. So he sent them home with the following words: “Go back to your families and stay with them. Teach them to pray as you have seen me pray. When prayers are due, one of you should make the call [to prayer] and the eldest of you should lead” (Abu Ghuddah, 2017, 601). While there are several pedagogical aspects to this particular story, including those of leading, role modeling, and participating in ritual practices, it is primarily an “excellent example of a group of youth travelling to a scholar to learn and to understand their religion at his hand” (Abu Ghuddah, 2017, 610).

as I am merciful to them!” (p. 172). In turn, children are required to respect parents and be kind to them, as described in the Qur’an (17:23–24).<sup>89</sup> These reciprocal family bonds, caring unconditionally for one another, are social dimensions of healthy individual development that dovetail with social development, and illustrate the holism permeating Muslim perspectives on all aspects of education.

Al Zeera (2001) described how the concept of unity and holism does not stop at an individual developmental level but extends to society, where community life and family structure are foundational to social development. Abdi (2011) provided a general holistic definition of *social development*, as representing all forms of human well-being including “the economic, the political, the educational, the cultural, the technological and the emotional” (p. 5). Al Zeera (2001) added the transcendent dimension: “The concept of social development for Islam is entirely different from the current Western idea of development... Material development represents one stage in the transcendence to higher stages” (p. 61-62). Halstead (2004) described how from Islamic educational perspectives, social development has exactly the same goal as individual development: “the realization on earth of divinely ordained moral imperatives” (p. 523). Individual development, then, takes place within social context:

Muslims walk together along the broad highway of the divine law, which sets out God’s will for people in both their private and their social life and helps them to live harmonious lives in this world and prepare themselves for the life to come. (Halstead, 2004, p. 523)

This description contains the individual and the social, the legal and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly. While human development focuses upon nurturing whole human beings, integrated

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<sup>89</sup> And do good unto parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in thy care, never say ‘Ugh’ to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech, and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say: ‘O my Sustainer! Bestow Your grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!’ (Qur’an, 17:23–24)

of cognition and emotion and embodied, human beings are “the foundation and building blocks in any society. If they are fragmented and split, any construction on that foundation will collapse” (Al Zeera, 2001, p. 63).

These primarily conceptual descriptions of human development within an Islamic paradigmatic perspective suggest that Islam is itself a theory of human development. Individual agency and responsibility are central, with implications on social development. Divine assistance in the processes of both may be reciprocally related to initiative: “Verily, God does not change the condition of a people unless they change their inner selves” (Qur’an, 13:11). In other words, the impetus for development comes from deep within a person.

### **2.3.2 Cognition/Emotion Unified in Consciousness: Epistemological Foundations**

A significant point of divergence between secular social scientific and Islamic perspectives is an epistemological one, particularly, conceptions of the origins of knowledge and what counts as knowledge. In understanding Muslim epistemological perspectives, Zine’s (2008) seventh principle explains:

Not all knowledge is socially constructed, but knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin. Beliefs in prophets, revelation, messengers, angels, spirits, jinn, and so on must be incorporated into research and knowledge production as part of the way faith-centred people read and make sense of the world and their place in it. (p. 65)

This principle is central in framing this research inquiring into educators’ pedagogies in constructing knowledge together with learners towards a unique Islamic consciousness; it alone renders an Islamic paradigm imperative. How is knowledge generated? What is a teacher’s role in knowledge generation? What role do pedagogies play? How does knowledge relate to emotion, intuition, embodiment, consciousness? Concerned with creating space in secular societies for the validation of knowledge from divine, revealed, or incorporeal origins, Zine’s

(2008) seventh principle “foregrounds religion and spirituality as crucial in understanding human social, cultural, and political development; the ways in which people make sense of lived experiences; and purposes behind teaching and learning” (p. 65). Building from this principle, this section explores Islamic perspectives on knowledge (*‘ilm*), which have differed over time and are often contested today by Muslim scholars of differing perspectives and orientations. However, Arjmand (2018) pointed out that a predominant trend across Islamic educational history has been to identify religious or revealed knowledge *and* mundane knowledge *in totality* as religious knowledge (*‘ilm*). Worldly disciplines, like medicine or mathematics, while important, may be considered as *techniques*. In other words, there is no separation between the sacred and the profane (Zine, 2008, p. 53) and Halstead (2004) detailed origins, qualities, and purposes of knowledge:

Although knowledge may be derived either from divine revelation or from the activity of the human intellect, it cannot be divided into two classes, one religious and the other secular. All knowledge has religious significance and should ultimately serve to make people aware of God and of their relationship with God. (p. 524)

While scholars are clear on this point—that knowledge is divine, unified, and intentional—different approaches might be taken in regard to attaining to revealed and secular knowledge, whereby the former knowledge requires particular purification preparations of the soul to receive and interpret knowledge and the latter suffices with scholastic techniques and methodologies.

Islam comprises a distinct conceptual system; each concept with its associated expressions has a distinct place within an overarching system of meaning.<sup>90</sup> A crucial aspect of knowledge in Islamic traditions is knowledge of our individual human place within this conceptual system in

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<sup>90</sup> “If everything in any system were in the same place, then there could be no recognition, there could be no meaning, since there would be no relational criteria to judge, discriminate, distinguish and clarify. Indeed, there would be no ‘system’” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 4).

relation to the position of God, which informs principles and practices; provides educational and developmental objectives; and philosophically undergirds practices of teaching and learning of Islam (al-Attas, 1980). Purposeful knowledge, learning, education, and consciousness are amongst concepts that feature in the Qur'an, in the traditions of Muhammad, and in premodern scholarly writings on Islamic education (Halstead, 2004). The importance of knowledge is detailed in traditions of Muhammad—some of which are of less certain authenticity but have nevertheless become epistemological staples in many Muslim communities—including: Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman; Seek knowledge, even as far as China; and Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave (Halstead, 2004, Nasr, 2012, p. 16). Nasr (2012) related a popular saying, reportedly of Muhammad, that “the first thing God created was the Intellect” (p. 15). Another hadith reported: “When God created the *‘aql*, [...] he declared: “I have created nothing nobler than you. It is through you that I take, and through you that I give” (Al-Munajjid, hadith 40, as cited in Winter, 2016, p. 36). The importance of knowledge has “given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion” (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 2). In approaching life as a “one long educational experience,” equally important for both males and females, Nasr (2012, p. 18) asserted that seeking knowledge does not end with childhood: educators must be constantly seeking new knowledge themselves over the life course. In some perspectives, knowledge is considered a vast ocean within which one should not swim but drown. Winter (2016) used a comparative analogy between Buraq<sup>91</sup> and reason, between mystical knowledge and formal theology, to describe the acquisition of true knowledge: where Buraq is a “miraculous winged

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<sup>91</sup> “Winged creature, usually depicted as a horse, which Muhammad mounted and rode to Jerusalem, through seven heavens, hell, and paradise, into the presence of God, and back to earth, according to the story of his Night Journey” (Esposito, 2003, Buraq). The Night Journey is mentioned in the Quran (17:1).

beast that helps us ascend to true knowledge” (p. 31); reason, although still a noble aspect of creation, is a desperately limited steed of formal theology. This analogy may pedagogically translate to considering education with children in terms of a shared exploration into the wonders of existence versus a dry, didactic teaching of facts.

### **2.3.2.1 Knowledge as “Light in the Heart”**

In terms of defining knowledge and its qualities, al-Attas (1980) suggested that knowledge may be best defined by its nature, rather than by precise, distinctive characteristics—and, more specifically, by its epistemological nature. Two aspects of this epistemological nature, are, first, that knowledge comes from God (al-Attas, 1980; Nasr, 2012), as the source, subject, and supreme object of knowledge within an Islamic perspective; second, that active ethics are inseparable from the process of learning and coming to know (Nasr, 2012, p. 16). Examining this first quality involving the origin of knowledge—“Muslims are in concerted agreement that all knowledge comes from God” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 5)—Halstead (2004) elaborated: “This applies whether the knowledge is revealed (*naqliyya*) or humanly constructed (‘*aqliyya*) and it means that knowledge must be approached reverently and in humility, for there cannot be any ‘true’ knowledge that is in conflict with religion and divine revelation, only ignorance” (p. 520). Importantly, revelation, as a source of knowledge, never discounted human reason; instead, the two functioned in a complimentary fashion. Karamali (2017, p. 14) cited three poetic lines by Al-Ghazali in describing this relationship:

There are two kinds of reason:  
Innate and revealed.  
Revealed reason does not benefit one  
Without innate reason.  
Just as the sun does not benefit  
Someone who is blind.

Karamali (2017) interpreted these lines as follows:

Revelation is a blazing sun, but it needs the eye of human reason to see it and benefit from its light. By implication, without the blazing light of revelation, the eye of reason strains to see in the dark, sometimes discerning with difficulty what the sun would have revealed to it with ease and sometimes mistaking things for other than what they really are. (p. 14)

Humans throughout history have had access to the blazing light of revelation through the prophets and their messages to humanity, with the final revelation coming in the form of the Qur'an, as mediated and illustrated by Muhammad. Al-Ghazali described true knowledge as “not simply a memorized accumulation of facts but rather ‘a light which floods the heart’” (as quoted in Günther, 2006, p. 382). Winter (2016) suggested that “the Qur'an insists on an epistemology of ‘descending upon your heart’ (2:97), for its author declares himself incomparable and unreachable by the faculties of perception (6:104)” (p. 30). Implications of this particular epistemological perspective come to bear upon “our vision of reality and truth and our methodology of research; our intellectual scope and practical application in planning for what is called ‘development’, which all bear upon our understanding of education” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 5). Accessing knowledge as a primary function of a spiritual process has implications on pedagogy that requires an overarching paradigmatic framework in attempting to capture its farthest reaches, which inspired the research design of this study. It must be noted here that while most Muslim educators foreground the Qur'an—“the immutable source for direction in all human endeavor” (Cook, 2010, p. xi)—and refer to it when seeking to understand, their own understandings are shaped by sociocultural and historical circumstances. Thus, some scholars argue that there may be no *singular* concept of knowledge in Islam; instead, many concepts “held by Muslims in different times and places” (Panjwani, 2004, p. 7–8) interact, change, compliment and build upon each other.

A second quality of knowledge from this perspective is that the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is intentional, active, and aimed at increasing consciousness, particularly in the form of God consciousness, to inform ethical practice. In order for teaching and learning to become an

*education*, participants must understand the *purpose* of seeking knowledge (al-Attas, 1980). In other words, knowledge is not sought for its own sake. In a similar same way, actions without meaningful intention (*niyah*) are valueless from Islamic perspectives. From this divine epistemic intention, two additional points are, first, that knowledge must inspire and be accompanied by action; and, second, that an exalted form of action stemming from the purposeful seeking of knowledge is *adab* (al-Attas, 1980). *Adab* is the refinement of Islamic ethics embodied in actions and cannot be attained without knowledge a person's active and willing participation within a Qur'anic conceptual system, including making constructive use of the instruments of interpretation—embodied senses, cognition, and emotion. “*Adab* identifies itself as knowledge of the purpose of seeking knowledge... to inculcate goodness” in an individual (al-Attas, 1980, p. 12), with *goodness* encompassing spiritual and material life, knowledge and action. The Qur'an described every person as being born into a state of innocence and goodness. The fact that people sometimes err, and other times do not, points to the human potential for goodness (Husain and Ashraf, 1979, as cited in Obeid, 1988). In summary, al-Attas (1980) offered the following definition of *adab as education*:

Adab is recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one's proper place in relation to that reality and to one's physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials. (p. 17)

In this definition, knowledge and being take their places within an overarching conceptual system whereby human consciousness is both holistic and full of potential; where coming to know is a transformative process (Halstead, 2004; Nasr, 2012).

#### **2.3.2.2 Ways of Knowing; Instruments of Consciousness**

Arjmand (2018) described four pathways by which individuals perceive and construct religious knowledge. The primary sources of the Qur'an and the sunnah of Muhammad; 'aql, or intelligence



in the combination of cognition and emotion; scholarly consensus (*ijmā*); and analogical deductive reasoning (*qiyās*). Zine (2008) building on the work of Castellano (2000) described three specific ways of knowing that function in many Muslim communities: revelation; traditional knowledge transmitted through formal and informal instruction; and shared empirical observation and building on the observations of others. Each requires particular pedagogical approaches and evokes instruments of consciousness, which are described below. Examining each of these ways, first, revealed knowledge is divine in origin and accessed through the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as well as individually through intuitions, dreams, or visions (Zine, 2008). Other aspects of the unseen world, the *ghayb*, include unseen beings such as angels and jinn. Zine (2008) pointed out:

These metaphysical world views are part of the common-sense, taken-for-granted ways in which people make sense of their realities and reflect on the world and their relationship to the physical and social environments they inhabit. They are seen as valid ways of knowing and as alternatives to many forms of secular knowledge. (p. 68)

Although these knowledges are beyond the limits of rational, scientific exploration and not verifiable through objective inquiry, they engage with human reason and inform social, cultural, and political practices taking place in the everyday. In a second way of knowing, traditional knowledge is conveyed over generations in the stories of the Abrahamic prophets—Muhammad along with some 26 other prophets whose stories feature in the Qur'an. This traditional knowledge is often relayed in oral storytelling within the family, in a mosque halaqat, or in Islamic school curricula. Third, collective and individual observation of the social and natural worlds and, in particular, divine signs manifest in those worlds, constitutes a dynamic and relevant source of religious knowledge. Pedagogically, the mediated nature of such observation is important, rather than the process of gathering raw data through observation. In other words, children and adults make meaning together, whereby adults make visible particular perspectives on the world and also build upon children's perspectives. Seeking this type of knowledge presents opportunities help

children make larger sense of the religion in lived context. Arjmand (2018), too, described that in addition to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as sources of knowledge, "every humanly attainable truth can be found in the revealed text or can be logically extrapolated from truths that are found in the Scripture" (p. 6) and is dominated by the methodology of *qiyas*, as analogical deductive reasoning, when an example of a concept is not to be found in the primary sources. Inducting from the known to the unknown enables a scholar to identify an application from a principle. Qiyas is often contingent upon a fourth way to construct knowledge, *ijma'* or consensus amongst scholars over historical time, or at a given time. It is often used to determine the best course of action or the best interpretation of a principle.

In terms of human capacity to engage with knowledge, al-Attas (1980) described that while knowledge comes from God, "the manner of its arrival, and the faculties and embodied senses that receive and interpret it are distinctly not the same" (p. 6). Every person has uniquely human facilities with which to capture, interpret, and elaborate this knowledge, including 'aql, as the amalgamation of cognition including reason, rationality, and intellect, and qalb, as the emotional and intuitive heart, which were previously discussed as collectively accommodating consciousness (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1743). Together, these instruments are embodied, unified, and hold a unique place in Islamic conceptual systems in relation to knowledge, meaning-making, discrimination, distinction, and clarification (al-Attas, 1980, 2005). Together, these two instruments guide human actions with implications in this life and the hereafter. Thus, this embodied unity of cognition and emotion is the first of two dimensions in which unity features in Islamic conceptions of knowledge. The second dimension of unity is between the human and the divine. Human unity of cognition/emotion should never be cut off from Divine cognition/emotion, a light that "shines in our minds" (Nasr, 2012, p. 15). The two dimensions of unity housing

consciousness may come together in the *soul*, as an overarching sense faculty and interpreter of knowledge. With reference to the soul as the interpreter of knowledge, al-Attas (2005) provided a definition:

Knowledge is both the arrival of meaning in the soul as well as the soul's arrival at meaning. In this definition we affirm that the soul is not merely a passive recipient like the *tabula rasa* but is also an active one in the sense of setting itself in readiness to receive what it wants to receive, and so to consciously strive for the arrival at meaning. (p. 26)

Although here al-Attas (2005) highlighted that the soul of the learner is active, the emphasis is on *receiving* rather than *constructing* knowledge. Indeed, some scholars (al-Attas, 1980; Halstead, 2004) have described Islamic educational processes in passive ways, suggesting, for example, that “education in Islam as done toward a passive learner, an object who is to be enlightened, developed, and encultured” (Niyozov & Memon, 2011, p. 6). But other scholars take a more participatory, even constructivist, view of the learner whereby the learning process as characterized by both reception, especially in the form of spontaneous insight, and construction, in terms of drawing from cultural resources in meaning making. Zine (2008) described knowledge generation via revelation as active in the sense that people engage intimately and personally with corpuses of revealed knowledge, whereby they make meaning and also derive signs, which are considered as “sacred guidance” (p. 67). This guidance may be considered as a form of divine *tarbiyah*. In Sahin's (2013, p. 182) “cloud-grass theory of education,” nature itself has the capacity to educate and *tarbiyah* is a “process of facilitation and leading thoughts out rather than pushing information in” (3513). The reciprocation is gratitude and cultivating both recognition of ongoing guidance and respondent gratitude are key aspects of Islamic pedagogy. Sahin (2013) described the ability, agency, and responsibility of the learner for self-refinement and change as a Qur'anic imperative: “[I]t is this freedom in becoming one's self, or constructing one's personality, in pursuit of the best of conduct, that constitutes the main reason behind the creation of death and

life” (3914, referencing Qur’an, 67:2). Embodied human senses, cognition, and emotion, unified in consciousness, then, are instruments in the acquisition and construction of knowledge (Obeid, 1988; Qur’an 16:78), and each also constitutes a point of potential connection with God. Thus, seeking knowledge becomes as an act of worship in its own right (Marshallsay, 2012, p. 180); the very act of knowing becomes a sacred act (Nasr, 2012, p. 15).

But senses, cognition, and emotion are also points of connection between educators and learners in their ongoing and mutual development and in their individual and collective interpretation of the ambient knowledge around them. This interpretive work involves studying the world of nature, as al-Attas described: “every detail therein, encompassing the farthest horizons and our very selves, is like a word in that Great Book that speaks to man [*sic*] about its Author” (al-Attas, 1980, p. 5–6). Here, al-Attas referenced a verse in the Qur’an (41:53) that states: “In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves [...]” This verse indicates that, through our instruments of perception, we can become aware of signs of divinity in nature and in our own inner selves. Asad (1980) commented that this verse refers to a progressive deepening of human insight into the wonders of the universe, and a deeper understanding of a person’s own psyche, “all of which points to the existence of a conscious Creator” (p. 1002–1003). As sentient beings, we are ultimately responsible for the ways and degrees by which we perceive, interact, and seek to understand signs in nature and our own selves. In eliciting this process of *tarbiyah*, this flow of knowledge, teachers play a valuable role: “[K]nowledge is considered a sacred ‘light’ and those involved in the process of transmitting knowledge have always been seen as transmitting a Divine gift and thus performing a religious act and duty” (Nasr, 2016, p. 24). This description of knowledge reveals that knowledge is not only considered something that is *constructed* by the

learner, in relationship with teachers and other people, but also something that is *transmitted* from a divine source. This concept developed into a model of Islamic education, at the heart of which is the inseparability of God and knowledge: “‘without [Islamic] knowledge one cannot know God, and without God, there is no [Islamic] knowledge’ (Zia, 2006, as cited in Marshallsay, 2012, p. 181).

In summary, Islamic perspectives on knowledge are expansive and holistic. Knowledge is both personal and collective, spiritual and worldly, and its attainment is possible via a diversity of means including the senses, reason, intuition, inspiration, and revelation (Ahmed, 2014, principle 3, p. 10; Arjmand, 2018; Zine, 2008, p. 58). Acknowledging this holism—and reconciling spiritual knowledge long marginalized by dominant secular ways of knowing with science—is another expression of tawhid (Zine, 2008). Safi (1999) explained:

Methodologically speaking, restoring the divine core to the spheres of knowledge means that revelation has to be reinstated as a source of knowledge. This has to be done without bouncing to the other extreme one finds in traditional knowledge, whereby notions found in the divine text are dogmatically interpreted, without regard to the knowledge acquired through worldly experience. (p. 6–7)

Embracing the pursuit of knowledge, in other words, requires all the human faculties in plumbing the depths of the seen and unseen worlds. Zine’s (2008) framework includes acknowledgement that secular knowledge is just one of many possible paths to understanding and meaning making; privileging secular knowledge silences other ways of knowing. Including these other ways of knowing and other ways of teaching and learning as legitimate epistemic and pedagogic praxis “challenges the dominance of secular and Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies” (p. 50). Indeed, these other ways of knowing lie at the heart of Islamic education and pedagogy.

### 2.3.3 Methods from the Majlis of Muhammad: Pedagogical Foundations

A primary point of presenting a paradigmatic overview of the ontologies and epistemologies undergirding traditional and contemporary perspectives on Islamic teaching, learning, and developing is to better understand the position and role of pedagogies in an individual's comprehension, mastery, and application of Islamic principles and practices. Zine (2008, p. 315) described a discursive function of Islamic schools, whereby pedagogy plays a key role in mediating between rhetorical and textual practices in the religious community at large, which express epistemology, and the everyday practices of schooling, which build ontology. In other words, the pedagogies with which teachers engage students are simultaneously drawn from a larger epistemic foundation and serve as ways by which students reconstruct subjective, ontic meanings of themselves and their positions in the world. Zine (2008) described this process as follows:

The religious messages of mosques and Islamic schools present specific normalizing discourses that affect the educational pedagogy and socialization practices at those sites. The knowledge drawn from those discourses is disseminated through the formal curriculum as well as informally. [...] Through these ideological and social processes, *the discursive practices in Islamic schools produce specific types of subjects*. Muslim children and youth begin to frame their identities and subjectivities through the discourses and narratives made available to them. (p. 314–315; italics added)

Identifying that participation in particular practices contributes to the construction of particular subjectivities within spiritual and social lives, characterized by particular ontological perspectives and leading to new epistemological interpretations, serves to highlight the importance of those practices. Yet, by which practices and pedagogies do teachers engage children in learning Islam? What does the literature say about pedagogies? Are specific pedagogies needed to teach Islam? Where do teachers learn their repertoires of pedagogies? To these questions, Memon's (2011) three questions are added: "What is an Islamic pedagogy? Should we speak of an Islamic pedagogy or

pedagogies? Who defines an Islamic pedagogy(ies)?” (p. 297). These questions together constitute the inquiry driving this research.

### **2.3.3.1 Current Research on Pedagogy**

While much analytic attention recently has been focused upon new curricula for Islamic education (Memon, 2011), less focus has been directed towards pedagogy, as one of three main components of education along with curriculum and school administration. Ajem and Memon (2011) pointed out that, in North America, more attention has been paid to the latter two than the former. Moreover, they argued, “The one area that has been relatively untouched... is the training of teachers toward an Islamically nuanced instructional approach” (p. 1). In other words, while conceptual and empirical research on existing pedagogical practices in sites of Islamic education is nascent, even more so are examinations into how and why teachers use pedagogy towards specific objectives of Islamic education. To this end, Memon (2011) conducted research on what Muslim teachers would value in a teacher-education program based upon an Islamic pedagogical framework. He found that while many teachers knew the material they were teaching, they felt inadequate in terms of how to teach to students in relevant ways that simultaneously did justice to methods within Islamic traditions. In addition, in designing a teacher education program that would equip teachers to integrate Islamic learning across the curriculum, one of the biggest issues was the lack of a codified pedagogy in Islamic traditions. A second overarching challenge was balancing between an ‘Islamic pedagogy’—without essentializing that pedagogy with singular interpretations—and accommodating diversity in perspectives within Muslim educational communities. Memon (2011) argued that principles and practices may be “derived from the vast intellectual and spiritual tradition of Islam; however, each of these is open to interpretation of how they manifest in the contemporary classroom” (p. 295). This point was reflected in perspectives of

participants in this study. One way to retain “fluidity of practice and multiplicity of interpretation” (p. 295), Memon suggested, would be to construct pedagogy on a foundation of principles rather than individual practices and to examine variance in the ways these principles are pedagogically expressed in different times and sites of Islamic education. Which principles would be included within a common set, or even if any could be identified at all, is a significant area of contestation (see also Panjwani, 2004). Abdullah (2018, p. 201), too, pointed out that any analytic approach to deriving pedagogic principles from the hadith (and Qur’an) is necessarily subjective and open to interpretation. Still, Ajem and Memon (2011) attempted to do so in conducting an analysis of pedagogic principles in the Qur’an and sunnah, which they identified through a methodology of juristic derivation from Islamic law and which aimed to guide teachers in matching pedagogical principles to Islamic educational philosophies. Their analysis, necessarily interpretational, provided an important dimension to consider in striving to teach “Islamically” (p. 2). These principles appear throughout the conceptual foundations of this study.

Another way to protect fluidity of practice and multiplicity of interpretation might be to ensure that teacher education programs draw from a variety of theories and approaches, rather than relying on the Islamic tradition alone (Memon, 2011). Rufai (2012) made a crucial point regarding pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam: “pedagogy is not *aqidah* related” (p. 58), with *aqidah* [creed] referring to the articles of faith at the core of an Islamic conceptual system: belief in God, angels, prophets, scriptures, and the Day of Judgment (Esposito, 2003). This means that pedagogies derived from Islamic primary sources may be optimal for engaging learners in teaching and learning Islam but, ultimately, *best pedagogical practices* should be used, whether or not they are derived from the primary sources. This perspective sheds light on pedagogical flexibility as witnessed in empirical studies in sites of Islamic Education, including this study. Rufai (2012)



suggested that there is theological flexibility in pedagogy because pedagogy is not included in the core creed of Islam. As the primary sources do contain pedagogical *principles*, like those articulated by Ajem and Memon (2011)—no matter how differentially interpreted and emphasized as relevant—educators may exercise pedagogical creativity in working with, and extending, those principles. Safi (2003) argued for the importance of epistemological pluralism, in the context of working for social justice, in extending methodological boundaries, “which freely and openly draws from sources outside of Islamic tradition, which can serve as useful tools in the global pursuit of justice” (p. 48).

As with other aspects of Islamic Education, conceptual studies outnumbered empirical ones. Conceptual examination of pedagogical principles in the Qur’an and Sunnah were considered in light of contemporary classroom realities (Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018). Abdullah, Abdalla, and Jorgensen (2015) conducted an inductive grounded analysis of 171 hadith to identify pedagogical principles, which they then synthesized with the Australian government’s productive pedagogies into a proposed framework for teachers working within an Australian Islamic schooling context. Asserting that Islamic school renewal must occur within an overarching Islamic perspective on education and pedagogy, they proposed a Prophetic framework intended to provide a teacher with examples of types of teaching practices, student activities and assessment that will support or hinder student learning in line with Prophetic pedagogy. The framework included the following elements: building relationships, relevance, deep knowledge (what and why), deep understanding (how), differentiation, engagement (techniques to aid retention, including explanations of negative consequences for discouragement), authenticity of knowledge (identifying sources of knowledge), language precision (including clear terminology of new concepts), and memorization as key. Based on their analysis, Abdullah, Abdalla, and Jorgensen

(2015) recommended that each Islamic school review current pedagogical practices across all curricular areas, invest in teacher education to ensure that all teachers—trained and untrained practitioners—are educated toward the develop a consistent pedagogy based on Islamic primary sources.

Memon and Alhashmi's (2018) essay on Islamic pedagogy pointed out a flaw in contemporary discourse and practice of Islamic education; it fails to take into account the “big questions in education” (p. 170), including *why*, *whom*, *what*, *when*, and *where*. They suggested broadening the discourse around education towards that of pedagogy, which, they claimed, takes into account these questions. While it is arguable as to whether switching the term education for pedagogy would precipitate anything more than a semantic shift (Sahin, 2018), their point should be noted: Muslim scholars, educators, and practitioners need to inquire more broadly and deeply into the scope of education in Islamic traditions.

In terms of empirical studies, few have examined pedagogies in the instruction of specifically Islamic material. Contributing to this gap, Abdalla (2018) conducted a qualitative study with school coordinators, teachers, and students to examine Islamic studies instruction and pedagogy within Islamic schools in Australia. He used Ajem and Memon's (2011) principles of Islamic pedagogy as a rubric in classroom observation, which he described as a methodology-in-progress and useful in identifying aspects of pedagogy derived from Islamic traditions. Abdalla (2018) found that while some pedagogical strengths featured in the Islamic studies classrooms—such as teachers who engaged students in exploring “real-life Islam”—a main theme of the study was the “absence of an appropriate pedagogy” (p. 275). Research participants reported that while some teachers were dedicated to teaching the students Islam, “they are ‘not doing justice’ to this knowledge on account of the way the subject is being taught” (p. 275). Abdalla (2018) concluded

that unnecessary strictness, rigidity, and authoritative teaching styles, a lack of creative, relevant, and interactive pedagogy may lead to student disengagement in learning and even alienation from Islam. Pedagogical coherence, effectiveness and purposefulness, as described by Memon and Ajem (2011) as the how, what, and the why, were missing from expressions of pedagogy at this Australian Islamic school.

Hardaker and Sabki (2014) conducted an anthropological study focusing on pedagogy at a British madrasa for adults. Beginning upon the epistemological foundation of the unity of knowledge and the sacred, they examined pedagogy holistically, as an approach that has the capacity to form the whole person. Another primary premise was recognition that people gain sensory information in a variety of physical ways and the madrasa's specific approach engaged the senses by privileging "orality, kinesthesia, and embodiment" (p. 3) through "heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner" (p. 2) in the facilitation of memorization and didactic approaches towards sacred texts.

Vicini (2013) conducted an ethnographic study in Turkey, in a Gülen community's housing system, where male high-school students prepared for exams while living in the houses of older, university students, who act as role models and guides for younger boys in an academic and spiritual maturation process. The younger boys improved their academic performance while simultaneously "learning the Islamic life path promoted by the community" (p. 383), which was modeled on the conduct of Muhammad. Importantly, Vicini (2013) illustrated that the pedagogical method of *exemplariness* in the older students worked through "pedagogies of affection," which structured the learning processes and inspired emulation in shaping "a specific kind of educated Muslim" (p. 396). The central role of pedagogies of affection kept alive moral-ethical content in light of competition with secular institutions. From Vicini's (2013) study, these pedagogies of

affection clustering around exemplariness might define an Islamic pedagogy derived from Prophetic exemplarity.

Rustham, Arifin, and Abd Rashid (2012) conducted a survey of 302 students at a weekend madrasa in Singapore, inquiring into the Islamic education teachers' methodologies in teaching traditional Islamic subjects, the methodologies preferred by students, and the level of students' participation in class. Rustham et al.'s (2012) self-developed survey instrument seemed to tap many of the pedagogies that previous research has identified in the primary sources—including participation, action and simulation, group work, inquiry, and inquiry expressed as conducting research, storytelling, out of classroom application work, debates, discussions, games, and humor. Students reported that information-intensive lecturing was the primary pedagogy; yet humor and watching videos were their preferred pedagogies. Rustham et al.'s (2012) pedagogical recommendations included enhancing lecture pedagogy with multimedia tools, interesting and relevant to young Muslims, integrating more hands-on activities and outdoor learning. While use of humor has been identified as a pedagogical tool with which Muhammad engaged his companions<sup>92</sup> (Abu Ghuddah, 2017), Rustham et al. (2012) did not suggest that an 'Islamic pedagogy' is the only way to teach Islamic studies at a madrasa. Instead, they emphasized pedagogies of interest to the students and, thus, highlighted connections between teaching methods, student character development, and student connection to the material being taught.

Some studies shed light on pedagogy tangentially. For example, Burglund (2011) conducted an ethnographic study at two Muslim schools in Sweden looking specifically at how Islamic

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<sup>92</sup> An example is a hadith describing how a man once asked Muhammad to give him a camel. Muhammad replied, "I'll give you the child of a camel." The man said, 'O Messenger of Allah! What can I do with the child of a camel?' So Muhammad replied, "Are not all camels children of camels?" (Abu Ghuddah, 2017, 3009). Muhammad's humour may have served to strengthen relationships while creating an engaging educational environment in which to emphasize a particular principle or to stimulate thinking.

Religious Education (IRE) is formed as a confessional school subject under the jurisdiction of the Swedish school system. Pedagogy arose as a significant part of her study, as teachers' pedagogical expressions were highly personalized expressions of their own ways of understanding of larger global issues regarding incorporating the Qur'an into children's education, gender equality, and living as minorities in Sweden. This study highlighted the fact that IRE at these Muslim schools involved educating children into one of several interpretative traditions, pedagogically expressed by individual teachers, which compete for conceptual space in Sweden. "Adapting the content of IRE is not a matter of inventing new interpretations or Islamic traditions; it is a matter of shifting perspectives on what in the common Islamic tradition is considered to be fundamental, essential and relevant" (p. 509). Berglund (2011) found that this interpretative work was a primary task for the teachers.

Tan and Abbas (2009) examined the Singaporean government's introduction of new pedagogies in madrasa education through new Islamic textbooks as part of an educational reform initiative. They described madrasas in Singapore as aiming "primarily to produce Muslim scholars and teachers to lead the community on religious matters" (p. 27). Pedagogies in these madrasas tend towards teacher-centered practices, which run contrary, they argued, to traditional student-centered pedagogies "propagated by Muslim scholars and practiced in Islamic institutions since the medieval times" (p. 25). Their study identified that the pedagogies promoted in the textbooks, including prompting discussions of social differences in a pluralistic society, extending them through interactive learning activities, and discussing. Tan and Abbas (2009) described as reminiscent of the active and dialogic participation between students in traditional sites of Islamic education.

Although Erdreich's (2016) study on spirituality in an Islamic teacher training college in Israel is not directly related to the focus here on pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam with children, two relevant points drawn from her study are: first, that in making room for *spirituality* in teacher training, pedagogy transcends "assumed neoliberal or neoconservative struggle over standards and knowledge" (p. 10); and second, on a pedagogical level, "spirituality is embodied both individually and as a group, fusing the professional and the religious into new conceptions of connectivity or kinship of the cultural group" (p. 10). Both points identify spirituality as important but marginalized knowledge.

### **2.3.3.2 Pedagogic Themes in the Primary Sources**

In the contemporary literature on pedagogy, scholars suggested that both the Qur'an and the Sunnah contain clear pedagogical dimensions and inspirations for contemporary practices (Abdullah, Abdalla & Jorgensen, 2015; Abdullah, 2018; Ajem & Memon, 2011; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018, p. 174–75; Rufai, 2010; Sahin, 2013, 2017). While the Qur'an is considered the "sacred heart of Islamic imagination," containing a pedagogic vision that aims to facilitate the actualization of human of human potential towards cognitive, emotional, and spiritual maturity (Sahin, 2013, 3222), Muhammad was considered an exemplary educator who would teach people and help them grow in wisdom and in spiritual purification (Rufai, 2010; Qur'an 3:164; 2:159). As the embodiment of Qur'anic principles, Muhammad's life is "a pedagogic resource to be used by successive generations of Muslims living in different cultural and historical contexts" (Sahin, 2013, 3222). Just as centering the Qur'an and accepting Muhammad's sunnah as a guiding framework are both religious imperatives for many Muslim practitioners, accepting pedagogical aspects of the Qur'an and Muhammad's Sunnah may be a religious imperative for many Muslim educators (Mogra, 2010, p. 318, 321). Rufai (2010) went as far as to assert that "only principles

and methods grounded on the primary sources of Islamic tradition are adequate in serving the pedagogical and evaluational needs of the Muslims” (p. 214). Obeid (1988) described a distinct sequence of learning unfolds as, first, observing events of the natural and social worlds, and role models; listening to what peers, teachers, parents, and more experienced others say; second, analyzing this material, and reflecting on it, by means of one’s intelligence and feelings; third, applying principles and practices in life; fourth, self-assessment; and fifth, further refinement.

In this section, I examine literature in English on pedagogies derived from the primary sources, including Abu Ghuddah (2017); Ahmed, M.D (1987); Ajem and Memon (2011); Al-Sadan (1997); Mogra (2010); Nasr (2012); Obeid (1988); Rufai (2010, pp. 199–207); Selçuk (2015), and Sahin (2013, 2017). Elsewhere, I conducted a thematic analysis upon this literature in order to discern pedagogic themes (Alkouatli, 2018), which were based upon reoccurring principles and which constitute sensitizing concepts in this study. These sensitizing concepts were clusters of pedagogies that overlapped because the holistic nature of education in Islam makes it difficult to strictly isolate elements for analysis. In addition, all of the pedagogic sensitizing concepts tapped the foundational epistemic conception of the learner as Divinely equipped for *self*-development, with the instruments of sense organs, cognition, and emotion as ways of gathering knowledge and making sense of it (Obeid, 1988). The pedagogies also seemed to aim for a quality that al-Attas (1980) described as knowledge of the purpose of seeking knowledge. This purpose relates to awareness of the “special place in the grand framework of human existence” that every person occupies (Ajem & Memon, 2011, p. 21).

Here, I will briefly describe two relevant clusters of pedagogical sensitizing concepts: relational pedagogies and pedagogies of mutual engagement. A third one, transcendent

pedagogies, requires expanded explanation below.<sup>93</sup> First, relational pedagogies highlighted the social nature of teaching and learning, including role modeling, whereby human relationships are educative, as both substrates for learning and developing and catalysts towards more-developed, more-knowledgeable, more-conscious states. Love, care, and compassion seem to have characterized Muhammad's pedagogy; as an educator fully aware of his responsibilities in dealing with human hearts and minds, who cared passionately for his students and aimed to help them "actualize their best potential" (Günther, 2006, p. 385). Muhammad's pedagogy of care extended across his diverse community—which included men and women "of all clans and all social categories" (Ramadan, 2007, p. 38), as well as diverse ethnicities: African, Arab, Egyptian and Persian—and translated into accounting for individual differences in teaching and learning needs. Ajem and Memon (2011) asserted the importance of recognizing the many variables that make each student unique. Their sixth principle: "Instruction is in accordance with students' aptitude, pace, and learning style" (p. 49), extending from the Prophetic differentiated pedagogical approach, emphasized aptitude, pace, and learning style. These relational pedagogies were clearly reflected in the data corpus of this study.

Second, pedagogies of mutual engagement make visible teaching, learning, and developing as active and participatory, mutual and reciprocal, life-long endeavors of both teachers and students. One of the Qur'an's central pedagogic features is that it worked in conjunction with the unfolding life of Muhammad: verses were introduced into a lived contextual situation as both an illustration and an interaction, often in response to situations or concerns experienced by the early

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<sup>93</sup> These themes were generated through thematic analysis of literature in English of primary source pedagogies; see Alkoutli (2018). They were also observed in my Master's research in terms of educators' uses of use of *affection* as a pedagogic quality and participation as pedagogy in social practices characterized by heterogeneity of age and ability (see Section 1.3 above).



Muslim community (Sahin, 2013). Sabrin (2010) described the Qur'an as an "entire collection of case scenarios where practical application of verses was taught *live*, on the spot" (p. 49). These pedagogies include doing together, speaking together, questioning together, and reflecting together. They were also reflected in the data of this study, although they largely seemed incidental rather than intentional.

While all of the pedagogies described in the primary sources appear to be aimed at supporting a learner's mastery and internalization of Islamic principles and practices, they primarily function in the tangible realm. Transcendent pedagogies, a third cluster that includes imagination and memorization, are perhaps the most complicated and contested in that they draw from intangible sources and aim for intangible objectives. As al-Attas (1980) described education as recognition of the locations of things in order to recognize "the proper place of God in the order of being and existence" (p. 7), glimmers of the order of existence are visible within the conceptual system of the Qur'an and also within the world of nature, as an open book, where every detail, from the farthest horizon to the depths of our own selves, points towards its Author. This third pedagogic sensitizing concept—transcendent pedagogies—involves ways of engaging with learners in light of an intangible, esoteric, and divine Educator, which is a primary objective of Islamic education. As Muslims place Muhammad's source material, the Qur'an, as originating in the *ghayb*—reality beyond the reach of human perception (Asad, 1980)—key learning outcomes also lie in the *ghayb*, such as faith, God-consciousness (*taqwa*), and even heaven as an existential aim. Evoking imagination as pedagogy and engaging in memorization transcend normative boundaries between tangible/intangible, self/other. Pedagogies that facilitate a person's connection with divinity may be important in linking the overarching aims of Islamic education with the development of individual consciousness.

Some scholars have defined *imagination* as the brain's activity of combining elements in the creation of something new; they highlighted the importance of rich lived experience in contributing fodder to imagination; and they foregrounded imagination as fundamental to almost all mental activity—from remembering the past, to embellishing the present, to visualizing the future (Ricouer, 1990; Vygotsky, 1987). Imagination is integrated throughout the Qur'an; Selçuk (2015) described a language of images, relaying its messages in a “transfer from the literal to the metaphorical” by means of “symbols (*mithal*), signs (*ramz*), and likenesses (*amthal*)” (p. 259). Imagination also featured in Muhammad's repertoires of pedagogies in various ways. He counseled people to engage in acts of worship *as if* they were actually seeing God (Abu Ghuddah, 2017). Such imagining, as a meta-perspective focusing attention on practices of conscious performance, may have contributed to inspiring excellence in humility, cleanliness, attire, and behavior (Al-Nawawi, 2010). Muhammad also evoked imagination in moral-ethical reasoning. A young man once came to Muhammad to ask permission to commit fornication. Muhammad asked the man to imagine if fornication could be permitted for his mother, sister, or (future) daughter. The young man replied emphatically in the negative whereupon Muhammad placed his hand on the young man's chest and asked God to purify his heart. This example reflects a pedagogical integration of relationship, differentiated learning, dialogue, inquiry, and reflection whereby Muhammad uprooted the young man's urge without ever citing any Qur'anic verses prohibiting fornication (Abu Ghuddah, 2017). Instead, he evoked imagination to expand perspective. Selçuk (2015) argued that imagination needs to be employed more often as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning Islam.

A secular liberal criticism of Islamic education is the central place of memorization as pedagogy (Boyle, 2006; Halstead, 2004; Memon & Alhashmi, 2018, p. 176); yet it is often

misunderstood, and the various existential and ultimate purposes of Qur'anic memorization remain under-examined. Within contexts of Islamic education, two conflicting impulses arise. First, educators ask how the ongoing significance of memorization, and oral pedagogies in Arabic, might be reconciled with rising prevalence of English in schools, increasing literacy rates, translations of the Qur'an into various languages, new media and digital technology (Boyle, 2006). Scholars critique dominant pedagogical approaches in Islamic classrooms in parts of Asia as being memorization within a teacher-centered learning environment, marginalizing higher-order learning processes—such as understanding, questioning, analysis, and discussion (Zia, 2006, p. 33, as cited in Tan & Abbas, 2009, p. 33)—and rarely exploring connections between Qur'anic teachings and lived experiences (Tan & Abbas, 2009, p. 33). In a second and contradictory impulse, others lament that, “Qur'anic memorization in the contemporary schools is often much abridged from what it was in the past” (Boyle, 2006, p. 487). The demands of public education have resulted in diminished time spent on memorizing the Qur'an. In full-time Islamic schools, educators described an additional challenge: integrating Qur'anic knowledge into secular curricula. An educational activist in Zine's (2008) study in full-time Islamic schools in Canada advocated: “[I]t is not enough for kids to memorize Qur'an unless that Qur'an is then taken and then integrated into the secular curriculum. Then the kids can make the connection” (p. 231). Zine (2008) described aims of decentering secular knowledge as the basis for teaching and learning to make way for new epistemic possibilities offered by Islamic education, with Qur'anic knowledge as a “living curriculum” infused through all subject areas” (p. 232). Despite the contestations around memorization as pedagogy, many educators, social and spiritual leaders, and parents agree: “There is no other methodology to *get* the Qur'an” (Alkouatli, 2015, p. 155).

Although transcendent pedagogies may be amongst the most meaningful for Islamic practitioners, they may be the most misunderstood by non-Muslims. Re-legitimizing them, and reclaiming their significance, may be a step towards centering marginalized pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam. In this study, educators' references to transcendent pedagogies were abundant and enabled constructing upon this initial sensitizing concept from the primary-source literature. The three clusters of pedagogic sensitizing concepts described here—relational pedagogies, pedagogies of mutual engagement, and transcendent pedagogies—may contribute to outlining a distinct epistemic perspective whereby both content and ways of engaging with that content mutually work together to nurture a particular moral-ethical character and develop a specific Islamic consciousness.

#### **2.3.3.3 Pedagogical Diaspora**

Taken together, iterations of the pedagogies described in the primary sources may be found in Islamic schools today. Based on fieldwork in Morocco, Nigeria, and Yemen, Boyle (2006) offered a description of an archetypical Islamic school:

The class encompasses children of different ages and levels. The master works one-on-one with the children and has the older or more accomplished students work with and coach the younger and less accomplished ones. The school year is flexible; students leave school and return, depending on the labor needs of their families. Students progress in the course of their studies at their own pace, according to how fast they master or memorize the particular material they are working on. There are no examinations or grades. If a student learns all he can from one teacher, he will get an attestation that he has studied with that teacher and perhaps go out and seek another teacher. (p. 482)

Within this description, characterized by students of mixed ages studying at a flexible pace and curriculum, primary-source pedagogic themes appear in the form of a teacher–learner dyadic relationship, peer teaching and scaffolding, differentiated teaching and learning, and travel as pedagogy. Boyle (2006) recounted how this archetypal Islamic school model moved and evolved over time and place, “from the Middle East to Asia and Africa, where it intermingled with existing

educational structures and models” (p. 483). While acknowledging that Islamic schools vary widely across Muslim communities, Boyle (2006) also pinpointed some shared defining traits, including that they are modeled on the educational practices of Muhammad and his companions and a central feature and educational objective is engagement with the Qur’an. In Turkey, the community that Vicini (2013) studied followed “a classic educational path in Islamic traditions, going back to the Prophet’s leadership of the first Muslim community” (p. 390); he described this path as having roots in Islamic pedagogical tradition, made even more valuable in today’s secularized society. In an English madrasa, Hardaker and Sabki (2014) described another aspect mirroring Prophetic practices: arranging the day’s pedagogy around the times of the five prayers. Teaching and learning in *halaqah*; Qur’an recitation, studying hadith and Islamic principles, discussing and disputing, jurisprudence, and Arabic language learning, each had their place in a sequence that moved with the sun across the sky. Similitudes of core elements of pedagogy and curricula may be found from Singapore to Nigeria to Canada, as educators in disparate sites of Islamic education draw inspiration a Prophetic pedagogical model that originated in the Hijaz 1400 years ago and is considered by some as best practices in teaching and learning Islam (Abdalla, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2015; Memon, 2011; Mogra, 2010; Rufai, 2010; Sabrin, 2010). Partially imagined, partially preserved in the many hadith, sayings, and stories of his life, Muhammad’s pedagogies cohere in his majlis, where he taught his earliest companions, and towards which many Muslim educators orient themselves today in a pedagogical diaspora that goes beyond human movement over geographical space and historical time. Yet, the ways in which educators reinterpret and reimagine pedagogies from the majlis of Muhammad differ in response to local time and place, evolving to fit the cultural, educational, and social needs of the people they serve.

Chapter 6 examines an iteration of this phenomena as described by Muslim educators tailoring their pedagogies to meet learning objectives in Canadian context.

Some implications may be drawn from this review of literature on pedagogy in sites of Islamic education, as well as themes in the literature on primary-source pedagogies. First, rich descriptions of pedagogies in the primary sources reveal creativity and generativity, along with some pedagogies less relevant today. Second, while it appears that contemporary educators actively, intentionally, passionately, and differentially draw from interpretations of Prophetic pedagogy to inform their methods of teaching and learning Islam, the degrees to which these pedagogies are reflected in contemporary pedagogical practice remain empirically unclear and presents a gap in the literature to which this study aims to contribute. Third, in understanding education in Muslim traditions as “conversations” occurring over time and place, requiring critical and creative participation in the recreation of new Muslim subjectivities (Kazmi, 2003, p. 279), pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam play a key role. While some pedagogies traditional to Islamic material, like memorization and imagination, have been simultaneously disparaged in secular educational perspectives, and perhaps ineffectively utilized in Muslim educational practices, these pedagogies hold potential in significantly contributing to criticality and creativity. The literature makes clear that pedagogy, extending from Zine’s (2008) first principle of holism, cannot be understood as separate from foundational Islamic epistemologies that precede them and educational, developmental, and ontological outcomes toward which they aim. Pedagogies must be understood within a tawhidic perspective and an Islamic conceptual system in which they play a pivotal role in linking sociocultural expressions of Islam in rhetorical and textual practices with the everyday practices of schooling that have consequences on individual meaning making, subjectivity, and personal development (Zine, 2008).

## **2.4 Chapter 2 Summary**

Comprehensions of pedagogy in sites of Islamic education are predicated upon a rich sociocultural and conceptual history, aspects of which are contested in scholarly discourse. This chapter aimed to overview the literature in English on Islamic Education to construct a paradigmatic foundation—translated into the language of social science by a critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008)—from which to draw out sensitizing concepts foundational to teaching and learning Islam. These include purposes of human life, human development, and Islamic education itself; sources of knowledge and ways of knowing; ongoing marginalization of Muslims, Islamic epistemologies, and aspects of Islamic education; and the differing uses of pedagogies for different objectives over time and place. These concepts suggest that sites of Islamic education—and their pedagogies—are just one expression of a comprehensive and life-long education aimed at individual and social development in line with Qur’anic and Prophetic ideals that is reflected in different spheres of a child’s life. This education, according to this literature, is characterized by systemic unity (tawhid), whereby sacred and secular sources of knowledge combine to inform principles embodied in practices to comprise a living curriculum in which children participate with adults, as more experienced members of the community; where educational and developmental objectives converge in shaping all aspects of whole people; and where all aspects of life are educative. This conceptual systemic unity may contribute to illuminating why ‘education’ never arose as a discipline distinct from other Islamic disciplines. It may also contribute to explaining why the exact form that Islamic education should take is not detailed in the primary sources (Marshall, 2012, p. 181). If Islamic education is to take place in various domains of life, pedagogical flexibility is needed in to ensure educational relevance in each of those domains, and also in supporting young Muslims in reconceptualizing Islamic

education in new times and places (Kazmi, 2003, p. 284; Niyozov & Memon, 2011, Panjwani, 2004; Ramadan, 2013). From a paradigmatic foundation considering big questions in iterations of Islamic education, this research inquires into the pedagogical *how* as it enables the ontological *why*. In other words, with what pedagogies do educators engage children towards realization of educational and developmental objectives? In the process of this inquiry, I also hope to contribute to answering Memon's (2011) questions—"What is an Islamic pedagogy? Should we speak of an Islamic pedagogy or pedagogies? Who defines an Islamic pedagogy(ies)?"—which have not been sufficiently, comprehensively answered.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology: Consistency in Complexity**

The architecture of this critical interpretive study aimed for intentionality, clarity, and consistency across ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods in approaching the research questions. It aimed to work against *unconsciousness* (never completely realizable), as arguably the “most substantial obstacle posed to social research” (Pascale, 2011, p. 3). Building upon the Islamic conceptual paradigmatic frame presented in Chapter 2, this chapter describes the research approach in four parts. The first part describes the research design as an Islamic interpretive bricolage by necessity of the cultural context of researcher, participants, and research questions and in aiming for Islamic coherence. I detail the implications of my own social location on the design (3.1.1). I explain why an Islamic paradigm is conceptually prior to interpretivism as a methodology (3.1.2) and justify that methodology in section 3.1.3. Guiding Islamic research principles (Ahmed, 2014) are described in section 3.1.4 and the bricolage in 3.1.5. The second part of this chapter describes the research participants: criteria, invitation, and participation. The third part details the three methods of data collection and how they worked together: semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009); *halaqat* (or dialogic circles), as an Islamically-coherent method (Ahmed, 2014); and artifact-mediated halaqat, whereby participants created an artifact as a visual representation of pedagogy, which we then discussed. In the fourth part, I describe the iterative analytic processes of data familiarization, coding (Saldaña, 2013), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and data triangulation. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study’s qualitative basis can be defined as social science research aiming to understand meanings of human perspectives and practices by asking “open questions about phenomena as they occur in context” to generate textual data, which is then analyzed in textual form (Carter &

Little, 2007, p. 1316). Qualitative research was particularly appropriate for this study—which may be considered *exploratory* given the lack of empirical research—where the phenomena in question were pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam, made visible by educators’ interpretative articulations of their perspectives, experiences, and challenges, in collegial conversation with the researcher and other educators, which comprised the main data corpus of this study. Some pictorial representations (nine artifacts) contributed to that corpus. As data, verbal articulations and pictorial representations are interpretations that lend themselves to both collection and analysis within an interpretivist methodology. Yet the data and the methodology itself require interpretation in cultural context. Thus, this research was built upon a critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008) as part of a larger Islamic conceptual paradigm, integrating interpretivist methodology tailored to do specifically interpretative work (Pascale, 2011).

As a way of assessing the quality of qualitative research, Carter and Little (2007) detailed a framework of internal consistency between epistemology, methodology, and method. Specifically, they described *epistemology* as the study and justification of knowledge; *methodology* as the process of inquiry and justification for the research design, including selection of particular methods to generate data; and *methods* as research action in the form of techniques for gathering data and conducting analysis, which together create knowledge (p. 1317).<sup>94</sup> *Islamic knowledge* is both a contextual starting point of this study and an intended outcome. Al-Zeera (2001) defined Islamic knowledge as: “knowledge that is based on an Islamic paradigm and emerges from Islamic

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<sup>94</sup> Braun and Clarke (2006) described the importance of qualitative consistency in a related way, whereby the theoretical framework and methods are analytic decisions that the researcher makes, which must match each other and match the object of the researcher’s inquiry. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) identified methodology as research approach linked to a paradigm of overarching principles, theories, and values that underpin that approach, as expressed through methods. Additional consistency, in this study, involved matching the epistemology, methodology, and methods to both deeper ontological concerns and research objectives in response to calls in the literature on the needs and perspectives of the community it aims to serve.

epistemology and Islamic methodology” (p. xxi). Both “Islamic methods” and an “Islamic paradigm” (p. xxviii) are required to guide research and interpret data. In other words, effective social research that taps a wide range of human experiences must employ a research paradigm as an interpretative frame from which to make knowledge claims that is clear and consistent with the ontologies and epistemologies—the paradigmatic perspectives—of the researcher, research participants, and contextual scholars. Pascale (2011) emphasized that research paradigms offer researchers more than “simple orientations for data collection and analysis [...] they provide frameworks for *recognizing what we see*, as well as for understanding the relevance and importance of what we see” (p. 25; italics added). As such, paradigms make data visible from particular perspectives. A central way to understand the relevance of data generated with Muslim educators is to understand the paradigmatic context in which that data was generated.

In explicating an Islamic paradigm overarching this research, I started with Zine’s (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework in section 2.2. I examined its anticolonial foundations and expansions in section 2.2.2 and drew from the literature on Islamic Education three conceptual elaborations that broaden it into a paradigm in section 2.3: specifically, ontological foundations (2.3.1), epistemological foundations (2.3.2), and pedagogical foundations (2.3.3). A crucial point to reiterate here, as in the previous chapters, is that ontology and epistemology are drawn in this study primarily from the literature on Islamic *Education*—not Islamic theology or philosophy.<sup>95</sup> Discussions of philosophical or theological ontology or epistemology, including from the fields of Islamic Studies, are beyond the scope of this study. Instead, various educators, researchers, and scholars of Islamic Education have detailed ontological and epistemological perspectives, principles, and pedagogical practices within Islamic

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<sup>95</sup> See footnote 43, page 42.

Educational contexts—indeed, “a pedagogical tradition exists within Islamic scholarship” (Memon, 2011, p. 288), including Ahmed (2012, 2014); Ajem & Memon (2011); al-Attas (1980, 2005); Al Zeera (2001); and Zine (2008)—from which contemporary Muslim educators may draw, and from which I drew in assembling Islamic conceptual paradigm that frames this study.<sup>96</sup>

Taking seriously the interpretative nature of qualitative research in sociocultural-historical context, interpretivism as a methodology provided an analytic framework for processes of interpreting evidence (Pascale, 2011). A key perspective that interpretivism offered to this study was in recognizing that people “actively interpret or make sense of their environment and of themselves... shaped by the particular cultures in which they live” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 26). In aiming to understand Muslim educators’ perspectives on pedagogy, interpretivism brought into focus the influence of distinctive and differing cultural and contextual orientations amongst research participants. In addition, the interpretivist researcher centers participants’ perspectives in the research process while simultaneously recognizing the impacts of her own interpretations shaped by culture, background, and experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). While interpretivism is often identified as a research *paradigm*, in this study it was relegated to the level of *methodology*—primarily because it is not conceptually broad enough to encompass the full range of human experience in Muslim educational contexts. In other words, in order to make sense of the data in the fullest way possible, a paradigm wider than an interpretative one was required.

Criticality in Zine’s (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework was necessarily mirrored in the research design of this study, making it a *critical interpretive* one. Aspects of criticality in social science are centrally concerned with challenging oppressive power

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<sup>96</sup> Exceptions include scholars of Islamic Studies, Islamic theologians or philosophers who have written specifically about education and which fill a particular gap in the literature on Islamic Education, including Nasr (2012, 2016); Rahman (1980, 1988); and Winter (2016).

(Cannella & Lincoln, 2018, p. 83). While scholars have emphasized that the production of knowledge congruent with an Islamic conceptual paradigm has been expressed over time in rich intellectual contributions to knowledge in astronomy, geography, math, medicine, psychology, and other sciences (Al Zeera, 2001; Haque, 2004; Saliba, 2007, 2009), they have also noted how these intellectual contributions have been marginalized over time (Grosfoguel, 2010; Sahin, 2018; Zine, 2008). This study centered people and paradigms marginalized by a secular, dominant culture, which exerts epistemic hegemony on Islamic ways of knowing and being and shapes expressions of Islamophobia (Grosfoguel, 2010). Yet this recognition of marginalization does not equate to acritical acceptance of Islamic pedagogic approaches.<sup>97</sup> Rahman (1988, p. 11) described the importance of creatively critiquing one's own tradition, first, as Islamic intellectual work.<sup>98</sup> Criticality, reflection, creativity, and dynamism are paramount qualities in processes of self-transformation and the production of new knowledge that originates in a Qur'anic foundation (Sahin, 2018).<sup>99</sup> Critical dominant-culture social scientists have described a *critical ethical stance* as originating in the researcher herself, in making decisions about the research, and extending outward (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018). Working within an Islamic paradigm specifically articulates this ethical stance within the human-being-as-researcher, enabling identification of injustices within one's own self. Specifically, I critiqued the limitations of my own interpretations, my strengths and weaknesses as a researcher, and the quality of my research processes as flawed acts of worship. As such, the criticality that asserts itself in framing this study originated internally.

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<sup>97</sup> Educators themselves critiqued pedagogy in sites of Islamic education, as detailed primarily in section 6.2: 'Connecting Islam to Negative Feelings' and other Mis-Pedagogies.

<sup>98</sup> A particular area requiring critique is contemporary pedagogy in sites of Islamic education, which is part of the rationale behind the research questions of this study.

<sup>99</sup> "[T]he Qur'an frames oral composition and transmission within a wider reflective and critical pedagogy of the voice that aims to facilitate human self-awareness and transformation" (Sahin, 2018, p. 6).

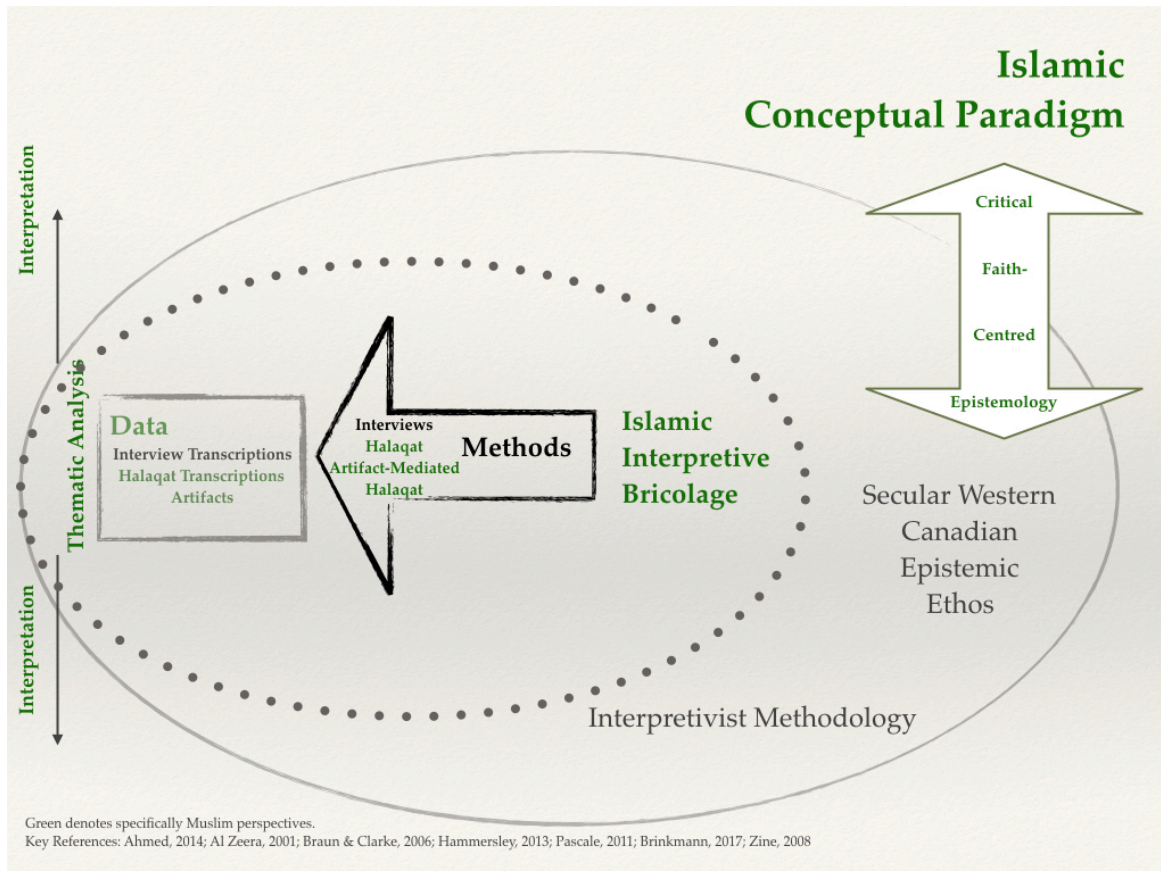
Extending outwards, criticality was employed in the Islamic research principles (Ahmed, 2014) guiding the study (see 3.1.4 Ethical Concerns, Principles, and Actions) and in the critical faith-centered epistemological framework that was intended to create conceptual space for examining injustices within the sites of Islamic education, broadly, space within which faith-centered people can identify, critique, and resist racism, classism, and sexism, from both *outside* and *within* their own communities, and in “the structural circumstances that sustain them” (Zine, 2008, p. 51).<sup>100</sup> Thus criticality, like other concepts imbricated in this study, is colored by perspectives of holism, individual accountability, and transcendence. If, as secular, qualitative scholars assert, critical social science “opens the doors of the academy so that the voices of oppressed people can be heard and honored and so that others can learn from them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 33), the pedagogical typology constructed from this critical research humbly offers itself towards more horizontal “inter-epistemic interactions” (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 36).

Incorporating a critical interpretivist methodology within an Islamic paradigm formed a bricolage within which Islamic research principles (Ahmed, 2014) guided the use of three methods: semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2017), halaqat (Ahmed, 2014), and artifact-mediated halaqat (see Figure 3.1. Research Design). Data generated through these methods were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This chapter (3) details how this paradigmatic foundation incorporated interpretivist methodology and methods in an Islamic interpretive bricolage relevant to members of one Canadian Muslim community. As such, this Islamic paradigm was, first, already an interpretation and, thus, open to other interpretations; and,

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<sup>100</sup> In this study, two educators specifically described grappling with sexism within social and educational communities: Faris described his pedagogy as intending to motivate young Muslims to consider issues of sexual justice as part of the faith; Fatima pointed out that that particular differing social standards applied to boys and girls in Egypt could not be justified Islamically and should not be replicated in Canadian-Muslim communities (see section 5.1.1.1).

second, contribution to enabling examination of “how faith and spirituality constantly inform daily social life and personal development” (Zine, 2008, p. 54), which included initial intentions and intended outcomes of particular pedagogies.



**Figure 3.1 Research Design: Islamic Interpretive Bricolage**

### 3.1.1 Researcher’s Social and Epistemic Locations: Design Implications

As interpretive bricoleurs, critical reflexivity is required in situating ourselves within our work, within academic discourses, and within the hegemonic and liberatory social structures that frame our lives in order to translate this reflexivity into research design. As I began Chapter 1 with my family’s own experiences with pedagogy in complimentary Islamic schools, in this section, I continue the ongoing reflexive process of making visible—and hopefully empirically useful—my socio-cultural-historical-religious location in relation to my research. As a white, able-bodied,

English-speaking, educated, Canadian woman of European descent, situated within socio-economic-educational privilege, the practices of formal Western schooling have contributed significantly to my educational and ontological development. They manifested themselves in many ways in this research: the concepts I used, the pedagogies I valued, the issues I saw in schools and societies, the research questions I asked, and the meanings I made. As Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welker (2017) described, “researchers are (and should acknowledge) that they have been constructed within particular academic discourses that constitute filters through which they see and act in the world” (p. 703).

In addition, I embraced Islam as a whole-life practice almost two decades ago and I learned many key principles and practices living for several years in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia, home to the cities of Mecca and Medina. I view my ability to have chosen Islam, and chosen how I locate myself as a Muslim, as additional expressions of privilege. I locate myself as a Sunni-oriented Muslim; I empathize with some Shia’ readings of history, Sufi practices of spiritual development, Salafi passions for text and Prophetic context, and Critical Muslim perspectives on the importance of rigorous engagement with Islamic traditions to both resist inter- and intra-community inequities, activate social justice, and develop interpretations relevant to contemporary time and place. I have internalized aspects of these varied expressions of Islam into an evolving understanding of what it means for me to live as a Muslim. One of these aspects is *hijab*, the headscarf. Electing to wear hijab came after much reflection on its purposes and meanings, across spiritual and sociocultural dimensions. But in today’s politicized Canadian climate, hijab embodies a marginalized way of seeing and being seen. The hijab not only reveals material and conceptual dimensions of Islamic principles, it visually reveals my ontologic positioning vis-a-vis the Divine and other human beings. The impossibility of adequately representing Islamic principles at all



times means that wearing the hijab is, at times, contradictory—perhaps especially so when worn by a white convert. Wearing hijab means publicly situating myself and it has altered my social location in Canada: my membership in the dominant culture is questioned and I have become a member of an-Other group. Wearing hijab in Canada, I have been taken for Persian, Arab, South Asian, and Anatolian.<sup>101</sup> But while hijab may have tilted perceptions of my sociocultural location slightly from West to East, and my hue, I remain *functionally white* in a hegemonic system constructed to privilege whiteness. While I can take off my hijab, I cannot take off my whiteness. Indeed, my whiteness, ethnicity, and historicized origins illustrate the specific, situated tensions that a white Muslim convert poses as, simultaneously, a sister in Islam and a colonizer in the community.<sup>102</sup> These situated tensions, which I anticipated might arise within the research encounters and sensitized me to potential power differentials with participants, parallel “the current immense military, political, economic, cultural, and discursive power imbalances between the West and the Muslim-majority world” (Duderija, 2013, p. 75). Grosfoguel (2011) pointed out that, “we always speak from a particular location in the power structures. Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the ‘modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system’” (p. 5). Thus, within my own self, I am both colonizer (by virtue of my whiteness and my colonial English/Russian ancestry) and relegated to a space of

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<sup>101</sup> That the hijab prompted people to locate my ethnic origins in the non-Western world was part of a process of classification that Mignolo (2011) described as starting with skin tone—“the spectrum between white and black, reflecting a process that in the sixteenth century mapped slavery with blackness and master with whiteness”—but ends in epistemology: “Classification of the global population by skin color [...] was initiated and sustained by white men of letters and scientists who were the gatekeepers of Western and modern knowledge. This is not a simple curiosity, but a fundamental pillar of Western civilization and, therefore, epistemology: the geo-historical and bio-graphic foundation of modern epistemology (that is, of the idea of modernity and its darker side, coloniality)” (p. 45).

<sup>102</sup> This was pointed out to me during the Critical Muslim Studies and Decoloniality summer program in Granada, Spain, 2018.

alterity (as a visibly Muslim woman). These complexities inform my ways of being within the world and within a research site, as Esack (2012) elaborated:

A White person can do nothing about his pigmentation in a world where Whiteness is an automatic signifier of power; the same goes for a male. The significant thing is to be alert to context and to engage in a relentless struggle to see the world and our texts through the eyes and urgencies of the marginalized. (p. 18)

My challenges as a researcher, then, are always to remain sensitized to my social and epistemic locations, mindful of the degrees of power invested in both; to constantly work to uncover the blind spots of privilege; and to remain alert to the possibilities of reception in the field.

Ultimately, a researcher's complexity is interesting only in so far as it comes to bear on her research designs—including analyses, interpretations, contributions, and relationships with research participants and research communities—in generating new knowledge.<sup>103</sup> As a first and most basic step, I strived for cultural sensitivity and epistemic expansion in my research approach. In conceptual engagement with the work of previous Muslim researchers towards such expansion (Ahmed, 2012, 2014; Al-Zeerah, 2001; Esack, 2012, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2010, 2011; Memon, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016; Sayyid, 2007; Zine, 2007, 2008), this study is built upon specifically Islamic iterations of decoloniality, which originate in particular cultural and historical experiences. This study involves three moves in this direction: research design, contextualizing literature, and data sources.

First, an Islamic conceptual paradigm elaborates Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework and incorporates interpretivist methodology to together constitute an Islamic interpretive bricolage as research design, inspiring specific methods relevant to the research questions as interviewing (Brinkmann, 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and halaqat

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<sup>103</sup> Personal correspondence, Dr. Mona Gleason, UBC, July 2018.

(Ahmed, 2014). See Figure 3.1. Research Design. As Ahmed (2014) described the need for modern Muslim scholarship to be rooted in traditional Islamic principles, in part, to offset the colonial disruption of civilizational development, including that of education, in Muslim-majority communities, I included Ahmed's (2014) six principles of Islamic research within the research design at the level of ethics guiding methods. As an Islamic interpretive bricolage, this research design made space for both my own position as a white descendent of European colonizers shaped by Western education *and* a convert to Islam engaged in ongoing Islamic education; my use of interpretivist methodology *and* critical faith-centered epistemology; and my selection of interviewing *and* halaqat as research methods. As Muslim researchers in a Western-dominated academic context are, to varying degrees, influenced—indeed shaped—by positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Ahmed, 2014), this research design is an openly syncretic construction relative to my social, spiritual, and intellectual experiences and influences. It aims for inter-epistemic expansion in bringing together Islamic perspectives and Eurocentric ones. It acknowledges that no singular perspective can speak for all of the quarter of humanity who identify as Muslim.

A second move involved the literature contextualizing my research, which contained gaps for my research contributions. Esack's (2018) emphasis of the importance of sharpening the analytic gaze to see the feminine, the southern, the non-white, the non-Western translated into deliberate selection of scholars and studies from the Global South, Islamic orientations, and non-Eurocentric perspectives.

Third, the data sources in this study were the perspectives of 35 Muslim educators involved in teaching and learning Islam as a faith tradition, who were, at the time of study, across much of North America and Europe, considered in mainstream, secular, Eurocentric perspectives as the

ultimate ‘Others.’ In inquiring into their perspectives on pedagogical practices, experiences, challenges, intentions, and hopes, a research goal was to discern particular types of pedagogy unique to the teaching and learning of Islam. Soliciting their *imaginings* of new ways of using pedagogy and inviting them to visually express those imaginings constituted a perspectival dimension different from common positivist privileging of words, thoughts, and cognition alone.

Centralizing Muslim perspectives in the research design in these three ways—paradigmatic framing, contextual literature, and data sources—aimed to open up epistemic perspectives in addressing a broader challenge that Zine (2008) identified as integrating: “spiritually centred ways of knowing as part of legitimate academic knowledge building and pedagogical praxis” as “part of a broader challenge to Eurocentrism and the colonization of knowledge in education” (p. 50). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) described that “The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (p. 12). This section aimed to make this interactive process visible. In conducting research as a counter-creative act through self- and social-reflexivity, beyond simple reactions to our own dominations, oppressions, and marginalizations, I hoped to contribute to illustrating the complexity, the syncretic value, and the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of transcending epistemic rigidity, binary thinking, and sectarian disconnections in exploring new perspectives on ways of being and becoming Muslim.

### **3.1.2 An Islamic Paradigm**

Previous scholars of Islamic Education have grappled with the question of how to paradigmatically situate their research when it involves knowledge production *with* and *relevant to* people in Muslim communities and, simultaneously, must also be taken seriously in the secular, Eurocentric academy. This is a significant challenge for Muslim researchers working within secular academic

contexts. Many sidestep the issue and adopt exclusively positivist or interpretivist paradigms. Others strive to build conceptual bridges between paradigms. Approaching Islamic ontology and epistemology from an *educational* rather than a philosophical or theological perspective, three scholars of Islamic Education—Al Zeera (2001), Zine (2008), and Ahmed (2014)—upon whose work I build in this research, positioned their work in different but related ways within Islamic paradigms.

Al Zeera (2001) pointed out that large numbers of Muslim students and scholars at universities in Europe and North America use methods of inquiry derived from Eurocentric scholarship (positivist or constructivist) and queried whether these students were aware of how paradigms derived from Muslim worldviews might relate to the methods and assumptions guiding their research. She described researchers who identified as Muslims, including herself: “Our daily activities are colored with Islamic values, so learning, making meaning, and interpreting new situations are all done in an Islamic frame of reference” (p. 46). Yet, she argued, not all existing secular, social-science paradigms are appropriate for producing holistic knowledge for the development of Muslim individuals and societies:

[A] practicing Muslim might blindly produce highly valid and scholarly research on cloning or genetic engineering which might cause a great deal of harm to humanity; [...] Scientifically it would be sound research, but religiously and morally it might be dangerous and improper. (p. 26)

As a Muslim researcher, Al Zeera (2001) described herself as “trapped in the rigidity of positivism and the looseness of constructivism” (p. 45). Thus, she raised the question of balancing religious paradigms with secular methodologies and suggested framing research in Islamic paradigmatic concepts as well as Islamic methods: “[W]hat makes any research method Islamic is not only the method but also the Islamic paradigm used to guide the research and interpret the data” (p. xxviii). She evoked the concept of dialectics to make sense of the contradictions posed by integrating

secular and religious paradigms—as encompassed within wholeness or tawhid—including the idea that reality consists of complimentary opposites: absolute and relative, objective and subjective, fixed and temporal, spiritual and secular. In this study, I draw from Al Zeera’s work (2001) the notion of basing social science research conducted in Muslim educational sites within an Islamic conceptual paradigm.

Zine (2008) also addressed the challenge directly. When embarking upon ethnographic research in Islamic schools in Canada, Zine recognized that there existed no single analytic framework that acknowledged or attended to the various religious, social, political, cultural, and gender issues requiring examination in her research site. There was no analytic framework that included and integrated “spiritually-centered ways of knowing as part of legitimate academic knowledge”; no “epistemological framework that utilized faith-based knowledge as a lens for a particular reading of the world” (p. 50). Instead, spiritual knowledges were subjugated knowledges, delegitimized by secular knowledge masquerading as a universal standard, despite the fact that secular knowledge is merely one path amongst many towards knowledge. “The dominance and perceived universality of this perspective silences other understandings—spiritual, metaphysical, and cosmological” (p. 50). In lacking holistic engagement with religious knowledge, existing epistemological frameworks were unable to center issues of importance to the research participants themselves. In response, Zine (2008) constructed the critical faith-centered epistemological framework in order to create space for faith-centered perspectives as valid sources of knowledge. Zine’s framework functions as a bridge between paradigmatic perspectives, upon which other scholars can travel, which allows for nuanced and contextually-relevant interpretation and analysis in sites of Islamic education. In this study, Zine’s (2008) framework forms the foundations of an integrated paradigmatic research design elaborated with ontological,

epistemological, and pedagogical perspectives drawn from the literature on Islamic education.

Ahmed (2014) made visible, but may have herself bypassed rather than bridged, the “fundamental divide between holistic Islamic epistemology and its principle of an eternal core truth on one hand and the inherent relativism/subjectivism of interpretivism on the other” (p. 567). Instead, she situated her research in an interpretive paradigm while aiming to retain the “the holism of Islamic epistemology” through the Islamic research principles she devised to guide her own research.<sup>104</sup> Ahmed (2014) described how a non-Muslim reader might take her work as purely interpretivist, but a Muslim reader might judge her work on how true it stayed to an Islamic paradigm as embodied in her research principles. She elaborated:

Had this study used a purely interpretivist paradigm, it may have produced useful findings from a social research perspective but these findings would be a world away from what the community that is initiating the research would find useful or meaningful. (p. 567–568)

Thus, Ahmed (2014) situated her research in an *interpretative* paradigm but devised principles to stay true to an *Islamic* one, thus aiming to speak to both non-Muslim and Muslim audiences. In this study, I did the opposite: I situated the research within an overarching Islamic paradigm to maintain internal consistency between ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods relevant to the research context, while employing interpretivism as an aspect of methodology.

Of the myriad ways to interpret and understand Islamic conceptions of ontology, epistemology, psychology, and pedagogy, the interpretation of an Islamic paradigm relevant in framing this study has already been laid out in sections 2.2 and 2.3. The question of why an Islamic paradigm was considered conceptually prior to, and encompassing, an interpretivist one in this study’s integrated bricolage design may still remain. The conceptual priority of an Islamic

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<sup>104</sup> In this study, I use Ahmed’s (2014) six “Islamic research principles” (p. 580) to guide ethical approaches and to link paradigm to methods, as described in the next section, 3.1.4.

paradigm was necessary for two reasons. First, by its ontologically, epistemologically, and pedagogically *holistic* worldview—“where knowledge is contextualized in reference to Qur’an and Sunnah” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 570)—within which (interpretivism as) methodology, methods, and pedagogy are situated and validated (Zine, 2008). Building on the work of these scholars, the intelligibility of the research objectives, questions, participants, site, context, analysis, and interpretation in this study all collectively depended upon an Islamic conceptual paradigm from the outset. Al Zeera (2001) identified that discussions on research foundations must take place at the paradigm level because the shortcomings of interpretative research approaches are not only located in the *methods* but also in the *paradigms* that constitute research design structure. Thus, both an Islamic conceptual paradigm and Islamic methods are needed for research involving and serving Muslim educational communities. An Islamic paradigm provided the impetus for the research design of this study in terms of an elaborated critical faith-centered epistemology (Zine, 2008), Ahmed’s (2014) six Islamic research principles, and selecting halaqah as a research method (Ahmed, 2014).

A second reason behind the conceptual priority of an Islamic paradigm is the wider dimensions of human consciousness that the paradigm evokes relative to more secular paradigms. Where a secular paradigm may be considered primarily a product (and tool) of *cognition*, an Islamic paradigm is characterized as a product (and tool) of an expansive expression of *consciousness*, as unified cognition, emotion, spirituality, embodied (Al Zeerah, 2001; Boyle, 2006; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).<sup>105</sup> This consciousness is central to an Islamic paradigmatic perspective, its development a primary objective of both human development and education in

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<sup>105</sup> Based upon conceptual and empirical research with key informants, Rothman and Coyle (2018) described both consciousness and intellect as centered in the heart: “this center of consciousness within the human being is inherently connected and can be consciously connected to a primordial, divine consciousness” (p. 1743).



Islam, and pedagogies may play a role in that development.<sup>106</sup> A specifically-Islamic iteration of consciousness is *taqwa*, or God-consciousness (Esposito, 2003; Sahin, 2013, p. 201), which Rahman (1980, p. 19) identified as perhaps the most important single concept in the Qur'an. *Taqwa* constitutes an inner awareness or vision through reflexive self-assessment, "a spiritual spark" or an inner torchlight that a person must light within herself to illuminate distinctions. Like torchlight, *taqwa* manifests itself in gradations, "from a zero-point of naive self-righteousness to a high point where one can almost completely X-ray one's state of mind and conscience" (Rahman, 1980, p. 84). *Taqwa* features in a Qur'anic verse that illustrates both the pedagogic value of human diversity and individual intrinsic worth:

O human beings! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply *conscious* of God [...] (Qur'an, 49:13; italics added).

In considering this verse, Rahman (1980) described *taqwa* as offsetting the "artificial but powerful sources of discrimination" between people: "[I]n the darkness of the earth there are no distinctions [between individuals] [...] while in the light of the heaven there are distinctions, *their* basis is that intrinsic worth which is called *taqwa*" (p. 31, italics in original). In other words, a person's intrinsic worth is the depth, degree, and/or quality of their *taqwa*, which both motivates worthy actions and is constituted by worthy actions. It is not enough to simply be conscious of God (al-Attas, 1980). Consciousness of God contributes to consciousness in actions. Islamic protocols for actions aim to both enact and expand consciousness, which, in turn, serves to refine those actions.

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<sup>106</sup> The connection between pedagogies and the development of consciousness has not been empirically studied in sites of Islamic education; the link between the two is posited from conceptual literature on the importance of Islamic social practices and the social environment in human development (Obeid, 1988) and from sociocultural literature that describes the role of social practices, including pedagogy, in shaping human consciousness (Daniels, 2016; Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1998; Wozniak, 1975).

Correspondence between a person's conduct and the ethical values of the faith are so important that Sahin (2013) suggested they constitute the central salvific criterion—above and beyond competing theological interpretations. Implications include, first, that *taqwa* is ultimately most meaningful within a social context; a person acting unconsciously or unjustly in society is also acting unjustly to herself (Rahman, 1980). In the sense of “embracing both responsibility to God and to humankind,” Esack (1997) described the Qur'an as linking *taqwa* to social interaction and active concern for others.<sup>107</sup> In this “coalescence of the public and the private life,” of which Muhammad was a living example (Rahman, 1980, p. 76), *taqwa* is clearly embodied in action. This action is *ihsan*, or doing what is beautiful (Esposito, 2003), characterized by awareness, intentionality, and excellence. Consciousness of the fact that the quality of one's intentions and actions are evaluated upon the highest standards requires constant self-awareness and -reflection. This “unique balance of integrative moral action” (Rahman, 1980, p. 19)—which integrates God-consciousness and action, *taqwa* and *ihsan*—constitutes the center Islamic conceptual paradigm from which other concepts derive meaning, including pedagogies as the focus of this study.

A conceptually-prior Islamic paradigm centered key Islamic values at the core of this research and aimed to heed Al-Faruqi's (1988) call for research to “embody the principles of Islam in its methodology, in its strategy, in what it regards as its data, its problems, its objectives, and its aspirations” (p. 16–17). In responding to such calls to center Islamic ontological and epistemological perspectives in social science research, which are often subjugated (Ahmed, 2014; Al Zeerah, 2001; Zine, 2008), the goal was to see more broadly and deeply educators' objectives and uses of pedagogy and, simultaneously, to contest the marginalization of Islamic education at

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<sup>107</sup> Esack (1997, p. 7) referred to the following Qur'anic verses: sharing (92:5), fulfilling covenants (3:76; 7:52), and kindness (3:172; 4:126; 5:93; 16:127).

the levels of paradigm and pedagogy. At this point, Halstead (2002) might ask: “Is there any place for scepticism in the author’s Islamic paradigm?”<sup>108</sup> By necessity, there must be skepticism in this attempted assemblage of an Islamic interpretive bricolage because it is ultimately a human attempt, which will, by nature, be flawed. Just as Bilal, a social studies teacher at a full-time Islamic school, described ending a lengthy thought-experiment with his students with the words “Or not. I could be wrong about the narrative I put forward [...]” (see section 7.5.3), I, too, must conclude this description of an Islamic paradigm, as central to an Islamic interpretive bricolage, with the words—*Or not!* Yet, if Halstead (2002), or anyone else, was to ask whether or not an Islamic paradigm *in general* is structured to include skepticism, some Muslim scholars would emphatically assert the affirmative. Rahman (1988), Sahin (2013, 2016, 2018), and Waghid (2014), in differing ways, each identified self-skepticism and critical reflexivity as central aspects of a Muslim scholar’s intellectual work, intrinsic to Islamic expressions of education, and crucial for growth.

### **3.1.3 An Interpretivist Methodology**

The second aspect of an integrated Islamic interpretive bricolage is the interpretivist one. The socially-situated starting point of an interpretivist approach to research is that people interpret themselves and their circumstances in ways shaped by culture and characterized by unique ontological perspectives, which, in turn, shape their practices, institutions, and cultural contributions (Hammersley, 2007). “Qualitative research that does not account for the importance of human interpretation in social interaction arguably limits understandings of human behavior to a behaviorist framework of stimulus–response,” which social scientists have long disregarded as satisfactory in studying human behavior (Pascale, 2011, p. 11). Hammersley (2013) described the

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<sup>108</sup> Halstead (2002) asked this question of Al Zeera (2001) in a review of her book and it struck me as a good question to ask of myself.

imperative for researchers studying complex social worlds to draw upon our capacity to understand others “‘from the inside’—through empathy, shared experience and culture [...]” (p. 26), rather than from the outside, as do researchers studying the behaviour of physical objects. While *understanding* was a goal in this critical interpretive study, the Islamic paradigmatic stance reflected recognition of limits to human understanding. This recognition is secularly echoed in Brinkmann’s (2017) suggestion: “If there is one lesson to learn from 20th-century human science [...] it is that we, as human subjects, do not have full authority concerning how to understand our lives, because we do not have—and can never have—full insight into the forces that have created us” (p. 581). This statement resonates with an Islamic perspective and colored this research project with humility as to the limits of human understanding. Yet, purposeful methods guided by an Islamic interpretive bricolage methodology—which clarify the researcher relationship to knowledge, data, and research participants—constitute tools by which to probe the limits of understanding. This section details the interpretive methodology of this study.

Addressing a divide that Ahmed (2014) identified between an Islamic conceptual paradigm centered on revealed and enduring truths and the relativism of interpretivism is to center points of convergence between them as part of dialectical engagement within a methodological bricolage. An Islamic ontological perspective may dovetail with an interpretivist at its most conservative, which “holds that the world exists objectively but the terms we use to define and describe it are socially produced [...] meaning is socially constructed through shared, rather than individual interpretations of reality” (Pascale, 2011, p. 22). In other words, interpretivists might posit the existence of a world beyond of human social constructions, as might Muslims, and the ways in which this world is perceived, experienced, and interpreted are multiple. Distinct principles, practices, rituals, etiquettes, and interpretations, social in nature and shared, are significant aspects

of Muslim educational communities; participation in them, and understandings of them, constitute education. The goal for the researcher is to inquire into how faith-centered people both derive and incorporate enduring truths into their daily meaning making and activities.

Two other areas of convergence may include, first, the importance of *reflection* in both an Islamic paradigm and an interpretivist one—by the researcher, as an analytic tool, and by research participants, in producing valid data. Second, the reconstruction of experiences in social encounters may contribute to deeper interpretation and meaning making. Al Zeera (2001) described the recalling and retelling intimate experiences as contributing to their reevaluation and reconstruction that, in turn, may facilitate transformation as an aim of education. A methodological implication may be that halaqah—as a culturally-appropriate research method comprised of recalling, retelling, reevaluating, and reconstructing social encounters in dialogue—may create transformative possibilities in the process of data collection, while staying true to both an interpretative and an Islamic paradigm (see section 3.3.1.2 below). One final interpretivist concept that dovetails with an Islamic one is that educational research “must itself be educative in character, that it should be concerned with realising educational ideals or achieving educational outcomes, rather than simply producing educationally-relevant knowledge” (Hammersley, 2007, p. 3). This echoes Ahmed’s (2014) sixth research principle of conducting *useful* research. Similarly, Rahman (1988) described that, “knowledge in Islam exists in order to enable us to act, to change the current events in the world. The Qur’an is an action-oriented book, par excellence” (p. 11).

In addition to conceptual convergence, interpretivism may elaborate an Islamic paradigm in three specific ways. First, in making explicit paradigmatic principles that are implicit within Islamic perspectives. Examples include the contextual nature of both human existence and of contemporary sense-making of traditional principles expressed in actions (upon which, from an

Islamic perspective, individuals will be ultimately be evaluated); the importance of subjectivity, agency, and choice (Waghid, 2014); the ability of, and responsibility for, shaping one's own development (Sahin, 2013); and the social construction of knowledge, including religious knowledge (Belzen, 2010). That Muslim children need Muslim contexts in which to learn and develop as Muslims—guided by Muslim scholars, educators, and parents (Alkouatli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018)—is testimony to the important role of social context in Islamic education (Halstead, 1995; Obeid, 1988). One might even go as far as to suggest that interpretivism is implicitly present within larger Islamic paradigmatic perspectives and may serve to make some of these perspectives more visible.

Second, an interpretivist paradigm may translate Islamic *concepts* into meaningful social research *context*. Pascale (2011) described: “In order to understand a situation, interpretivists argue that researchers must understand the *meanings* the situation holds for the participants, not just their behaviors” (p. 23). An Islamic paradigm in interpretational context may provide space interpretivism requires in order for (a) a participant to articulate meaning and (b) a researcher to interpret meaning. An example is the pedagogy of Qur’anic memorization: the depth of the phenomenon cannot be understood by simply analyzing the behaviors.<sup>109</sup> The objectives, purposes, meanings, and contextual factors—embedded within an Islamic paradigm—all contribute to a fuller understanding of memorization as pedagogy.<sup>110</sup> Interpretivism, overlapping with social constructionism, “emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding, the subjective nature

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<sup>109</sup> Boyle (2006) described how Western media images of children studying the Qur’an—“rocking back and forth, memorizing the Qur’an and reciting it in unison under the watchful eyes of stern-looking teachers” (p. 480)—serve to confound Islamic education with rigid, violent, and extreme interpretations of Islam and miss the larger purposes of memorization, which include internalizing a rich and diverse vocabulary with which to express a range of emotions and communicate with the Divine.

<sup>110</sup> As described in Section 2.3.3.2 above on memorization as pedagogy.

of research, and the importance of reflexivity” (Pascale, 2011, p. 22). In addition, phenomena only count as evidence if they are *recognized in relation to an analytic context*:

Evidence is always the political effect of decisions regarding what constitutes valid and relevant knowledge as well as decisions that regard the conditions a researcher must fulfill to give her or his work value as science. Consequently, critical empirical research must begin not with a theory/evidence dichotomy but rather with a theory/evidence *convergence* that recognizes the theoretical foundations that shape what constitutes valid knowledge. (Pascale, 2011, p. 27)

In other words, a paradigm/evidence convergence may produce valid data and add rigor and credibility to qualitative social science research. In this study, the possibility of paradigm/evidence convergence lay in utilizing and making transparent a deep Islamic paradigm from the outset. A corollary of this point is that in engaging in such translation work, an interpretivist bricolage as research design may render the research relevant in social scientific circles that do not share Islamic perspectives precisely because it was conducted in internally-consistent ways in *relevant cultural context*.

Third, in merging an Islamic paradigm and interpretivism, and conducting research at their intersection, this study may push the boundaries of social science research. Secular, Eurocentric research paradigms, including interpretivism, embedded with “white racial ideologies”—which were developed in the context of coloniality, “during periods of devastating racial oppression” (Pascale, 2011, p. 21)—are insufficient for inquiring into the full range of human experience. In the context of Islamic education, specifically, these paradigms need to be expanded. My research could not push the boundaries of any existing framework if it did not, first, identify the limitations of existing and hegemonic research paradigms and, second, offer tangible ways of expanding those paradigms in ways meaningful to communities teaching subjugated knowledge, building upon

previous scholarship,<sup>111</sup> which this research aims to do. The goal is not to replace one paradigm with another but understand their limitations—including Islamic ones, which cannot be acritically accepted—in order to “recognize the potential and possibilities of additional frameworks” (Pascale 2011, p. 28).

Selecting interpretivism as a methodology, which contributed analytic perspectives and methods to an Islamic conceptual paradigm, brought some implications to bear on the research process. An interpretative researcher takes an exploratory approach towards the research participants, with the intention of understanding their experiences in context—“an essential requirement not just for explaining but even for *describing* people’s behaviour and the social institutions in which it is located, and which it helps sustain” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 29; italics in original). In addition, rather than approaching research with predefined concepts, interpretivists use sensitizing concepts<sup>112</sup> to help them better understand the social relationships being studied (Pascal, 2011). Centering people’s words and actions as meaningful within systems of culture and context (Schwandt, 2000) contributes to shaping the research design in terms of the questions driving this study and the *interactive interpretive encounters* designed to gather data to address them (interviews and halaqat).<sup>113</sup> Recalling that the research questions driving this study were: What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners specifically in teaching

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<sup>111</sup> Including Ahmed (2012, 2014, 2016); Ajem & Memon (2011); Al Zeera (2001); Memon (2011, 2013); Zine (2007, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> The sensitizing concepts guiding this research were drawn, first and primarily, from the literature on Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology, as situated within a larger Islamic conceptual paradigm, described in Chapter 2—including central concepts like holism (*tawhid*), human development (including *tarbiyah*), objectives (including *taqwa*); second, literature deriving from Shulman’s (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge; third, scholars from various disciplines writing against secular epistemic hegemony and Islamophobia (including Dei et al., 2000; Esack, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2010; and Zine, 2004, 2007, 2008); and, third, interpretivism and the post-qualitative (in particular, Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hammersley, 2013; Kamberelis, Dimitriadis & Welker, 2017).

<sup>113</sup> I refer to the interactive interpretive encounters designed to gather data, expressed, in this study, in the methods of semi-structured interviews, halaqat, and artifact-mediated halaqat, collectively as *research encounters*.



and learning Islam? How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives? How might educators imagine, design, and implement new or contextually relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam? These research questions were crafted to center each educators' interpretations of their pedagogical experiences and expertise; their particular interpretations of objectives of Islamic education; their uses of pedagogies in attaining towards those objectives; and their interpretations of pedagogical suitability in teaching and learning Islam. The research questions aimed to draw out individual specificity, temporal fluidity—past, present, and future pedagogies and possibilities—and contextual relevance, and were operationalized in the interview questions (see Appendices C and D). In making meaning of these research questions with participants in research encounters—and accepting the interpretivist premise that human action *has* meaning, outside of the research encounter itself—the analytic focus is not to objectively 'discover' that meaning, but to approach new meanings together through exploration of multiple meanings. In interpreting words and actions *with* research participants, “we must draw upon our own social experience or capacity for learning, rather than seeking to achieve procedural objectivity” (Hammersley, 2014, p. 27). This social experience and capacity for learning, moreover, means that, as an interpretive researcher, there is no epistemic objectivity. Thus, I elaborate basic interpretivist premises with the hermeneutic notion that the interpreter's own cultural context, inherited traditions, biases, and preconceptions (Schwandt, 2000)—comprising our ways of being, seeing, and sense-making—require active engagement in the process of research and, in particular, in interactive interpretivist encounters with research participants. Although an interpretive goal is *understanding*, I recognize that understanding is necessarily an interpretation always already colored by one's social and epistemic locations. This acknowledgment manifests in dialogue across lines of difference between the researcher, research

participants, and other researchers in order to “‘see’ the limited conditions of their discursive horizons, engage in imaginative work about how things might be otherwise given different discourses, and open up possibilities for changing discourses [...]” (Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, & Welker, 2017, p. 703). Epistemologically, my interpretations of shared research encounters were necessarily colored by my own situatedness. Methodologically, I aimed to employ reflexivity in analytic memo writing, active listening during research encounters, and member checking afterwards to keep this situatedness as visible as possible. In addition, while I considered the research encounters characterizing this study as negotiated interpretation (Schwandt, 2000), I saw negotiated interpretation as a process of creating something entirely new, thus tending towards social constructivist notions that the mind is active in the construction of meaning. This may be particularly salient in a focus group like a halaqah—where each participant’s meaning is bound to be altered, inspired, shaped in the moment through the process of sharing and negotiating meaning with others—and this mutual negotiation of meaning comprises a process of constructing new meaning. These paradigmatic and perhaps chimerical conditions of the research encounters in this study shaped the ways in which I interpreted utterances in the process of generating and analyzing data. Criticisms of interpretivism include that it tends to produce a coherent narrative, reducing the different to the same (Hammersley, 2007). Using interpretivism as just one paradigmatic aspect of the research approach may attend to this criticism. In addition, I aimed for mindful triangulation of the data, remained aware of the Sunni Muslim bias that featured in the research encounters, and aimed to solicit minority perspectives within each halaqah group.

The idea that “understanding other people is necessarily an uncertain process that relies upon openness to the world, and on the exercise of personal capacities, especially the imagination, *rather than upon any method* (Hammersley, 2013, p. 28; italics in original) underscores two final points.

First, as previously noted, the paradigmatic must be positioned as prior to the methodological. Second, imagination is a tool of social research. In Islamic educational contexts, some content is not visible and can only be referenced in imaginary or allegorical terms; in addition, evoking imagination is a pedagogy that has featured in both traditional and contemporary sites of Islamic education.<sup>114</sup> As a culmination of embodied human cognition and emotion in shared cultural trajectory of meaning and collective consciousness, imagination may be situated as a link between a finite, embodied human being and a larger, transcendent level of consciousness. The importance of imagination in Muslim educational communities was translated into the research design itself in the third research method: evoking imagination in inviting participants to craft an artifact that was then used to mediate a halaqah. Where an Islamic paradigm and an interpretivist methodology together allow for the recognition of the importance of imagination, its inclusion in the research process as methodological tool, and the acceptance of the results of imagination as data, were primarily enabled by the Islamic paradigm.

In this study, then, interpretivism not only complimented an Islamic paradigm in framing research conducted in an Islamic site of education, it rendered an Islamic paradigm imperative in that the unit of analysis of this study—educators’ perceptions of pedagogy—“have been shaped by the deeper faith values” (Sahin, 2017, p. 131). An Islamic paradigm made visible those faith values and interpretivism made visible their import.

### **3.1.4 Ethical Concerns, Principles, and Actions**

In designing this research, overlapping ethical considerations arose as important both *within the faith*, in terms of guiding Islamic principles, and *within the university*, in terms of protecting individual and social wellbeing. This section details how these ethical concerns were addressed.

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<sup>114</sup> Please see section 2.3.3.2 on imagination as pedagogy.

Actions were built into the study design to secure research benefits, including setting clear criteria for selecting and inviting participants and engaging them in research encounters within an Islamic ethos. Ahmed (2014) derived six research principles from Islamic ontological and epistemological perspectives to guide research conducted within Muslim communities. These principles form a broad ethical substrate for this study, as part of the bricolage, constituting a conceptual connection between an overarching Islamic paradigm, anchored in a critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008),<sup>115</sup> and halaqah as a research method. Ahmed (2014, p. 570) tentatively proposed these principles in light of previous attempts to develop Islamic research principles, including Al-Faruqi's (1988), and inspired by holistic indigenous research principles—particularly Maori approaches, which derived principles for needs specific to their communities. The six principles used to guide this study are described below, followed by specific concerns central to the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board (H19-00275).

(1) The principle of the primacy of the Qur'an and Hadith as the ultimate guiding forces for Muslim researchers and constituting the core of an Islamic paradigm. While the Qur'an is central to an Islamic paradigm of interconnected concepts, which al-Attas (1980, p. 7) termed a *Qur'anic conceptual system*, Qur'anic meanings are reflected in the hadith, the Sunnah, and "the things of the empirical world" (p. 7). As both the *origin* of an Islamic conceptual system, and its *evidence*, al-Attas (1980) asserted that the Qur'an "is the final authority that confirms the truth in our rational and empirical investigations" (p. 7). This description underscores Ahmed's (2014) first principle. It also serves to acknowledge that the two primary Islamic sources, which have, historically,

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<sup>115</sup> It must be noted here that although Ahmed (2014) acknowledged the importance of Zine's (2008) epistemological framework and other contributions for critically addressing challenges in contemporary Muslim communities, Ahmed (2014) questioned the authenticity of "new, possibly feminist, interpretations of Qur'an" (p. 6), which Zine (2008) put forth as important in examining issues gender and stereotypical notions of Muslim women in discursive socialization. For this research, the contributions of both scholars are crucial.

guided Muslim educators (Ajem & Memon, 2011; Alkouatli, 2018), may constitute contemporary guiding forces for educators' uses of pedagogy today.

(2) The principle of combining classical Islamic scholarship, in all its diversity, with a range of other research methods. Ahmed (2014) contended:

Most research methodologies are compatible with Islamic epistemology once the Islamic paradigm is made the conceptual framework within which the methodology operates. Methodologies and methods should be selected in order to meet the objectives of the research and in line with the other principles. (p. 570)

This principle emphasizes the importance of both an overarching Islamic paradigm that encompasses methodology and extends to culturally-relevant methods while including those originating in differing paradigms, each offering varying approaches to answering the research questions. An example of this combination of diverse methods within an Islamic paradigm can be seen in the research of an 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholar, who Al Zeera (2001, p. 108) described as using three triangulated, qualitative methods—interviewing, document analysis, and comparative analysis—in a phenomenological approach to understanding and interpreting aspects of a Hindu community in India. Activating Ahmed's (2014) second principle in research may contribute to the continuation of Islamic empirical traditions and, simultaneously, utilize new ways of producing knowledge and addressing contemporary issues in social science. Al Zeera (2001) described: "By realizing and accepting the dialectical concept of tawhid, Muslim scholars are challenged to search for truth in contradictory and opposing ideas and situations" (p. 107). This principle can also be examined in reference to culture, whereby Muslims shape Islam and Islam shapes Muslims in an ongoing iterative process of development (Ahmed, 2016; Halstead, 2004; Panjwani & Revell, 2018); and Sahin (2018) offered an example:

Islam became a world civilization precisely because its core spiritual/ethical values shaped diverse cultures, and, in turn, Islam itself was creatively interpreted and articulated within different historical, cultural and geographical landscapes. [...] both Islam and the indigenous

cultures have been reciprocally reinterpreted to bring about new '*Islamically meaningful patterns of creative syntheses*' in history. (p. 7)

This primary force of creative synthesis driving processes of civilizational development is further described as a dynamic, dialectical hermeneutics, whereby Muslim scholars intellectually engaged with values, pedagogies, and practices outside of their communities, and interpreted and operationalized them within "a higher Islamic educational value system" (p. 16). While this study is based upon a methodological bricolage that aims to reflect this second principle, this principle was also expressed in participants' descriptions of the ways Canadian Muslim children made sense of their Islamic and secular realities, and their responsive pedagogic approaches.

(3) The principle of using all human faculties as tools of research, analysis, and interpretation: cognitive, emotional, intuitive, and spiritual. Ahmed (2014) asserted: "Human understanding of the natural, social, and human worlds cannot be reduced to the empirical/rational dimension only. A more holistic approach needs to be accepted to recognise multiple forms of human meaning and knowledge" (p. 570). While holism (tawhid), occupying a central role in Islamic ontology, has implications on human development and education (Nasr, 2012, p. 20; Obeid, 1980; Zine, 2008), this third principle emphasizes its implications on research. While research participants may draw from multiple tangible and intangible sources of knowledge expressed in a research encounter, the researcher must explore those sources, too, in processes of interpretation and analysis. For example, conscious use of contemplative Islamic practices creates spaces for reflexivity (Alkouatli, 2015). Mauthner and Doucet (2003) described temporal distance to the research as increasing degrees of reflexivity. Similarly, deliberate acts of mindful contemplation may lend a similar sense of distance, clarify intellectual confusion, and increase degrees of reflexivity. In this study, when research participants offered the results of their own contemplation, worship, and reflection, I accepted them as data. In addition, these results played a

role in data analysis, and when we discussed them in the member checking interviews. Ahmed's (2014) third principle privileges all human faculties as tools of research and ways of inquiring, knowing, and understanding, thus evoking Zine's (2008) seventh epistemological principle that "knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin" (p. 65). Within this third principle, Ahmed (2014) called for research—no matter how the knowledge within it is generated—to be "rigorous and peer reviewed to ensure validity and authenticity" (p. 570). This serves to underline the importance of scholars functioning *within* Islamic paradigms to review each other's work.

(4) The principle of centering the human situation in research. As research should "meet the holistic needs of human beings as individuals and a collective" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 570), human wellbeing must be at the core. Broadly holistic, qualitative, and interdisciplinary social science research should generate expansive and detailed understandings that are relevant and useful for human beings and the communities in which they live. Honoring the fourth principle, this particular study was inspired by calls within literature on Islamic Education, and anecdotal expressions within communities of Muslim educators, to analyze and enhance pedagogy; the objective being to work with educators to better understand pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam.

(5) The principle of Islamic ethics and etiquette. At the core of Islamic education is a specific moral–ethical system (Boyle, 2006; Mogra, 2010; Nasr, 2012; Vicini, 2013), which the researcher must embody in her research approach and her interaction with research participants, people in the community in which the research is being conducted, and the academic community at large. Beyond fundamental Islamic ethical principles—like respect for life, justice, peace, and honor—respecting local social etiquette practices translates this principle into research practice. Three

examples are respecting dress code, prayer times, and engaging in mixed-gender interactions in locally appropriate ways. In this study, I was mindful of each research participant's needs and preferences, including how, when, and where to engage in interviews and halaqat. A central aspect of conducting research in places of Islamic education—where teaching and learning specifically Islamic iterations of etiquette are primary—is inquiring into and respecting local nuances of etiquette.

(6) The principle of collaborative, participative, transformative, and useful research. This principle emphasizes that research should serve the people researched by offering empowering and practical contributions. Ahmed (2014) suggested that research should “include the researched in all stages of the research process including dissemination and application” (p. 570). This principle lends importance, in this research design, of participatory methods, whereby interviews are active encounters of meaning-making and halaqat are collaborative. Inviting participants to engage in member checking after initial thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interview and halaqat transcripts and participants' artifacts is an important part of the research process, whereby participants extend upon their initial thoughts and contributions. In terms of usefulness, the research questions were crafted to tap new pedagogic knowledge in response to community calls. An additional purpose of generating an artifact as part of the data-gathering process was to leave each educator-participant with a tangible trace of his or her pedagogical thinking. Research aims include that the data generated from this study may contribute to a) enhancing extant Islamic teacher-education programs, b) inspiring new ones, c) constructing an empirically-based pedagogical model for enhancing human development in sites of Islamic education through educators' uses of pedagogies, and d) contributing to inter-epistemic interactions in widening non-Muslim educators' and administrators' understandings of Islamic pedagogies to better teach



Muslim students in public schools. The methods of this study were derived from an integrated Islamic paradigm, and I used Ahmed's (2014) principles to guide their manifestation in research action.

Within this framework of research principles, and in obtaining university ethics board approval for this study, the following ethical concerns were addressed with specific ethical action:

Ethical concern	Actions in addressing concern
Respecting cultural and contextual norms of/with participants	As a Muslim insider, I was sensitive to interpretational diversities, ways of practicing Islam, and ways of being Muslim in not assuming commonality or universality of principles and practices amongst participants. As an outsider to the specific educational communities of which educators were members, I aimed to understand and respond to specific contextual norms and ways of communicating. Out of respect for the conservative dress code in many of the mosque schools, I wore clothing reflecting my more-conservative Muslim self. Methodologically, employing halaqah as a research method within an Islamic paradigm was one way of acknowledging and operationalizing the importance of specific Islamic practices, including social etiquette practices. Although most research encounters took place in English, I accepted contributions in Arabic and kept them in the data corpus in their transliterated forms. <sup>116</sup>
Protecting privacy and confidentiality	No real names of people or places were used in this study's data (apart from celebrities' names); any name that arose in a research encounter was assigned a pseudonym, including names of mosque leaders, other teachers, community members, participants' family members etc. Each participant either selected their own pseudonym or I assigned them a pseudonym when signing the Informed Participant Consent Form for Islamic Teachers (see Appendix B) at the first research encounter. Participants' real names and contact information was kept in one digital document and password-protected. Audio files were saved anonymized; downloaded onto my personal computer; transcribed; and kept under password following UBC BREB guidelines. Data was deleted from the recording device after downloading. Consent letters were kept in a locked location at UBC to be destroyed after five years.
Voluntariness of participation	The voluntary nature of participation in this study and ongoing consent was emphasized at a few points: first, in the introductory letter (see Appendix A) and verbally upon first research encounter. Then, when participants signed the consent form, I re-articulated the voluntary nature of

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<sup>116</sup> Most Arabic contributions were offered in the form of common Islamic words, expressions, and ayahs of the Qur'an, which many participants used peppering English speech. I transliterated them without using a transliteration system.

	<p>participation and reminded them that they could withdraw at any point. The voluntariness of participation is one reason I opted <i>not</i> to include school leaders (principals) in the study—concerned that their participation might directly or indirectly influence the voluntariness of the <i>teachers’</i> participation. Yet, one elementary-school principal and three complimentary school leaders did participate. Mindful of the possibility of peer pressure to participate, I communicated directly with each participant emphasizing that ongoing consent was a tentative agreement between the two of us. I invited latitude in ways of participating; one participant, for example, requested that the halaqah not be audio-recorded, so I documented it by field notes instead.</p>
<p>Risk of drawing negative public attention to an already-marginalized group</p>	<p>Muslim educators face Islamophobia in society; they teach a contested subject that has been charged as ‘indoctrination’; their pedagogies have been critiqued from both inside and outside of Muslim educational communities. The risk of drawing negative public attention was not necessarily in regard to individual educators, as I aimed to ensure anonymity, but for the educators as a minority group in a secular society and also as a group of Canadian educators in a global Muslim educational and academic community. The probability of this risk was low, given the research goals and intentions—including to enhance, not destruct, pedagogies in sites of Islamic education. I intended from the outset to enter the research site to explore and understand, not criticize—although the educators’ themselves criticized pedagogies within Muslim educational circles; these were noted and added dimensionality to the data. The magnitude of risk might also be low given the already-negative impression of Islamic education and pedagogy in the media and little extant academic literature, to which I hope my research contributes. Despite deeming the risk as minimal, I outlined its possibility in the participant consent letter (Appendix B).</p>
<p>Power differentials</p>	<p>In aiming to remain mindful of power differences between myself and my participants—I occupied a position of power in terms of coming from an institution of higher education, my whiteness, and my roots in dominant-culture Canada—I also verbally recognized that the participants were likely more knowledgeable about Islam as religion and Islamic education as praxis.</p>
<p>Incentivization</p>	<p>To avoid incentivization, but still honor the Islamic social etiquette of gift-giving, I gave each participant a gift-box of Arabic sweets after the second research encounter and a \$25-gift-card after the third research encounter.</p>

Research benefit	Actions in protecting benefits
Advancing empirical knowledge on Islamic education/pedagogy	The study was designed in response to calls from within the Islamic educational and scholarly communities for research on pedagogy. I aimed to create with participants quality research, useful to both Muslim educational communities and scholarly ones, in line with Ahmed's (2014) sixth principle of <i>useful</i> research.
Direct personal benefits for each participant	Personal benefits may have included: dedicated time for reflection upon one's own pedagogies, exploration together of new possibilities and ways of thinking about Islamic education and pedagogy, support and challenge within discussion, and communication of pedagogic ideas with colleagues. I aimed to support each participant individually and as a group in reflecting upon one's own pedagogies and those of other educators; I also helped the participants to see the results of the research process as it unfolded by describing themes as they arose, sending them digital transcripts of audio-recorded interviews and halaqat, and offering time for discussion on transcripts. In bringing Muslim educators together, community connections may have been formed or strengthened. I offered to send the results of this study to each participant. I also offered to deliver a presentation to each participant's school community.
Indirect benefits	Equally likely as the risk of negative public attention is the benefit of drawing <i>positive attention</i> towards Islamic education as a field and educators' pedagogies. The data revealed positive and negative aspects of the educators' pedagogies, and how pedagogy can contribute to the social wellbeing, including helping Muslim children contribute to a secular society as Muslims.
Countering Islamophobia	Recalling from Chapter 2 that Islamophobia may contribute to exacerbating a lack of intra-community analysis and self-critique, masking gender inequalities and power imbalances (Kalin, 2011), and justifying a sense of self-preservation rather than open discussions of pluralism (Niyozov, 2016), centering this research within an Islamic paradigm aims to counter Islamophobia—regardless the research results. In addition, Muslim educators in the study were in agentic positions to refute uninformed stereotypes and engage in intra-community analysis, including celebration and critique, which they did.
Debriefing	Although no deception was used in this study, I engaged in on-going debriefing at the ends of the second and third research encounters. A follow-up letter at the end of the study shared preliminary findings and invited ongoing contact with participants.

A primary purpose of situating research within an Islamic paradigm is to render it optimally beneficial to the participating research community and scholarly field. As such, ethical concerns are paramount as part of a process of self-critique; critically examining the ways in which this

research might be damaging or beneficial. While there may have been some risks to participating in this study, there were also benefits—possibly both personal and collective. In addition, a broader intention was to examine pedagogies in sites of Islamic education as part of *intra-community analysis*. While one of the critiques of Islamophobia is that it has precluded this type of analysis, we, as Muslim educators need to do the work of examining our own educational communities in terms of how we are preparing upcoming generations of Muslim children to participate in a complex world. This intention, hopefully, contributes to the benefits of this research in outweighing potential risks.

### **3.1.5 An Islamic Interpretive Bricolage**

The starting point of this research in a critical faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008), elaborated by Islamic ontology, psychology, and pedagogy, enhanced by interpretivist methodology, guided by Islamic research principles (Ahmed, 2014), and operationalized by relevant methods constitutes a critical Islamic interpretive bricolage that is responsive to multiply-informed and culturally-complex processes of teaching, learning, and developing in diasporic sites of Islamic education. Teaching and learning Islam encompasses transcendent content material and transcendent learning objectives, beyond the reach of corporeal sense perception. In attempting to embark upon genuine inquiry, meaningful to the research participants and their communities,<sup>117</sup> this research is also situated in different academic communities, namely, a secular, Western field of education and an emerging field of Islamic Education, which includes scholars who run along

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<sup>117</sup> Key scholars have highlighted the importance of both meaningfulness and integrity in research. For example, Crotty (1998) stated that “to talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality” (p. 10), which necessarily means different things to different groups of people holding different paradigmatic perspectives on what constitutes meaningful reality. In addition, Bredo (2006) identified a central concern of researchers as being to set conditions for research that would enable *genuine inquiry*. In constructing an Islamic interpretive bricolage, this study aims towards both meaningfulness and integrity.

confessional and non-confessional spectrums. This research strives to advance knowledge in both fields. As no single methodology has been identified as able to address social, religious, and cultural complexities of Muslim educational contexts, and the multiple realities and identities of individuals situated at cultural, scholarly, and paradigmatic intersections, Muslim scholars have argued for the use of multiple methods and interpretive frames (Ahmed, 2014; Al Zeera, 2001; Zine, 2008). These scholars described that use of a single framework restricts the wider vision required for interpreting data, for integrating philosophical perspectives, and, ultimately, for engaging in rigorous sociocultural analysis in Islamic educational contexts. Interpretivism was too limited to be used alone. As Al Zeera (2001) noted: “The interpretive/constructivist paradigm is unable to encompass life in its wholeness” (p. 44), with one-dimensional paradigms producing one-dimensional knowledge. Ahmed (2014) acknowledged that Muslim scholars may, to some degree, accept the realism of positivist ontology and aspects of the relativism of the interpretivist paradigm but, ultimately, both paradigms are rooted in a secular Western source and, “although able to be incorporated into Islamic epistemology, are essentially alien to it” (p. 566). Zine (2008) described how, in her own work in Islamic schools, fidelity to a single paradigm would have restricted the development of a more comprehensive analysis. Instead, she pointed out that “Multiple discursive frames will allow a more nuanced reading of the empirical data and provide opportunities for more fine-grained analyses” (p. 48). Pascale (2011) additionally described: “Any mature science needs to include a broad range of strategies and tools in order to be fully capable of responding to contemporary issues” (p. 12). Thus, research encounters with Muslim educators, data analysis, and interpretation—conducted by a researcher who has herself been shaped by multiple cultural forces and cognitive frames—required a multi-methodological research approach to plumb the depths of knowledge production. As such, “The interpretive bricoleur produces a

bricolage, that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11). An Islamic interpretive bricolage was born of empirical necessity.

In terms of complimentary paradigms, Zine (2008, p. 58) described how a critical faith-centered epistemological framework is intended to function dialogically with other paradigms and discourses, including those with more secular foundations, which provides “new epistemological vantage points when multiple yet complimentary paradigms are combined” (p. 48-49). This combination may also heighten awareness of paradigmatic rigidity. A Muslim researcher need not draw from a faith-based perspective *only*, nor from only one interpretational or sectarian perspective of Islam or way of being Muslim (Panjwani & Revell, 2018). Instead, the interplay of secular and faith-based frameworks as intellectual alliances may allow for greater depth of analysis than either one on their own (Zine, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) pointed out, “The researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms” (p. 12). In terms of working with paradigms that are not necessarily complimentary, Al Zeera (2001) described how integration in analytic perspectives and methods may lead to transformation in research. An Islamic–interpretive bricolage is holistic and expansive; its basic premise is that reality is simultaneously “ideal and relative, subjective and objective, spiritual and material” and “encourages interaction and relationships between contradictory elements” (Al Zeera, 2001, p. 98). Muslim children, parents, educators, and researchers living in diasporic communities in secular Canadian society must constantly reconcile contradictory elements of complex lived experiences. Employing research methods drawing from different conceptual foundations reflects this reconciliation in research design and may “allow for free and powerful interaction between the researcher and participants” (p. 100) and ultimately more transformative

research. From the overarching research paradigm to individual methods, the design must be expansive enough to make space for contradiction as the starting point for transformation.

An analytic aim of this research was to remain reflexively aware of the affordances and constraints of both faith-centered epistemological and interpretative methodological frameworks, as reflected in the data of the coming chapters. Framing this study within a larger Islamic conceptual paradigm aimed to balance the epistemic weight of its interpretivist methodology, developed in the global North. Evoking Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, and including literature on asset pedagogies, aimed to balance the abundance of literature in the fields of Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology. Ultimately, this balancing work aimed to center faith-based perspectives—marginalized by epistemic hegemony as a result of ongoing coloniality and Islamophobia—and highlight pedagogical reasoning within. The integration of Islamic and interpretivist concepts aimed to unify the emic and the etic, the marginalized and the dominant, the contextual and the abstract. As such, it may constitute a form of “border thinking” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 61), which Grosfoguel (2011) described as “a critical response to both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms” (p. 3), whereby fundamentalism refers to holding the position that there is only one way to attain to truth. In this integration, an Islamic interpretive bricolage aimed to encompass in wholeness the multiple, relative, interpreted, and constructed realities described by interpretivists and the tacit, intuitional, and faith-based experiences and ways of knowing (Zine, 2008) beyond the sense-based or tangible, as meaningful in Muslim communities. In building upon previous scholarship, I tentatively aspired towards a trajectory of Muslim researchers throughout history, as described by al-Attas (2005):

The representatives of Islamic thought—theologians, philosophers, metaphysicians—have all and individually applied various methods in their investigations without preponderating on any one particular method. They combined in their investigations, and at the same time in their persons, the empirical and the rational, the deductive and the inductive methods and

affirmed no dichotomy between the subjective and the objective, so that they all affected what I would call the *tawhid* method of knowledge. (p. 14)

In combining disparate, even contradictory, elements within the personal as a starting point for research, this *tawhid* method, as a golden standard, may be considered in light of an overarching unity, which Al Zeera (2001) termed the “dialectics of *tawhid*” (p. 116). The primary point of explicitly centering ontological transcendence and encompassing epistemic diversity within an Islamic interpretive bricolage was to approach the dialectics of *tawhid* in capturing as fully as possible meanings to be made of the data and rendering those meanings useful for other Muslim educators, learners, and scholars.

### **3.2 Research Participants**

Participants in this study included 35 Sunni Muslim educators involved in teaching and learning Islam with children in a city in British Columbia. Twelve educators taught in formal, full-time Islamic schools; 18 taught in complimentary, informal, weekend- or mosque-schools; and five taught in a freelance, consultation, or community-service capacity (see Table 4.1. Participant Biographical Data). This study focused on educators in varied but intentionally *educational* settings, despite the fact that teaching and learning Islam is a cross-context phenomenon, occurring, in varying degrees, in home, school, mosque, and community contexts, with educators characterizing any of those venues, and parents employing weekend schools as supplementary instruments in an overarching Islamic education that they themselves are conducting. Neither parents nor religious leaders (*imams*), in their respective domestic and liturgical pedagogical roles, were invited to participate in this study. However, most of the educators in this study were also parents—indeed their roles as parents, in many cases, provided passion, expertise, and motivation in teaching Islam within the community. A reason for precluding parents and religious leaders was simply one of capacity; if I did not demarcate boundaries, this study could be open to the entire



Muslim community of this particular city. Another reason was to focus analytic attention on *pedagogies*, as tools of the trade in teaching Islam, of which educators rather than parents might arguably be more mindful and/or intentional. I further restricted inclusion to people with academic, experiential, or professional backgrounds in education and/or Islamic Studies. Thus, the criteria for inclusion as Muslim educators in this study were defined as: Adults with backgrounds in Education and/or Islamic Studies involved in teaching and learning Islam with children and youth (aged preschool through high school) in formal or complimentary Islamic schools, or on a freelance or community basis, in this particular Canadian city. These criteria were driven by an urgent and understudied question in the literature: by what methods are educators teaching Islam?

### **3.2.1 Criteria and Rationale for Participant Inclusion**

Two parts of the criteria for inclusion require elaboration: What constitutes an *educator*, including degrees of professional experience and/or teacher-education? What constitutes a *Muslim*, including sectarian or interpretational orientation? First, I took a wide stance in defining an educator as someone who works intentionally to guide, inform, and/or engage children or youth in the process of teaching and learning Islam. The rationale behind including informal, freelance, and complimentary-school educators—including those who were not formally educated or trained as teachers—along with their more formally-educated colleagues, was not just to honor the value of teaching experience itself. There were three particular reasons. First, was to recognize the fact that most Muslim children in Canada attend public schools during the week (Memon, 2013) and complimentary/informal/mosque schools on the weekends, thus, most Islamic teaching occurs in informal settings by volunteer and/or informally-educated teachers. This informal dominance is a reality in many Canadian Muslim educational communities and, therefore, a feature of this study. A second reason was that inquiry into some of the shared objectives of Islamic education in the

literature revealed mastery of ritual practices, sensitization to an unseen world, and reasoning Islamically, defined as: “engaging and reasoning with the Islamic tradition in light of contemporary life conditions” (Sahin, 2013, p. 50). These shared objectives lie outside the scope of formal secular liberal Western schooling (and higher teacher education) making it possible that Muslim teachers may need different and/or additional skills to teach Islam than the ones commonly taught in secular teacher education programs. This point has been acknowledged by scholars including Ajem and Memon (2011), who suggested that mainstream, secular teacher-training does not necessarily equate to teaching Islam *well*. The third reason for including informal educators built upon my own Master’s research in a Canadian mosque school, which included teachers who had no formal teacher education and where I found, within the clamor of rote memorization, closed-ended questioning, and traditional discipline techniques, instances of seemingly generative pedagogies that may be considered intrinsic to Islamic practices and perspectives themselves (Alkouatli, 2015).<sup>118</sup> While each of these pedagogies requires further research, they contribute to literature on the importance of including informally-educated Muslim educators, as in this study, and in potentially widening the scope of data.

Second, the conceptual perspective behind who constitutes a Muslim was similarly wide: a person who self-identified as a Muslim. Yet, a couple of factors contributed to a methodological decision to focus on self-identified *Sunni* Muslim educators. There is a Sunni perspectival dominance in Canadian Muslim community demographics, whereby a large majority of Muslims in Canada identify as Sunni, with Shia’ sects including Ismaili and Ahmadiyya, constituting a

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<sup>118</sup> As described in section 1.3: Research Overview, examples of generative pedagogies included multi-age participation in ritual prayer; warm and affectionate teacher–student relationships; role-modeling particular social etiquette (Islamic adab) in context; learning how to speak with God; thinking together about Islamic principles; and cultivating senses of belonging to larger human communities.

minority (Environics, 2016). This follows a global trend, whereby Sunni Muslims constitute up to 90% of the global Muslim population (Pew, 2015). In addition, Sunni Muslim perspectives dominate within the literature on Islamic Education in North America.<sup>119</sup> As the purpose of this research was to probe pedagogies, not sectarian differences, I chose to garner as much literature as possible, which led to a focus on Sunni perspectives. Finally, formal Sunni Muslim schools were the prevalent in the city compared to Shia' schools by a ratio of three to one. I contacted the one Shia' Muslim elementary school in the city and received an initial response, but they did not follow up. I also reached out to a Sufi-oriented elementary school, but they did not respond either. So, although I initially intended to include any educator who self-identified as Muslim and taught Islamic material—regardless of their personal sectarian or interpretational orientation, whereby no educator would be excluded based on orientation, sect, or interpretation—all of the participants in the study ended up being Sunni Muslim educators.

### **3.2.2 Identification, Invitation, and Communication Processes with Participants**

With the criteria for inclusion in mind, and after receiving approval from UBC's Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB; H19-00275), I used snowball sampling as a strategy to identify and invite participants, whereby initial participants assisted or referred additional potential participants (Roulston, 2013). I initially contacted teachers, principals, and social leaders that I personally knew within the Muslim community of this particular city by sending them the Introductory Letter for Potential Research Participants (see Appendix A). This letter provided an explanation of the study and invited educator participation. Initial contacts did not give me the names of other educators; instead, they passed my contact information on to others and, in some

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<sup>119</sup> Unique expressions of Islamic education have been developed by Shia scholars and educators, which warrant further study. Existing studies include, for example, Al-Fartousi (2016) and Merchant (2016).

cases, helped set up halaqat. Section 4.1: Participants: Muslim Canadian Educators describes the research participants in more detail.

At the time and place of this study, there were at least three full-time, formal, Sunni Muslim elementary schools: the Muslim Elementary School, with branches in two suburbs, and the Hikmah Elementary School. I contacted all three full-time schools. Teachers or principals from two of the schools responded and were included in the study. I also approached four complimentary, weekend schools: the Ihsan Weekend School, the Subha Mosque Weekend School, the Amin Mosque School, and the Muslim Assembly Weekend School—educators from all except the last one responded and participated. Three key contacts generated many research participants: two school leaders at two complimentary schools (Subha Mosque Weekend School and Ihsan Weekend School) and the principal of Hikmah Elementary School. I met the first research participants on April 12, 2019 and conducted semi-structured interviews and halaqat intensively until the end of April. At that point, I started to transcribe the audio data into text, and I continued to be in touch with participants, sending them completed transcripts in preparation for member checking. I continued to conduct interviews, including member-checking interviews, until the end of August 2019.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data collection took place over five months, from April to August 2019, whereby I met with the educators in places and at times convenient for them and engaged in the three methods of data collection: interviews, halaqat, and artifact-mediated halaqat. This section begins by describing each of the three methods in detail, followed by processes of data collection. I had anticipated that the research participants would have uneven understandings of pedagogy and differing dimensions of reflectivity and intentionality, abundant diversity based on lived experience. So, I

clearly defined my focus on *pedagogy* at the outset of the interviews and halaqat, which I described as *ways* or *methods of teaching* with which teachers engage learners in learning Islam. This definition was premised on the idea that, regardless of his or her educational background, each teacher uses pedagogies, however intentionally or unintentionally, and that those pedagogies have effects on the ways in which children learn and develop. Descriptions of these pedagogies constituted the unit of analysis in this study.

### **3.3.1 Methods**

To address the research questions, I employed semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), halaqah (Ahmed, 2014), and artifact-mediated halaqah as three varied and purposeful methods within an Islamic interpretive bricolage. Each of these three methods has a specific genealogy that can be traced back, through methodology, to the overarching research paradigms guiding this study. Denzin & Lincoln (2018) emphasized that understanding the history of a method is important in understanding its strengths, weaknesses, flexibility of use across paradigms, and in making visible how each, “as a set of material, interpretive practices, creates its own subject matter” (p. 524). In aiming to make visible epistemological diversity operationalized in pedagogy, I used semi-structured interviews, halaqat, and artifact-mediated halaqat with educators as creative approaches “that are situationally responsive and appropriate, credible to primary intended users, and effective in opening up new understandings” (Patton, 2002, p. 401). Along with opening up new understandings, the goal in using these approaches was to *make meaning together* to increase the data quality and relevance. Imagination was employed as a research tool in the later stages of the research study, where participants were invited to imagine and diagram their perspectives in constructing pedagogic artifacts, which then mediated subsequent research encounters. Rather than neat distinctions whereby each educator participated

in an equal measure of halaqat and interviews, given the constraints of time, schedule, and transportation, some participated only in halaqat, others only interviews, and some participated in both. Some constructed an artifact within a halaqah, some at home, and others not at all. Despite these variegations, the three methods generated a rich and diverse data corpus from three sources: first, transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews conducted with individual educators; second, transcriptions of audio-recorded halaqat conducted with groups of two to four educators; third, educators' pedagogic artifacts. Researcher analytic memos were analyzed along with the participant-generated data corpus (see Table 3.1. Data Triangulation).

### **3.3.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

An interview, as one of the most common forms of generating empirical data in the social sciences (Pascale, 2011), holds “dialogical potentials for knowledge production that are inherent in human conversations” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 579). As a verbal exchange whereby one person (the researcher) attempts to obtain descriptions of life phenomena from another person (the research participant) in order to interpret meaning, an interview may be considered as a socially-constructed communicative encounter, a mode of systematic, situated inquiry, and “a joint accomplishment of vulnerable, embodied persons with all sorts of hopes, fears, and interests” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 577). This jointly-constructed nature must be emphasized for this study, whereby researcher and research participants made meaning together, sometimes grappling for long periods of time with concepts difficult to conceptualize and even more difficult to articulate, either because they were obscured in intangibility (*ghayb*), or because they were difficult to isolate from a larger whole (see section 4.3). In addition, Pascale (2011) identified that analytic approaches to and within interviews vary, “depending on the ontological and epistemological foundations of research—most particularly, how one conceptualizes the nature of ‘truth’” (Pascale, 2011, p. 65). In this case,

aspects of Islamic ontology and epistemology—including what counts as truth and knowledge, and where each originated<sup>120</sup>—constituted research foundations that framed this method of interviewing and enabled particular meanings in cultural context.

In terms of the importance of a method's history (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), interview genealogy may stretch back over phylogenic time as humans have used conversation for making meaning and producing knowledge for as long as we have had language; “in this sense, the interview is as old as humanity” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 583). The method of interviewing may have genealogical roots in Muslim cultures, whereby *conversation for meaning-making* was primary amongst Prophetic pedagogies. An example is the classic dialogue between Muhammad and a stranger—essentially an interview—whereby the stranger asked Muhammad a series of questions, witnessed by Muhammad's companions (as described in Al-Nawawi, 2010, second hadith). Muhammad also held informal dialogic sessions, featuring people arriving to ask questions, discuss, and dispute (Ramadan, 2007).

In the Western world, the interview has roots in positivism, whereby researchers began, as early as the turn of the century, to conduct opinion polls and measure attitudes in psychology and sociology (Fontana & Frey, 1994), which blossomed into survey research after World War 2. Jean Piaget's theory of child development was based on interviews with children and Carl Rogers' non-directive interview for therapy (Brinkmann, 2017). Qualitative interviewing came to be used in grounded theory, ethnomethodology (not uncritically), and ethnography, featuring more recently in post-modernist and feminist ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Social scientists have generally come to understand the interview not as a neutral tool

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<sup>120</sup> Section 2.3 described Islamic ontological, epistemological, and pedagogic foundations. See also, al-Attas (2005) and Sayyid (2006).

in extracting information but as “a kind of social practice in itself that is historically constituted and with its own inbuilt presuppositions” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 585), which serve to shape the data produced.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as methods for this study given their potential in allowing participants latitude in exploring topics important to them and, simultaneously, allowing the researcher to focus conversation towards issues relevant to the research questions (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 579). Throughout the course of data collection, I engaged educators in audio-recorded, semi-structured individual interviews to explore the research questions over the course of one or two interviews averaging 45-minutes. These interviews provided flexible ways to engage with participants convenient to their particular schedules. Centering participant convenience meant that some interviews took place within breaks in the educators’ teaching day; others took place before or after school time; still others took place in parks, libraries, or cafes. The interviews were semi-structured around a sequence aimed at answering the research questions (see Appendix C), and I used this protocol to loosely guide the interviews and ensure that basic questions were addressed. But I also aimed to allow the conversation to flow naturally, towards areas of interest to the participant, while keeping in mind those overarching research questions. The interviews generated data in their own right, as well as providing context and depth to the educators’ contributions in halaqat.

### **3.3.1.2 Halaqat (Dialogic Circles)**

The second method of data collection was a *halaqah* (plural: *halaqat*), a traditional, dialogic, social practice that is common today in many formal and informal Muslim social and educational settings. As an “oral circle of learning” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 20), halaqah has devotional, pedagogical, and methodological functions. Conducted orally, with participants often positioned in a circle on



the floor, the format varies widely from a social gathering, where people discuss topics of concern to the community; to a collaborative group effort to come to consensus on an issue; to a transmission-based/teacher-led pedagogy; to a dialogic/student-led pedagogy (Ahmed, 2014); to an activist circle (Esack, 1997).<sup>121</sup> Halaqat are often premised upon an intention of nurturing faith and God-consciousness *in relation to* social issues and questions. Esposito (2003) noted that halaqat often include the quality of *shura*, or democratic consultation amongst participants. Siddiqui (2009, p. 143) described halaqah as characterizing the pedagogy of Muhammad as he educated the earliest community of Muslims; as a symmetrical model of communication that included, as defining features, interactivity, openness, and mutual beneficiality in embodying an Islamic code of ethics. Aspects of this code of ethics include functional inclusivity in collective meaning making, whereby everyone is welcome to contribute without interruption. There was an egalitarianism to Muhammad's early halaqat, whereby he would sit on the ground with people and could not be distinguished from them except with his pensiveness and shyness (Abu Ghuddah, 2017).<sup>122</sup> Illustrating the social etiquette characterizing a halaqah was that Muhammad would stand up in respect when a newcomer arrived, whether that person be older or younger, male or female, Muslim or non-Muslim. A third quality of a halaqah may be a scope of acceptable epistemic contribution to the circle beyond evidence gathered through the senses alone. Contributions might include the outcome of participants' insights gathered through the course of a day structured by ritual and contemplative practices. Accepting participants' *imagined offerings* as valuable and

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<sup>121</sup> Esack (1997) described halaqat in struggles against apartheid as activist circles of praxis, reflection, knowledge, and the nurturing of *taqwa* (God-consciousness), whereby young, South African Muslims would gather to reflect upon the relevance of the Qur'an and the sunnah in their lives and in their struggles.

<sup>122</sup> Once a man from the countryside approached Muhammad, who was sitting with his companions. The man became nervous. In order to assuage the man's nervousness, he said: "I am just the son of a woman who used to eat dried meat in Mecca"—dried meat being the food of the poor (Abu Ghuddah, 2017, p. 969).

useful, including those that originated in dreams, is a way of making the invisible visible through intersubjective imagination. This concept is illustrated in a precedent whereby the dream of one of Muhammad's companions became embodied in normative practice to this day in the five-daily call to prayer.<sup>123</sup> Taken together, these three qualities—faith-based intention, social etiquette derived from an Islamic perspective guiding dialogic conduct, and contemplative contributions—may contribute to an Islamic frame of reference that makes a halaqah distinct from a regular focus group.

Ahmed (2012) incorporated halaqah into the research design of a study with Muslim educators at an Islamic school in England as a primary research method, whereby social practices and knowledge were collaboratively and reflexively explored (Ahmed, 2012; 2014). As a culturally-relevant research method, halaqah centers participants' worldviews and enables engagement with topics of relevance to the research participants themselves (Ahmed, 2014). It may serve to validate both local knowledge and traditional ways of making meaning, which Ahmed (2014) described as "transformative for participants; giving them 'voice' and agency in shaping a way forward for their communities, meeting the challenges of a postcolonial world" (p. 12). Centering research participants' perspectives within a traditional social practice created a research climate that recognized, made visible, and worked with the complexities of conducting research with Muslim participants as minoritized members of dominant-culture societies. As such, engaging in halaqah as a research method aimed to contest the epistemic racism inherent in some North American academic discourse that considers much of Islamic scholarship, including

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<sup>123</sup> "Muhammad was looking for a means to call the faithful to prayer, considering Jewish or Christian practices, with bells or a horn, when Abdullah ibn Zayd came to him and told him of a dream: "a man taught him the manner in which he was to call others to prayer. The Prophet listened to him and immediately recognized that the vision was genuine. He sent for the former slave Bilal, whose voice was extraordinarily beautiful, and had him stand on top of the highest house near the mosque and call the people to prayer" (Ramadan, 2007, p. 93).

methodologies, as pre-modern and medieval (Günther, 2006), given its explicit religious framing (Ahmed, 2014). Halaqah as a research method may also operationalize Zine's (2008) fourth principle, which described religious practices as sites for the analysis of social phenomena. As compared to an individual interview, the degree to which a halaqah is structured might have an effect on its inquiry-based qualities—silencing some participants, amplifying others. Simultaneously, the degree to which is it multi-discursive may contribute to wider dialectics of meaning-making.

Although Ahmed (2012, 2014) was one of the only scholars to date to have used halaqah as a research method, parallels may be drawn from literature on group interviews and focus groups.<sup>124</sup> Initially popular with market research, group interviews have evolved over time to offer both advantages and challenges to qualitative social scientists. An advantage is that dynamic, dialogic interaction can occur between participants, in an emergent, dialogic group culture, which could lead to expanded and unexpected topics; another is that they may provide safe spaces for expression, especially when conducting research in communities of shared practices (Currie & Kelly, 2012). Multiple perspectives are shared in the same time it would take to conduct an interview with one person. All of these methodological advantages were evidenced in the halaqat conducted in this study. However, Frey and Fontana (1991) pointed out some difficulties in conducting group interviews: given group dynamics, they may be more difficult for a researcher to direct and also to transcribe, as participants interject and speak over one another. Outspoken participants might dominate an interview (Currie & Kelly, 2012), or dominant views might prevail.

In this current study, I aimed to construct with participants halaqat based on the intentionality, social etiquette, and epistemic expansiveness of traditional Islamic ones, as building

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<sup>124</sup> See also, Currie and Kelly (2012); Kamberelis, Dimitriadis and Welker (2017); and Kvale and Brinkman (2009).

on the transformative potential as described by Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welker (2018) of focus groups as “dialogic events within which power relations between researchers and research participants are diminished and people collectively interrogate the conditions of their lives to promote transformation” (p. 692). While power dimensions may never be completely diminished, sitting together as a heterogeneous group, loosely guided by a question as discursive theme, seemed to inspire comfort and confidence in the participants. My original research design included the aim of conducting three audio-recorded halaqat with four groups of four teachers each, constituting a total of 12 halaqat: one composed solely of formal-school teachers, one of complimentary-school teachers, one mixed group, and one group of freelance educators. Instead, due to the restrictions of the educators’ time and travel-distance around the city, I conducted halaqat wherever and whenever was most convenient for the educators, which primarily ended up being their respective schools with a cluster of colleagues. Therefore, I conducted one halaqah each in two formal schools, two halaqat each in three complimentary schools, and one halaqah in a public library with freelance educators, for a total of nine halaqat. While we sat in chairs rather than on the floor, we usually started with the phrase, *Bismillah al Rahman al Raheem* (in the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate) to set the intention of divine centering and seeking knowledge for self- and social-development, and followed the etiquette of circular and egalitarian contributions.

In order to address the research questions, halaqat were facilitated using key or guiding questions (see Appendix D). Ahmed (2018) described using *key questions* in an iterative way in which the facilitator rewords and reposes questions and encourages participants to challenge each other’s perspectives, until no new information is generated. Thus, questions guiding the halaqat in this study were slightly different from the semi-structured interview questions as they served

different functions in different dialogic contexts (please compare Appendices C and D).

While understanding a research encounter as inherently *joint meaning making* may be common in interpretive research, the particularly esoteric (*ghaybiat*) dimensions of the conceptual substrate underlying these research encounters—Islamically-inspired perspectives of objectives, content, participants in teaching and learning, and pedagogy—made for discussions whereby we grappled to articulate these esoteric dimensions and generated insights that could only have been captured within a research paradigm allowing for such dimensional reach. Participants offered perspectives colored by their own ritual and contemplative practices, their experiences engaging children in Islamic rituals, aspects of discrimination they faced in daily life. They built off each other's insights and contradicted each other, including heated disagreement in one particular halaqah—seemingly stimulated, at times, by my own perspectives from outside a given learning environment—which all contributed to richness of perspectives. As a researcher aiming to generate meaningful data across halaqat—not simply gathering the words of participants or leading them to say particular things within halaqat—I tried to guide constructive research encounters that would allow for freedom and contradiction, boldness and disobedience (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 579).<sup>125</sup> Constraints of halaqat mirroring those of focus groups, of which I was mindful, included that the voices of quieter educators or those with minority perspectives might not be heard. In those cases, I occasionally directed questions towards a quieter one or supported a comment that seemed in minority. Overall, while a halaqah may be more than a group interview—in terms of its intentionality, etiquette, effect, and relevance to participants—its importance in this study lies

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<sup>125</sup> In light of this point, part of the reason for designing and terming a focus group with Muslim educators as a *halaqah* is to deliberately craft a space where participants feel free to use language, concepts, and references specific to Islam if they so choose, rather than feeling restricted to articulate themselves within the bounds of a secular society and academy.

primarily in the possibilities of collaborative meaning making with educators in exploring epistemically-marginalized material within a culturally-relevant method.

### **3.3.1.3 Artifact Construction and Mediation**

This study's third method consisted of inviting the educators to construct a visual representation of their perspectives on methods of teaching Islam in light of their particular educational objectives—a pedagogic artifact—which we then discussed. I deliberately kept my instructions on constructing the artifact wide and open so that participants might feel free to express themselves however they wished. In some cases, I provided a participant with a blank piece of paper and ask them to draw, diagram, or in any way visually represent their perspectives. In other cases, the participants preferred to use the time together to talk, and suggested constructing their artifacts at home, which they then presented to me and/or to their colleagues in the next research encounter. Later, we examined them together as juxtaposed with ideas from previous discussions, probing themes and inconsistencies.

The artifact as a visual, pictorial, or diagrammatic exploration of pedagogy, generated by the participants analytically, conceptually, or imaginatively, can be considered as an unstandardized document in that it was solicited and, in some cases, created within a research encounter itself (Flick, 2009). While working with artifacts may be established in qualitative methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10), and artifact mediation may have traditionally occurred within halaqat,<sup>126</sup> artifact construction is much less common in the context of a halaqah as research

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<sup>126</sup> An early example of a visual aid used within a halaqa was reported in a hadith (Jabir, as cited in Abu Ghuddah, 2017, 2103), whereby one of the companions described that a group of people sitting with Muhammad when he drew a line on the ground in front of him. Muhammad said: "This is the path of Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He." Then Muhammad drew two lines to the right and two lines to the left and described them as deviated pathways. Pointing to the center line, Muhammad recited a verse from the Qur'an: "And [know] that this is the way leading straight unto Me: follow it, then, and follow not other ways, lest they cause you to deviate from His way. [All] this has He enjoined upon you, so that you might remain conscious of Him" (6:153).

encounter and as a method of data generation. Yet artifact construction and artifact-mediation in halaqah methodologically tapped the three research questions of this study differently than oral methods, stimulating new ways of thinking about pedagogy. Limitations of this method have been reported as including analyzing the artifact out of context, and, if used as a stand-alone method, providing only limited exposure to experiences and perspectives (Flick, 2009). Addressing these limitations, in this study, artifact construction was used *in addition to* the other two methods (interviews and halaqat), so that implicit meanings could be drawn out. I was also mindful of the contexts in which the educators constructed the artifacts—within a research encounter or at home; related to a formal-, complimentary- or freelance-educational context—and brought those contexts into our discussions of the artifact. In addition, Eberle (2018) asked probing questions of researchers who use images as data:

Which type of research question calls for collecting images? [...] which kinds of information do images contain that cannot be provided by other types of data, like thick descriptions, interview data [...]? Without a clear answer to this question it does not make much sense to collect images. (p. 393)

In order to attend to these questions, the way I used artifact-mediated halaqah must be understood as a method in two parts. The first part involved the educators' processes of generating the artifact, which, in turn, generated data. The second part involved discussing the artifact together in halaqah, whereby the halaqah was mediated by the artifact and the resulting discussion generated data. Methodological intentions included engaging in a creative process outside of convention, in an intimate space, that used visual rather than verbal expression, to stimulate the teachers in thinking Islamically about pedagogy. I initially hoped that the teachers would feel freer to tap emotions, intuition, and the epistemic fruits of spiritual and contemplative practices in imagining what is pedagogically possible in teaching and learning Islam. An analytic intention was that the artifact would triangulate the words of the educators in the oral research encounters: interviews and

halaqat. These intentions were realized in the cases of three educators in particular. While Eberle’s (2018) questions were useful to consider prior to data collection, they were only fully answered afterwards, in comparing the insights generated by oral research encounters and artifact-construction.

It is important to note that the uptake of this method was uneven: some participants eagerly and immediately diagramed their ideas; others constructed an artifact in private and sent it to me later; others struggled with the idea of an artifact and instead wrote a list; still others never constructed an artifact at all. Yet despite this uneven uptake, the conceptual breakthroughs that artifact construction stimulated with particular participants—and within myself as the researcher—made the method valuable in this study. Pushing oneself to think about pedagogy and express those thoughts in a medium different from an oral one—and then using the resultant artifact to mediate a halaqah—opened up new avenues for perceiving, meaning-making, and understanding, described in section 4.4.3.

Employing the three methods enabled triangulation of data: first, by gathering data from educators in full-time and complimentary schools and freelance educators; second, through individual interviews and group halaqat; third, by analyzing the educators’ artifacts in relation to their spoken words. Researcher analytic memos were examined in relation to these three data sources.

**Table 3.1 Data Triangulation**



	<b>Data Source 1</b>	<b>Data Source 2</b>	<b>Data Source 3</b>	<b>Educators' Contexts</b>	<b>Researcher's perspective</b>
<b>Research Questions</b>	Interviews	Halaqat	Educator-constructed artifacts	Formal + Complimentary schools + Freelance venues	Researcher analytic memos

### 3.3.2 Data-Collection Process

Once an educator decided to take part in this study, s/he was invited to participate in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview and/or a halaqah, organized around a primary topic of relevance to ways of teaching Islam, which I refer to as *research encounters*, and invited to construct an artifact. Initially, I aimed to conduct three halaqat with consistent groups of two-to-four educators, as well as an individual, semi-structured interviews with each one. This initial aim proved ambitious, given educators' allowances of time and schedule. Instead, I met with educators whenever and wherever possible, at times and in places convenient for them. The number of research encounters with each of the 35 participants fell along a spectrum: at a minimum, I conducted one semi-structured interview with a participant, or one halaqah with a small group. Sometimes that was enough, we exhausted the research questions, and I did not feel the need to schedule another. Other times, I would have preferred to engage in a second research encounter, but the participant was not available. At a maximum, I conducted two halaqat (one artifact-mediated), one semi-structured interview, and a member-checking meeting. This maximal research-encounter was due, in some instances, to the participant's availability and/or, in other instances, due to the fact that we both wanted the additional time to make elaborated meanings together.<sup>127</sup> Each research encounter was based on a research question (see Table 3.2. Sequence of Data Collection and Analysis). Flexibly, during one of the first two research encounters, with time

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<sup>127</sup> For example, in three different halaqat, three particular participants caught my attention as needing more time to express complex ideas or an abundance of ideas.

and interest permitting, I invited participants to draw or diagram their methods of teaching Islam, and to imagine new ways. These artifacts were discussed and photographed.

**Table 3.2 Sequence of Data Collection and Analysis**

Research Question	Methods of Data Collection Halaqah = H Interview = I			Date of data-collection (2019)	Ongoing Analysis Researcher
1. What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners specifically in teaching and learning Islam?	H1			April	Analytic memo writing Transcription Preliminary analysis: H1
2. How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives?		I		Ongoing (April–August)	Analytic memo writing Transcription Preliminary analysis: I
3. How do educators imagine, design, and implement new or contextually relevant pedagogies?			H2 Artifact –mediated (construction)	April	Analytic memo writing Transcription Preliminary analysis: H2 Preliminary artifact analysis
RQs 1, 2, 3			H3 Artifact- mediated (member checking)	July, August	Analytic memo writing Transcription Preliminary analysis: H3 Member-checking correction
RQs 1, 2, 3					Thematic Analysis Data: —H1, 2, 3 —Artifacts —Analytic memos

After the research encounters, I manually transcribed the anonymized<sup>128</sup> audio recordings into text, with help from Otter Voice Note software. I emailed each participant a Word document of the interview or halaqah in which they participated and invited them to review the document—add, delete, elaborate, or change their words in the transcriptions and amend their artifacts, if needed—and to meet for a final research encounter, three months after the others, to engage in member-checking. Some participants had topics they wanted to clarify or elaborate, an artifact to discuss, or corrections, so we meet in person for a third, audio-recorded member-checking

<sup>128</sup> As described in section 3.1.4, I invited each participant to choose their own pseudonym at the first meeting, upon signing the Informed Participant Consent Form for Islamic Teachers (Appendix B). If they did not choose one, I assigned one. I saved the audio recordings using the participant’s pseudonym. I also assigned pseudonyms to their respective schools and any other name mentioned in the text, including family members, religious leaders, place names, etc.

interview, which took place in July and August, 2019; still others replied that they were happy with the transcription and signed off the study digitally. Table 3.2 presents the process of data collection sequentially. Throughout the study, I made myself available to talk one-on-one at any point, for any reason; some educators requested that I share my results with their schools at a later date.

By the end of the data-collection period, I had collected 20 hours of audio-recorded research encounters including 35 educators over 20 semi-structured interviews (including member checking) that ran for an average duration of 45 minutes (almost 16 hours total); 10 halaqat that ran for an average duration of 60 minutes, with three lasting almost two hours (approximately 16 hours total); and nine artifacts (see Table 3.3. Data Corpus).

**Table 3.3 Data Corpus**

Site (Type)	Name	# of Educators	Data Sources		
			Interview Transcript	Halaqat Transcript	Artifacts
<b>Formal</b>	Hikmah Elementary	7	2	2	0
	Muslim Elementary	5	2	1	1
<b>Complimentary</b>	Subha Mosque Weekend School	9	7	3	4
	Ihsan Weekend School	5	4	1	0
	Ameen Mosque Weekend School	3	1	2	1
	Sideen	1			
<b>Freelance</b>	Abid	5	1		
	Halima		1		1
	Faris		1	1	1
	Nadia				
	Ola		1		1
<b>Total Educators</b> <sup>129</sup>		<b>35</b>			
<b>Total data items</b>			<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>

<sup>129</sup> I had estimated that there would be two dedicated Islamic content teachers at each formal school, thus estimating that my participant pool would include between 12 and 18 teachers. Instead, there were four participants in each halaqah at the formal schools and an average of six educators in the complimentary schools, who engaged in interviews and halaqat. Along with freelance educators, my total grew to 35 educators.

### 3.4 Iterative Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as an overarching analytic approach defined as “searching across a data set... to find repeated patterns of meaning” (p. 86), was selected as an appropriate method to analyze data generated in this study. Analytic focus was upon *meanings* articulated, constructed, and interpreted in interviews and halaqat, rather than on dialogic moves. The unit of analysis was pedagogical approaches to teaching Islam as a religion. Thematic analysis is both flexible and applicable “across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches” (p. 78) and simultaneously methodologically sound and able to yield rich analysis of data—especially if the researcher makes clear the analytic decisions, details, and processes undertaken, which is the goal of this section. First is acknowledgment of the active role of the researcher in the analytic process, in identifying which themes are interesting to that researcher in light of the research questions particular to this study, and in presenting them, rather than suggesting that themes *emerge* from the data. Second is defining what counts as a theme. Where a *theme* captures “something important about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), in this study, three broad themes captured different modalities of pedagogy used in teaching and learning Islam and were constructed based upon their *substantive significance* (Patton, 2002). The third analytic decision a researcher must make is whether to provide a rich description of the whole data set or focus on a particular aspect. As little empirical research had been previously conducted on Muslim educators’ pedagogies, this was an exploratory study; yet, within the data corpus, I focused specifically on educators’ descriptions and reflections of pedagogy, as connected to context, objectives, and conceptions of learners and teachers, and including intentions behind them and ways in which they were used. Given this broad focus, very little from the data corpus was excluded in analysis and extracts were taken expansively across that corpus. A fourth analytic

decision is whether to use inductive or theoretical thematic analysis—bottom up or top down. Given this study’s grounding in a faith-centered epistemological framework (Zine, 2008), within a wider Islamic paradigm, and its building upon some conceptual and empirical research on pedagogies in Islamic education, I conducted a more theoretical thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) described as tending to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in an area. Yet, after writing Chapter 2, and identifying sensitizing concepts prior to data collection, I did not return to the literature until after I had conducted a formal thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) on the data several months later. The fifth decision to analyze data at a *latent* level, rather than a *semantic* (surface description) level, was consistent with the interpretivist methodology; ideas, conceptualizations, and assumptions were theorized as informing the semantic level. The sixth decision is an epistemological one that involved analyzing the data according to a constructionist paradigm, seeing meaning as socially produced and reproduced, as elaborated by a faith-centered perspective asserting that people make meanings of experiences in sociocultural contexts including religious and spiritual ones (Zine, 2008; principles 2 and 3). Extending from the interpretivist methodology, rather than imagining that I could objectively capture truth through research encounters and deliver it, through analysis, in the form of a written document, I saw each research encounter as a joint meaning-making moment, followed by additional meaning-making in analysis.

In this study, the *data corpus* included all the data collected from interviews, halaqat, and artifacts, which I thematically analyzed to derive three broad themes, which can be considered as pedagogic modalities on the research questions. A *data item* referred to one transcribed research encounter (interview or halaqah) or one artifact. I considered the educators’ artifacts as separate data items from their research encounters because they were visual expressions of ideas, rather

than oral—thus constituting a different expressive genre—and some were constructed individually and privately (ie: at home), rather than collaboratively or within the group setting. A *data extract* was a section of coded data taken from a data item.

Thematic analysis included several phases, the first being familiarization of the data, involving reflecting on research encounters, writing analytic memos, manually transcribing audio recordings, and checking to ensure that the interview questions were answered. The second phase included initial coding (Saldaña, 2013), generation of code categories, and initial candidate themes. The third phase involved refinement of the themes and culminated in writing the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis was iterative in the sense that it began at the onset of data collection and continued in a reflective fashion throughout the study, whereby I toggled between research-encounter transcripts and analytic-memo writing, noting thoughts, insights, and tensions as they arose. In this section, I detail each of the analytic steps I took over three phases of thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clark’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis.

#### **3.4.1 Familiarization: Reflecting and Transcribing**

The first step involved reflecting upon the research encounters in becoming familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). While each research encounter was audio-recorded, I also took hand-written notes. Afterward a research encounter, and before listening to the audio recordings, I reflected upon the discussion that had taken place and started a digital file for that research encounter into which I typed participants’ big ideas and my own notes. After the majority of research encounters had taken place, I poured over my hand-written notes, highlighting particular points and noting possible codes and initial themes. As part of this familiarization stage, I wrote a fieldwork update to my committee, which was helpful in identifying key ideas. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) described that the process of thematic analysis begins when “the analyst

begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data—this may be during data collection” (p. 86). When I began the process of data collection, something immediately caught my attention: the educators were dealing in unique ways with a unique subject, towards unique objectives in light of unique conceptions of their own roles as teachers and the natures of their learners. This reminded me of Shulman’s (1987) pedagogical content knowledge, an “amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding” (p. 8). Here, in the interviews and halaqat, educators were describing their work in terms of such amalgams *and* special forms of professional understanding. As Shulman (1987) described how pedagogical content knowledge represents “the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8), this is exactly what I was seeing as I collected the data and many of these codes ended up within the theme of Transcendent Pedagogies, as pedagogies endemic to an Islamic conceptual environment.

The second part of data familiarization was transcription of the audio recordings of research encounters into text files. Transcription—as both an aspect of familiarization with the data as well as interpretation, whereby the analyst creates meaning in the process of transforming voice into text (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88)—is considered a form of analysis itself. I transcribed each of the research encounters with the help of Otter Voice Note software,<sup>130</sup> following Schifffrin’s (1993)

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<sup>130</sup> Anonymity was prioritized by labeling each audio recording—while it was still on the recording device—with the participants’ and schools’ pseudonyms. Thus, each audio recording and text transcription was immediately anonymized. Recordings were deleted after transcription from the recording device and from the transcription software, which does not keep copies of deleted files: “We store a copy of the recording, the associated transcript, speaker ID, key phrases and other related metadata until it is deleted by the user who uploaded the recording. If it is deleted by the user no record will be retained” (<https://otter.ai/privacy-policy>). One anonymized recording was kept in a password-protected file on my computer. Pseudonyms were linked to participants real names in one password-protected Word file, kept as a key.

transcription conventions (see Appendix E: Transcript Conventions). I transliterated Arabic words into their simplest English rendering, if needed using Esposito (2004). When a participant referenced the Qur'an, I found the original chapter and verse and included an English translation (from Asad, 1980). As an aspect of thematic analysis, rather than, for example, discourse analysis, I aimed to capture all of the participants' words verbatim, but I was not analyzing speech nuances in particular, like rising or falling intonation, grunts, stutters, or coughs. As such, I took out excessive *yeahs*, *rights*, *likes*, *umms*, and *uh huhs*. If I kept particular ones—along with noting particularly long pauses, distinct interruptions, whispering for emphasis, and laughing—it was because they were meaningful from a thematic standpoint and/or useful as visual text breaks in the transcriptions. For example, I italicized words and phrases that participants emphasized, either by saying them loudly or by whispering them.<sup>131</sup>

Although the interview questions were initially written to tap the research questions, and they were divided into two groups to guide two research encounters, participants' words rarely mapped directly to research questions. Sometimes participants offered information related to one research question while I was actually asking about another. The subsequent task of mapping participant answers through interview questions to research questions was important analytically, but it also aimed to ensure that the responses generated by the interview questions actually contributed to answering the research questions. For example, after the initial wave of research encounters in April 2019, I did not think that I had generated enough data specifically related to the third research question—How do educators imagine, design, and/or implement new or contextually-relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam? Yet within the

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<sup>131</sup> An example is Faris' emphasis on freedom as essential in teaching and learning Islam: "And that's why that freedom is *absolutely essential*" (H1, 4/15, 819). His emphasis on these words carries meaning and I denoted that emphasis using italics.



familiarization stage of analysis, I saw that even in discussing the initial interview questions in the first research encounters, participants were imagining into the future and describing contextually-necessary ways of teaching Islam to Canadian Muslim children.

### **3.4.2 Developing Codes into Code Categories and Initial Themes**

After wide-angle familiarization, coding is finer-grained examination of the data in making meaning of data collected within a paradigmatic perspective, searching for consistencies and patterns across the data (Saldaña, 2013). As I read closely through the data items, I was amazed by the distinctive voices and angles that each different educator took on teaching and learning basic Sunni Muslim content material to children and youth in this city. Educators in the same halaqah, who taught at the same school, held significantly varying pedagogical approaches and educational objectives. Many educators had a very specific and personal motivations for teaching Islam. So, reflecting this phenomenon of variety, for example, I created a code for general objectives of Islamic education and one for individual teacher objectives.

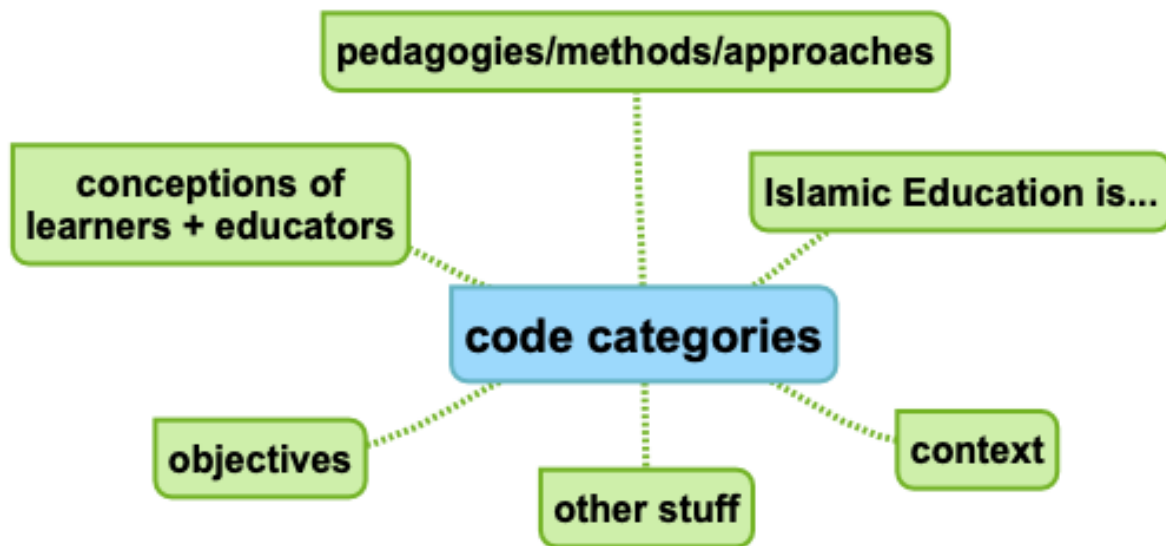
Staying close to the data, the initial codes I identified were nonetheless inspired by the literature on Islamic education. Sensitizing concepts appeared in features of the data. For example, one of the research participants—a freelance educator who was currently conducting a Master’s degree in Education and had experience teaching in the complimentary schools—described epistemic marginalization of Muslim ways of knowing that was harmonious with the literature (Ahmed, 2014; Zine, 2008). Her identification of this challenge not only motivated the creation of a code category of ‘contextual challenges facing Islamic education’ (which later became a subtheme), it also brought my attention to the fact that many pedagogies were actually *in response* to such contextual factors as epistemic marginalization. Perceiving sensitizing concepts from the literature within the data illustrated Braun and Clarke’s (2006) point that: “Researchers cannot free

themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). Although I did not return to my literature until after I had generated themes, I had already been cognitively saturated with that literature and it contributed to informing the lens through which I engaged in thematic analysis.

In the process of data collection, the educators had appeared to me to be discussing the research questions in wide circles without speaking directly about pedagogies—a reason for which I later discovered, which related to the holism at the heart of Islamic education (Zine, 2008): educators could not artificially extract pedagogies from the entirety of the Islamic educational process, yet pedagogies were woven throughout. To sharpen distinctions between topics in the data, the process of coding, I heuristically employed Shulman’s (1987) categories of knowledge,<sup>132</sup> to create code categories. Therefore, amongst the six code categories that I developed, only one captured pedagogies directly, the primary subject of my research questions: Pedagogies/Methods/Approaches. The other five were: Islamic education is..., Objectives, Conceptions of Learners and Educators, Context, and Other Stuff, to catch codes that did not seem to fit the other categories (see Figure 3.2. Code Categories).

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<sup>132</sup> Shulman’s (1987) categories were: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners and conceptions their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and pedagogical content knowledge (p. 8).



**Figure 3.2 Code Categories**

As coding progressed, I examined the lists of codes in each of the categories in order to see how they might combine into an overarching theme. It seemed that four broad themes overlay the codes: 1. Pivotal Pedagogies, 2. Pedagogies in Canadian Islamic Education, 3. Pedagogies of Here and Now, and 4. Transcendent Pedagogies. At this point in the analysis, I physically enacted what Braun and Clark (2006) described thematic analysis to be: constantly moving back and forth between the data corpus and the analysis being produced, via the coded extracts of data being analyzed. Moving across the room, between my handwritten lists of codes in categories on colored paper; printed transcriptions of research encounters; and my computer, where I was writing, this physical movement seemed to enrich the analytic process.

### **3.4.3 Refining the Themes and Writing the Dissertation**

Once I had my four candidate themes, I considered Patton's (1990) concepts of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity by, first, examining the themes at the level of codes—how representative were the themes of the codes and did the codes fit the themes?—and, second,



pedagogical suggestions, which are explored in more detail in the following two themes in terms of contextual and transcendent expressions.

An important step in theme refinement at this point was collecting the themes into a table, along with sub-themes (see Table 3.4. Thematic Analytic Working Table). This table, along with the figure diagrams, helped me see a larger picture, including how the code categories supported the three themes; how the themes fit together and where errant sub-themed might belong. At this point, I asked probing questions of my themes, including: ‘What does this theme mean?’ ‘What are the implications of this theme?’ ‘What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). These questions prompted closer examination of Pivotal Pedagogies, which seemed incorrectly named. Yes, these pedagogies were pivotal between unique conceptions of learner dimensions and objectives of Islamic Education, but didn’t all the pedagogies play pivotal roles? The key aspect of these pedagogies is that they recognized and engaged uniquely Islamic developmental dimensions of the human being, distinct from secular conceptions: nafs, ruh, ‘aql/qalb unity. Thus, I renamed the first theme: Dimensional Pedagogies. Each of the three initial themes captured a different angle on pedagogies that educators used in teaching and learning Islam. Figure 3.4. Refined Themes and Subthemes contains the final, refined themes and subthemes.

Concurring with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) point that writing is an integral part of the analysis, rather than taking place only at the end, I wrote throughout the analytic process and analysis continued through writing the dissertation. Analytic-memo writing, as a form of research journaling, started before data collection, through data-collection, and into the formal analytic phase of the research. In the analytic memos, I noted insights from the data, linked ideas, and started to identify codes and even possible themes. Simultaneously, analysis extended well into

writing the dissertation and refinement of themes continued as I assembled working tables of contents for each chapter.

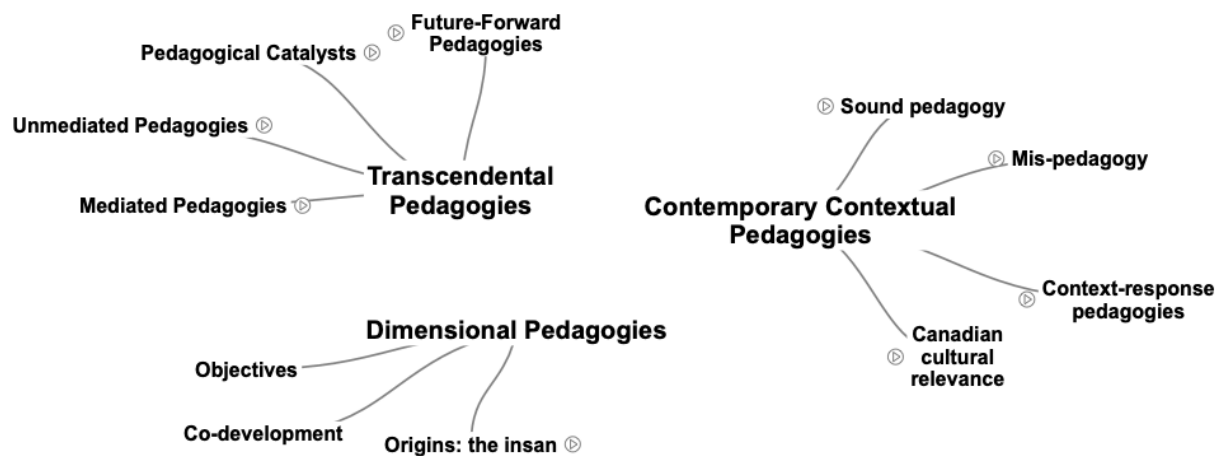


Figure 3.4 Refined Themes and Subthemes

Table 3.4 Thematic Analytic Working Table

Code Cluster/s	Theme	Subthemes	Sub-Sub Themes	
Islamic Education is...	1. Dimensional Pedagogies	Destinations: Objectives	‘Positive externalities’ Illuminated internalities*	
Objectives of IE		Origins: ‘Who is the Insan?’	Conception of the learner* Roles and Privileges of the teacher*	
Conceptions of Learners + Educators		Dimensional Pedagogies	Recognizing divine intelligence*	
			Honoring dignity	
			Fostering trustworthiness	
			Facilitating child leadership	
Reciprocal development*				
Context	2. Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies	Canadian Cultural Relevance	Affordances: Reason Choice and Freedom Action and play Teacher investment in locale	
Approaches/ Methods/ Pedagogies		Mis-Pedagogies	Constraints: Problems with Public Schools Epistemic Marginalization Marginalizing Islam Double Identity	
			Islam as Ancient, Irrelevant, Negative	
			Ineffective Methods	
			Equivocal Pedagogies	
		Sound Pedagogies	Pedagogical Deterioration	
			Learner Uniqueness; Educator Responsiveness	
			Open Dialogue	
			Discovery Learning	
		Context-Response Pedagogies	Bringing Islam Alive Here and Now	
			Curriculum Integration	
			Contextually-relevant role modeling*	
			Answering Back, Answering Ourselves	
			Barreling towards Contention	
			Standing Up, Public Speaking	
		3. Transcendent Pedagogies	Approaching the Limits of Perception	Developing Cross-Context Adab*
				Allah*
				Triangle of Education*
			Mediated Pedagogies	Measurement and the Unmeasurable*
Reasoning Islamically Together*				
Friends				
Environment, School, Mosque as Method				
Processes of Unmediation	Pedagogies of Qur’an*			
	Triangulated Reflection*			
	Imagination			
Pedagogical Catalysts	Children’s Dua*			
	Educator taqwa*			
	Educator’s Dua for Students*			
Future-Forward Pedagogies	Love			
	Technology			
	Research + Assembling a Relevant Islam*			
	“Doing Islam Right”**			

\* Seemingly a uniquely Islamic approach/pedagogy, i.e. not an Islamic iteration of a common, public-school pedagogy.

### 3.5 Chapter 3 Summary

Ahmed (2014) identified that Muslim researchers aiming to center their work in Islamic paradigms

are engaging with a “small aspect of the wider problem of Muslim engagement with modernity” (p. 580)—a modernity shaped by ongoing coloniality (Abdi, 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo, 2011), which marginalizes ontologies and epistemologies alternative to itself (Grosfoguel, 2010; Sayyid, 2006; Zine, 2008). Building on the work of scholars, who called for research based on holistic Islamic conceptual foundations (Al Faruqi, 1980; Al Zeerah, 2001), and more recent scholars who have done so, in full or in part (Ahmed, 2012, 2014; Memon, 2011; Zine, 2007, 2008), this study centered conceptual prioritization of an Islamic paradigm as an ethical imperative in providing internal consistency across ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods in conducting research relevant to the community in which the research takes place. Elaborating on Zine’s (2008) conceptual vocabulary of a critical faith-centered epistemology made visible aspects of the data that would have been rendered invisible by a secular conceptual paradigm. An interpretivist methodology made visible human interpretation at every level of the research design and enabled interviews, artifact-mediated research methods, and thematic analysis as ways of generating and engaging with data. Interpretivism within an Islamic conceptual paradigm makes space for interpretational differences. Ahmed’s (2014) Islamic research principles guided the methodology and provided halaqah as an Islamically-coherent research method. Taken as a whole, an Islamic interpretive bricolage constituted a broad base of internal consistency from identifying foundational sensitizing concepts and organizing the literature review; through selecting methods for data generation and guiding research encounters in Islamic relevance and etiquette; to enabling data recognition and Islamically-coherent analysis and interpretation in a process aspiring toward a “tawhid method of knowledge” (al-Attas, 2005, p. 14).



## Chapter 4: Fieldnotes

Over the course of five months, I met with 35 different Muslim Canadian educators, of diverse backgrounds and experiences in Islam, individually and in groups, who shared their experiences and perspectives on engaging children in pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam. They also shared recommendations on pedagogical imperatives moving forward into a digital, culturally-heterogeneous future. Over the duration of data collection, the research participants made visible two dynamic and complex forces, interacting with each other as a pedagogical substrate. First, Islam. Educators expressed distinct and varied perspectives on Islamic educational and life objectives, human development, and pedagogies, drawn from Islamic primary sources as well as experiences ‘back home.’<sup>133</sup> Second, Canada. Most educators centered Canadian culture—including pedagogic principles and practices—in describing appropriate ways of teaching and learning Islam, here and now. At the intersection of these two forces, some educators saw clearly illuminated ways forward for Muslim learners and educators in a complex world; others struggled with ways of understanding and sharing Islamic principles and practices with children in a contemporary Canadian context. Fatima asserted: “Raising children in the Western society—raising *Muslim* children—it is very challenging, I have to tell you, *challenging*” (I1, 4/10, 688–689).<sup>134</sup> The Islamic content material itself, its objectives, and pedagogies are largely intangible, posing pedagogical challenges in a visual, technological age characterized by the importance of evidence and reason. The dominant Canadian context functions on some premises that pose

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<sup>133</sup> The 35 educators referenced 17 countries in addition to Canada as informing their pedagogy; some referred to these countries as “back home” (Fatima, Huda, and Sideen).

<sup>134</sup> Data extracts of participants’ words are referenced by research encounter type (H=halaqah; I=interview), number, date, and line number(s). For example: (H1, 4/15, 819) or (I2, 4/21, 61–64).

epistemological challenges to holistic Muslim perspectives.<sup>135</sup> Yet today, as in history, it seems that there can be no teaching Islam, no Islamic pedagogies, outside a sociocultural context of time and place.

This chapter describes some experiences in the data-collection process as a link between an Islamic interpretive conceptual frame, research encounters in the field, and theme construction. It aims to contextualize data-collection and analysis. In the first section (4.1), I describe the research participants (35 Muslim Canadian educators) in more detail than the previous chapter. In section 4.2, I detail ways in which they described their own roles as educators. In section 4.3, I reflect on how they received me, as a researcher and as relevant to the research topic. In section 4.4, I discuss how the different methods solicited different perspectives on the research questions to generate different data. Section 4.6 concludes the chapter and outlines the three themes constructed from the data.

#### **4.1 Participants: Muslim Canadian Educators**

Educators at formal, complimentary, and freelance venues comprised the research participants in this study; four were school leaders or principals. Although these school leaders were not the target participants of this study—simply because I wanted to maximize teachers’ voluntariness of participation<sup>136</sup>—four school leaders participated in the study because they wanted to. I could not exclude them because they met the criteria for inclusion. Three of the four I knew from previous encounters with Islamic education in the city. One of them (Amira) had participated in my previous

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<sup>135</sup> Nasr (2012) offered an example from a Western context: “In modern epistemology, which is the foundation of all modern education, the knowing subject is restricted to the individual human being, the individual’s reason and his senses [...]. The subject is taken as earthly man (*sic*), cut from revelation and any transcendent principles, severed from anything beyond his lower self and cut off from the higher powers of the soul and mind” (p. 14).

<sup>136</sup> See section 3.1.4 Ethical Concerns, Principles, and Actions.

Master's research;<sup>137</sup> another (Rasha) had been in my cohort of the ITEP;<sup>138</sup> the third (Marya) I knew from five years previous, when my children participated in complimentary Islamic education in the city. Each school leader connected me with other teachers in their respective schools, engaged enthusiastically in the research encounters, and shared valuable insights on pedagogy.

Each research participant was an active member of the greater Muslim community in this particular city, composed of predominantly new Canadians, including immigrants and refugees. Their cultural backgrounds rooted in 17 different countries,<sup>139</sup> teaching experiences and qualifications, and pedagogical approaches varied widely (see Table 4.1. Participant Biographical Data). Many participants identified challenges of living between cultures. Identifying educators' places of origin aims to provide a sense of the diversity of participant backgrounds, which in most, if not all cases, came to bear on the ways in which educators made meaning of the research questions and their own pedagogies. Participants referred to their experiences of learning Islam in a particular context 'back home' as juxtaposed with the Canadian contextual experiences of their students. Two educators were born in Canada: Bilal and Asifa. Bilal, a social studies teacher at Hikmah Elementary School, strongly identified with social and political issues in Palestine yet emphasized the importance of his educational commitment and contribution to his local Canadian

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<sup>137</sup> Amira was one of the teachers at the mosque school in which I conducted M.A. research; I did not contact that school for this current study. But since the completion of my M.A. research, Amira had become the school leader of another weekend school and when I contacted that school to embark upon my doctoral research, she was the one who responded to my email. Although I did not explicitly ask her to attend the first halaqah with three other teachers, because I was mindful of the time she had already given me, she did attend, and contributed richly to the discussion, as well as participating in two additional research encounters. Although, as of 2011, the Canadian Muslim population numbered just over one million (Environics, 2016), the Muslim community in the city where this study took place was not large; Muslim educators made up an even smaller subset of that population. Therefore, it made sense that in conducting two studies in the same city, I might get some overlap in participants.

<sup>138</sup> Please recall the description of the Islamic Teacher Education Program (ITEP) from section 2.1.1.3 Contemporary Islamic Education in Canada.

<sup>139</sup> Participants identified close connections to places of origin and education including Algeria, Canada, Egypt, India, Jordan, Kashmir, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen.

context. Asifa, an Islamic Studies teacher at the Muslim Elementary School, had completed high school in Canada, then went to India, the birthplace of her parents, for higher Islamic education. Sideen and Nadia arrived in Canada as teenagers. Sideen, a complimentary-school teacher, spent her childhood in the UAE and her own experience arriving in Canada as a teenager informed her pedagogy in helping Muslim children negotiate differing cultural contexts. Nadia initially got involved in complimentary Islamic education, upon arrival in Canada from Libya, as a way to use her fluency in the Arabic language.

In addition to educators at established sites of Islamic education, both formal and complimentary, five *freelance* educators participated in this study. Two offered educational consultation services specifically within the Muslim community: Halima worked for a family development program for new Canadians and, simultaneously, had a private consultancy specifically aimed at supporting Muslim child and youth development within the contexts of home and complimentary Islamic schools. Having taught for several years at complimentary schools, which she called “Sunday schools” (I1, 8/8, 22), Halima offered a birds-eye view of these overlapping contexts through the lens of human development within an Islamic paradigm. Ola conducted Islamic educational activities for Muslim youth at various community venues. On the day I interviewed her, she had just returned from a party of teenage girls in celebration of one girl adopting the Islamic headscarf (*hijab*). Ola had organized the party around the theme of a hadith: “God is Beautiful and loves beauty.”<sup>140</sup> She had each of the girls write about something beautiful in their lives on paper butterflies, which they then attached to a bouquet of flowers for the party girl. Ola asserted that these types of educational community events were profound ways of learning Islam by *living* it, optimal for Muslim Canadian youth. Abid offered Islamic instruction to youth

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<sup>140</sup> Considered a strong hadith from the collection of Sahih Muslim.

in the community on a freelance basis and, at the time of the study, was working with some youth who were advanced in Arabic and had outgrown the weekend schools.<sup>141</sup> Abid had developed a novel approach to understanding the Qur'an based on thematic analysis and key-word analysis.<sup>142</sup> Nadia worked with new Canadian youth (immigrants and refugees) in adapting to Canadian systems, and was thus experienced in the challenges of living between cultures. Nadia was enrolled in a Master's degree in Equity Studies in Education at a local university at the time of the study and she had taught in complimentary Islamic schools. The fifth freelance educator, Faris, offered Islamic instruction to youth and adults in various community venues, along with working at one of the complimentary schools included in this study. He had developed a three-year program covering the entire Qur'an in English, which aimed to offer a variety of interpretations of any given verse in order to furnish youth the ability to assemble "their own set of beliefs and practices; their *own* repertoire of Islam" (H1, 4/15, 372). Each of these freelance educators had particular qualifications to teach Islam—including a Master's degree in Islamic Studies, a Master's degree in Education, and/or an ijazah (certificate to teach Islamic material) from an Islamic scholar or institution. As these freelance educators met the criteria of teaching Islam to children and youth in the city, I invited them to participate, anticipating correctly that their backgrounds and approaches to teaching Islam might illustrate pedagogical distinctness.

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<sup>141</sup> Most Islamic schools in the city, formal and complimentary, served elementary-aged children; there were no Islamic high schools at the time of the study.

<sup>142</sup> Described in section 7.2.3 Pedagogies of Qur'an: 'The Big Door.'

**Table 4.1 Participant Biographical Data**

Site of Work	Participant Name <sup>143</sup>	Place of Origin <sup>144</sup>	Biographical Notes
<b>Formal Islamic elementary school</b>			K–12 teachers must be certified by BC Ministry of Education
	Rasha	Egypt	<b>School principal.</b> Islamic Teacher Education Program (online)
	Bilal	Palestine	Social Studies + Islamic teacher. MA Education (Canada)
	Rawan	Lebanon	Islamic studies teachers Each had various additional qualifications to teach in Canada
	Amal	Egypt	
	Yusr	Libya	
	Sara	Somalia	
	Mina	Egypt	
	Ruby	Syria	Homeroom teacher. BSc. Chemistry, Ijazah Qur'an
	Asifa	India	Islamic studies teacher. Islamic Studies, Canadian madrasa
	Lulu	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. MD (Egypt)
	Amora	Tunisia	Islamic studies teacher. MA Education (USA)
	Sharifa	Jordan	Islamic studies teacher. MA Education (Jordan)
<b>Informal mosque or weekend school</b>			Educators had varying educational training + years of experience
	Amira	Algeria	<b>School leader.</b> BA Islamic Studies (online)
	Yassine	Kashmir	<b>School leader.</b> PhD, Microbiology (India)
	Marya	Egypt	<b>School leader.</b> Ten+ years' teaching Islam; Ijazah: Qur'an
	Sideen	Egypt/UAE	Islamic studies teacher. MA, Economics (Canada)
	Nour	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. PhD, Sociology (Egypt)
	Hamza	Syria	Islamic studies teacher. PhD, Chemistry (Canada)
	Saba	Yemen	Islamic studies teacher. Several years teaching Islam
	Jina	Morocco	Islamic studies teacher. MEd. Child/Youth Care (Canada)
	Reem	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. Ijazah: Qur'an + Islamic Studies
	Layla	Morocco	Islamic studies teacher. BA Art (France)
	Hana	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. Islamic teaching experience
	Dalia	Syria	Islamic studies teacher. Little experience, recently arrived
	Hadeel	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. BA Math (Iraq)
	Mona	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. BEd. (Egypt); teaches French preschool
	Huda	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. Over ten years' experience teaching Islam
	Fatima	Egypt	Islamic studies teacher. MEd. ECE (in progress)
	Ama	Jordan	Assistant teacher; little experience
	Amina	Palestine/KSA	Islamic studies teacher. Taught Arabic 30 years, various countries
<b>Community venues</b>	Faris	Pakistan/ Saudi Arabia	Freelance Islamic studies teacher MA Religious Studies (Canada); MA Islamic Studies (Malaysia)
	Nadia	Libya	Freelance educator + youth worker MA Equity Studies in Education (Canada; in progress)
	Abid	Morocco	Freelance Islamic teacher MA, Linguistics (France); Ijazah: Qur'an + Hadith
	Halima	Egypt	Educational + parenting consultant ECE; Family + Youth Development background
	Ola	Egypt	Educational consultant MA in Education (online)

<sup>143</sup> All people and place names are pseudonyms.

<sup>144</sup> Place of Origin refers to the place in which a participant grew up and was educated in Islam.

#### 4.1.1 Noting Gender

Out of the 35 educators who comprised the research participants of this study, five were male and 30 were female. These ratios indicating the feminization of the teaching profession are common not only in Islamic schools in Canada, where educational matters in growing communities have often been delegated to women (Memon, 2013), they are also in keeping with ratios in Canadian public schools (Guo, 2015; Zine, 2007). Little empirical research in Islamic Education specifically has explored reasons behind this feminization of Muslim educators, which points to a gap to be explored. In this study, educators engaging with the research questions did not seem to do so differently relative to gender specifically. While shared themes arose within the research encounters, as well as vivid differences, those themes and differences did not seem to be tied to gender. Yet pedagogical differences based on gender *may* exist and this is another exciting research trajectory to be explored, driven by different research questions.<sup>145</sup>

While Zine (2006, 2008) explored the discursive construction of gendered identities and relations in Canadian Islamic schools,<sup>146</sup> less inquiry has examined educators' pedagogies in contributing to this construction. In various other fields, like Anthropology, Sociology, and Cultural and Islamic Studies, female scholars have been re-interpreting the Qur'an (Bakhtiar, 2011; Barlas, 2016; Wadud, 1999), contesting and decolonizing global hegemonic representations of Muslim women (Taylor & Zine, 2014), examining gendered Islamophobia (Zine, 2006), and

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<sup>145</sup> Examples of such research questions might include: How do educators' gendered understandings of Islam come to bear upon their pedagogies in Islamic education? How would these pedagogies nurture gendered subjectivities? How do developments in the field of Islamic Studies, involving feminist hermeneutics and re-interpretations of primary sources, affect educators' pedagogies in the field of Islamic Education?

<sup>146</sup> Zine (2008) described finding, both constraints and affordances facing girls in Islamic schools in Canada. On the one hand, girl students had less restrictions in pursuing academic subjects ordinarily considered by the dominant culture the intellectual domain of men; yet they faced restrictions in terms of social practices. Zine described that despite attempts to provide more equitable academic opportunities, "the rigid regulation of gender-based structures created a limiting paradigm that worked against gender equity" (p. 225).

contributing to Islamic feminist discourses centered on “religious arguments for gender equality and social justice” (Badran, 2018, p. 136).<sup>147</sup> These discourses are often based upon some shared conceptions that include social failure in implementing Qur’anic equitable and liberatory principles and male scholars’ maintenance of authority based upon “their own particular male interpretations of the sources” (Davids, 2015, p. 314). While Islamic feminism specifically in relation to Islamic education remains elusive, the active and agentic participation of women in Islamic scholarship, education, and community development over time and place—and the explicit equity and equality granted women in the Qur’an (Davids, 2015)—may not be reflected in dominant narratives within sites of Islamic education, creating the mis-impression that women occupy a marginal and unequal position in all three. Davids (2015) asserted:

In order for Muslim women, then, to address or remedy their exclusion from the foundational interaction and participation from their own religion and its interpretations, they have to engage with the very conceptions of Islamic education—as constituted by the Qur’an and Sunnah. (p. 318)

This assertion highlights the central role of Islamic education in preparing young Muslim learners for building equitable communities of the future, as well as imperatives for future research.

A final, methodological, consideration involving gender in this study was in terms of local expressions of Islamic etiquette and sensitivities around the mixing of genders in interviews and halaqat. Prior to data-collection, I had prepared for the possibility of facing requests for differing configurations, guided by Ahmed’s (2014) fifth principle of Islamic research centering etiquette and in light of previous research experiences, whereby a male educator had me observe his class from behind a screen (see Alkoutli & Vadeboncoeur, 2018, p. 32). In the field, I followed the

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<sup>147</sup> While scholarly contribution at the intersection of gender and Islam is vast, and has implications on education, some key names and references include Abu-Lughod (2002); Badran (2009); Bakhtiar (2011); Barazangi (2000); Barlas (2016); Mahmood (2012); Shaikh (2013); Wadud (1999, 2006).



configurations suggested by the educators themselves. Three male educators were comfortable participating in halaqah with me and other female educators in a mixed-gender research encounter; the fourth met me for an interview at his school; and the fifth met me in a busy public space, commensurate with common understandings of Islamic etiquette.

#### **4.1.2 Educators' Perspectives on their Roles**

Some of the educators offered insights into their perspectives on their work and their careers that revealed unique conceptions of Muslim educators and had distinct bearing on their pedagogical approaches. Amal recounted how she discussed her work with her students: “I always tell my kids it’s not about my salary. Maybe one of you will learn one *ayah* (verse of Qur’an) from me and after my death Allah will reward me with it. So, it’s *always* beneficial” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 163–165). She defined the work of Muslim educators as a type of *sadaqah jariyah*, or an ongoing charity,<sup>148</sup> and beneficial knowledge: “It is *‘ilm yandafubi*; knowledge that people will continue to teach and learn, like continuous good deeds” (170). These conceptions of daily work being ongoing charitable action for the betterment of the community with resonances in the hereafter added degrees of responsibility, privilege, and passion. “As an Islamic teacher, it’s an honor. [...] It’s a *privilege* to teach this religion. That’s why we’re so dedicated from heart and soul, we love to do it” (Asifa, H1, ME, 4/26, 74; 143–144). Ruby also described her job as a homeroom teacher at the Muslim Elementary school as multi-layered joy: “Alhamdulillah. I am so happy. At the time I am practicing my career, I am helping my community, building a new generation, and pleasing Allah” (I1, 4/26, 246–247). Rasha, principal of Hikmah Elementary School, described a quality common amongst teachers as being passion for the topic:

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<sup>148</sup> The concept of *sadaqah jariyah* is derived from a hadith narrated by Muslim as a gift or bestowal that benefits people in this worldly lifetime and the next.

All the teachers are passionate about the subject they are teaching. If I am teaching math, it's because I love math. If I am teaching drama, it's because I am passionate about drama. The Islamic Studies teachers, the only thing they are passionate about is the relationship of the student with Allah (ﷻ).<sup>149</sup> (I1, 4/23, 35–38)

Bilal described that a Muslim educator's passion for the topic makes Islamic pedagogy hard to replicate: "It makes it very difficult to put in a nice pedagogical kit that I could just hand to another school and say, 'Here you go.' Because if that person is not enthusiastic about the material, even if they have all of the knowledge, it just won't work" (I1, 4/23, 454–457). Educators' articulations of love for Islamic education resonated across the data corpus.

In terms of teacher qualifications, Rasha provided insight, saying:

Honestly, I don't believe that the [Teacher Education] Professional Development Program *makes* teachers. They are teachers by nature, by passion. They are skilled; they are creative as teachers. The PDP is just the refining of it. So, if you don't have it, the PDP does not make them good teachers—whatever kind of teachers they are, Islamic or not. (I1, 4/23, 1–5)

This sentiment suggested that good educators were intrinsically motivated to teach. Part of that motivation was the sense that they had something special to offer Muslim Canadian children and the community. Sideen described how arriving in Canada from the UAE as a teenager had been difficult: "It was a very turbulent time—a lot of hormones, a lot of growth, a period of change—and I found it incredibly difficult to navigate on my own" (I1, 4/19, 213214). She described her parents as educated and open minded, but they didn't *know* Canadian culture—to them, it was foreign. "And, so, even though they tried to help as much as they could, they didn't really have a full grasp of how to do this. And so, I wanted to give kids that opportunity" (220). Sideen's combined knowledge of Islam *and* knowledge of Canadian culture was something she wanted to

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<sup>149</sup> After uttering the word *Allah* (God), many participants included one of two honorific phrases: *subhana wa tala* (the most glorified, the most high) or *jalla jalalouhou* (may his glory be glorified), which I denote with the Arabic symbol ﷻ rather than the transliterated English. As with honoring Muhammad, the point was to retain honor of the term and stay true to the words of the research participants, without distraction. For simplicity, I used the symbol for both honorific expressions.

offer to the community: “calming their fears, connecting with the girls, and talking out different things that are going on in their lives until they’re able to do it on their own and don’t need the guidance anymore” (242–244). Implications of this motivation were expansive and are discussed in the chapters to come.

In terms of educators’ perspectives on their roles within the larger picture of Islamic education, and their relationships with the learners, Amira highlighted leading by example: “This is part of striving in the name of Allah as a teacher” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 65–67). Bilal likened his role to that of a mayor: “Someone told me, ‘You should be in politics.’ I think I *am* in politics!” He described walking through a local mall with a non-Muslim friend:

And as I’m walking through the mall, little kids are coming up to me, ‘Salaam aleikum brother! Salaam aleikum, brother!’ And my friend remarked, ‘You’re like the mayor of a little Arab village. Everywhere you go, there are these little people talking to you.’ [laughs]. And so, I *am* in politics. I do have ‘a people’ that I’m responsible for. I’m not the mayor. But I’m here, and I have a role to play. (I1, 4/23, 489–499)

Bilal’s responsibility to his people also had pedagogical implications, to be explored in the pages to come, including on his own behavior and self-development. Faris saw his role as teacher as more important than it should be, in the absence of an agreed-upon curriculum and without a shared understanding of educational objectives within the community of the mosque school where he worked, specifically, and in the larger Muslim community in the city more generally. He said,

It depends too much on a teacher, the way things are right now. On the other hand, even as I say this, I’m concerned that perhaps this is the best that we can have. Because if we were to push towards a shared understanding, that would actually suffocate the space for more open discussion. [...] and any democratic potential in it, and go towards the authority-based thing. (H1, 4/15, 306–309; 314–317).

In other words, while being aware that educational inconsistencies in the community resulted in too much emphasis placed upon particular educators, Faris also knew that to push for shared understanding, and distribution of responsibility, might result in the coalescence of authority and

diminish chances for democratic potential in teaching and learning Islam. For reasons of educational heterogeneity, then, Faris described himself as a *facilitator* of discussions amongst young Muslims, not as an *instructor*: “So even when I teach them the Qur’an, I actually share with them the different views that have existed about certain things. And I would let them choose, let them make up their minds” (H1, 332–335). Another reason why Faris, and Muslim educators in general, may be particularly important here and now is that, throughout our communities, we are lacking relationships with more-experienced others. From the educators’ individual motivations and perspectives on their teaching, it is apparent that just as objectives of teaching and learning are not singular, neither are pedagogical approaches.

#### **4.2 Interaction in the Field**

I embarked upon fieldwork with humility, aware of the situated tensions saturated with contemporary and historical power differentials identified in section 3.1.1 (Researcher’s Location). Would I be welcomed by the research participants as a Muslim sister—a colleague, an ally, and as affirming the value of Islam? Or would I be taken as a representative of white oppression? Or something in-between? I dressed neatly, simply, and modestly. I tried to strike a balance between honoring the educators’ expertise yet offering insights of value, when asked. Conscious of Ahmed’s (2014, p. 570) principle of centering the human situation in research, and aware of the participants’ limited time, I wanted them to leave each research encounter with the sense that it had been a valuable experience and that their time had been well spent. In addition, I aimed to embody Ahmed’s (2014) fifth research principle of commitment to Islamic etiquette by working around their class times; offering refreshments of nuts, cookies, and dates within the research encounters; bringing each participant a box of Lebanese sweets on second meeting and a gift-card on third meeting; and meeting the male participants within the gender parameters of open public

spaces. I was the only convert to Islam<sup>150</sup> in the group of 35 participants, with only two others born in Canada. Thus, I was one of only a few who had not had a childhood education in Islamic education. This resulted in a sense of both *deficiency*, in terms of Islamic education in early life, and *enthusiasm* for the subject, which Fatima described based on her observations of other converts she had met:

We were *all born Muslim*. [We have] the seeds of Islam. [...] So, this is why I am not surprised when I see converted people, when they convert to Islam, they are so eager to know a lot—as if they are catching up on what they have missed! They are so *thirsty*. They want to drink and drink; they want to learn and learn! This is not because they want to know more or they are so curious—no. It’s because they were born as Muslims, but they have missed *a lot*. So, they want to *catch up* what they have missed. (11, 4/19, 422–431)<sup>151</sup>

Here, Fatima applied a ‘seed’ analogy, which will feature as important in considering Islamic pedagogy in Chapter 6, to the situations of converts: we need the right environment for our “seeds of Islam” to grow, catch up, and bloom.

Amongst the research participants, it seemed, I was taken as a colleague and sister in the faith. Most of them peppered their speech with Islamic words and phrases in Arabic (see Glossary, p. xvii), most often without translating, which might indicate that they saw me as *insider enough* that they did not need to translate. Yet, I still retained outsider status: I was an outsider to each of the schools in which the participants worked; I was an ethnic/cultural outsider in that I did not have

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<sup>150</sup> I had heard about, and contacted, a Muslim convert who was a social leader and educator in the community, but she was unavailable to participate in the study. In the development of Islamic education, as one of several factors in the emergence of religification in Muslim identity in the UK, Panjwani (2017) critically noted the significant role of converts: “Heads of several Muslim schools and writers of influential papers on Islamic education happen to be converts. This makes sense as, having consciously chosen it, Muslim identity is likely to be central for them and given their in-depth familiarity with the educational system it would be natural for them to rise in the school hierarchy. The role of converts, though under-researched, is very important in the process of the religification of Muslim identity in the UK, both through schools and more generally” (p. 602).

<sup>151</sup> While Fatima described the enthusiasm of Muslim converts as intrinsic to their humanness containing “the seeds of Islam,” Panjwani (2017) identified it as a cause of rising religification in a reduction of diversity in identity-attributes and religious differences. Religification of young Muslims as a pedagogical objective is described in section 5.1.1.1.

a subculture that I belonged to apart from the dominant Eurocentric Canadian one; and I was on the fringe of the Muslim community in this city, in part, because I did not live there consistently. My outsider status—and maybe the generally eccentric ethos of my personality—seemed to create a little bit of space, of freedom, for participants to speak openly. I encouraged this freedom by accepting all epistemic offerings, including diversities of interpretational expressions; aiming not to impose, or even suggest, a dominant interpretational perspective; and presenting myself as I authentically was: a Muslim researcher interested in ways and methods of teaching Islam. Glimpses of this space included, for example, Bilal suddenly stating: “Whether it is relevant or not to your research, I view myself as an orthodox Sunni Muslim” (I1, 4/23, 129–130); and Amira’s urgently whispered insights, here speaking about her own teachers: “Allah is giving them *baraka* [blessings] *you cannot imagine*, Claire!” (I1, 4/20, 449); and Faris describing his oppositional stance to a dominant assumption in many Islamic schools as being, “We know what needs to be done, and we’re just here to deliver” (H1, 4/15, 215), which made people uncomfortable. He continued: “So part of the job for me, in that setting, is to remain invisible, as much as I can, vis-à-vis the management...” [pause, then we both laughed] (215–220). The openness with which the participants engaged in the research encounters, the intimacy, and the diverse perspectives they expressed created a sense of a multi-voice, multi-perspectival conversation ongoing over time and place, which is how Kazmi (2003, p. 279) described education in Islamic traditions: offering multiple storylines for learners to select and weave together into new senses of self. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 94) suggested that the analyst takes on a dual position as both a cultural member and cultural commentator, my own mixed epistemic background may have enabled that dual position, enriched empirical and analytic processes in this study, and contributed depth perception to both cultural membership and cultural commentary.

### 4.3 Methods as Angles on Data

Meeting with these Muslim Canadian educators—engaging together in the methods of semi-structured interviews, halaqat, and artifact generation/mediation—yielded rich, exciting, and diverse data. In the sections below, the ways in which each method produced different angles on data is presented; these ways are foundational to the following chapters.

#### 4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews provided opportunities to communicate directly and intimately with each educator, following a natural flow of ideas wherever they led. In some cases, the esoteric nature of the topic matter—itsself beyond the scope of language to articulate—led to tentative, conceptual grappling as collaborative meaning-making.<sup>152</sup> In terms of individual interviews, although each was semi-structured in that the conversation was encouraged to flow in directions that arose in the moment, each was also guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix C). This protocol enabled me, in the analysis phase, to juxtapose one interview against another to examine differences in the answers to a particular question. Examining the data items against each other this way made visible

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<sup>152</sup> An example of such grappling occurred in an interview with Amira, in the following amended excerpt:  
Amira: Subhan Allah, when I was student—young, in schools—not all the teachers were spicy, you know? So, what is the ingredient here?

Claire: What *is* the ingredient?

Amira: *This* is the thing? Unbelievable. When you feel comfort, you will get the knowledge.

Claire: But do you think it's—

Amira: —or is it a method? I don't know. We take knowledge, we shape it based on, you know, the other side [the child], and then we give it smoothly—

Claire: —in a way that they can understand...

Amira: Is this an educational methodology? Or is it higher? [pause]

Claire: Could it possibly be that when you gain knowledge, whether it's from Allah, or from experience, or from school, a contemplative practice, whatever, and you take note of the *process*—*how* you got that knowledge, *when* it came—and *that* you share?

Amira: Yes, I see. It's...

Claire: Would that explain the differences as to why one person can communicate knowledge but another person can't? I don't know!

Amira: Yes! I don't know! I have to think about it! [laughing] (I1, 4/20, 380–412)

distinctions. One was in parlance. Each educator spoke a variation of an Islamic parlance, rooted in principles and concepts yet differentially expressed, which was larger than language yet contained words in the Arabic, English, and (less-often) Urdu languages. Islamic parlance clothed Islamic principles, ideas, practices, and processes as part of a constellation of concepts derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, Sirah, and lived Muslim experience, as the vernacular of people affectively and cognitively connected to an Islamic paradigm. Every educator engaged in this parlance, but differently, possibly based on their cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences. Those raised in Canada seemed to integrate more secular Western conceptual language into their Islamic parlance, like Sideen, for example:

If we're talking about the monotheistic religions, they *are* very similar. And, yes, there are things that are *starkly different*. But it's only a handful of items. The rest of the principles are the same, which makes sense because they come from the same God. So, it's a continuation of the same series" (I1, 4/19, 428–431).

Others, like Abid, responded almost *entirely* to the questions I asked him in the words of the Qur'an and Hadith. In this uniqueness of speech, Abid initially illustrated a binary concept: thinking within an Islamic paradigm inspires, and maybe necessitates, Islamic parlance; simultaneously, interpreting Islamic parlance requires knowledge of an Islamic paradigm in that many of the concepts to which the educators referred lay outside a secular paradigmatic frame. Examples of distinct differences in parlance are Abid's and Bilal's responses to a key interview question regarding pedagogy in developing a young Muslim's connection with God. Both were male Islamic studies educators; both positioned themselves interpretationally as orthodox Sunni Muslims. To Abid, I asked: "In terms of an intimate relationship with Allah, how would you help kids develop that?" Abid replied:

Generally, I give an example of the heart, because Allah mentioned different types of the heart. There is the *qalb al-salim*, which is the sound heart, and then there is the *qalb al-mareedh*, which is the sick heart, and Allah mentioned different types of sickness. There is



the *qalb al-qasi*, which is the hard heart. Nabi (ﷺ) [Prophet Muhammad] explained this in many different ways, for example, the heart by fitra is white! Whenever somebody starts to commit sins, there is a black spot that is marked on it. I draw that heart. Imagine if I carry on putting these dots, at a certain point, the heart will become all black. So, basically, we cannot see clearly. The heart becomes *dark*, doesn't make right decisions. But to the heart that is *sound*, Allah gives insight. Because there's a verse that says, *blindness* is not the blindness of the eye. The real blindness is blindness of the heart: *Afala yaseeroo fil ardi fatakoona lahum quloobun yya'qiloona bihaaa aw aazaanun yyasma'oonabihaa fa innahaa laa ta'malabsaaru walaakin ta'malquloobu llatee fissudoor*" [Qur'an 22:46].<sup>153</sup> (I1, 4/18, 447–457).

Abid's answer was replete with references to both Qur'an and the Prophet, richly populated with Arabic phraseology. To Bilal, I asked a similar question: "Forming a child's connection with God, how do you go about doing that?" Bilal: replied:

So, I want to take the most contentious, the most difficult issues that I can and address them absolutely head on, and barrel right towards them. In both the weekend school and here, the issues that they [the administration] come and tell me, 'This issue, maybe you should steer away from'—*that* is one that I dive right into. And I take full responsibility for it, I say, 'If any parent comes and complains or asks, tell them to come and talk to me and I will explain my actions.' (I1, 4/23, 122–132)

Bilal's goal was to precipitate the children's first existential moment happening in an environment of support and he, like Abid, also answered the question in Islamic parlance, only very differently. It is not only that Abid used more Arabic in his description; the entire approach was different. Where Abid stuck very closely to the primary sources, Bilal described a pedagogical approach that I came to refer to as *barreling* (discussed in section 6.4.3). Whether or not this pedagogy is rooted in primary sources, which it very well might be, Bilal did not provide a reference. Despite differences in Islamic parlance, both educators expressed deliberate and intentional pedagogies. Both *imagining the shade of one's heart* and *barreling towards contention* may be considered

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<sup>153</sup> "Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind, but blind have become the hearts that are in their chests!" (Qur'an 22:46).

iterations of Islamic pedagogical content knowledge aiming towards a unique educational objective: connection with God. The individual nature of the interviews enabled an educator expression in articulating their own unique perspectives. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled comparison of answers to particular questions through juxtaposition of individual interviews against each other.

#### **4.3.2 Halaqat**

The halaqat provided a forum for collective knowledge construction in three primary ways. First, participants elaborated each other's ideas, which sometimes involved evaluation of their colleagues' pedagogies that they themselves had witnessed. Second, participants provided perspectives distinct from each other, thus allowing for fuller perspective on a pedagogy. Third, participants disagreed with and, at times, outright contradicted, each other. Each pathway is briefly described below.

One of the benefits of conducting group interviews is the potential for extension or elaboration of ideas in a community of practice, which may act as triangulation. The enthusiasm with which participants described their pedagogies, and those of their colleagues, amplified particularly-effective pedagogies. An example is drawn from the halaqah at the Hikmah Elementary School, which was composed of four Islamic Studies teachers: "What is a *favorite* thing to do with the students because you feel that it works well?" (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23). They responded, speaking over each other, in describing their recent projects on historical role models, focusing on a project whereby Grade 7 students explored the relationship between Muhammad and his wife Khadija:

Amal: For me, for Grades 5 and 7, they love projects and these last two months, we have been working on role models or real heroes—*sahaba* [Muhammad's companions]. *Wallahi* [by God], we worked hard. [laughs] We learned about—

Rawan: —Yours was about sahaba and mine was about Sayyidina Muhammad (ﷺ) and Sayyidina Khadija. Because you know because there was a *big love story* between Prophet Muhammad and Khadija—

Amal: —oh yes! They loved it *so much*! [laughing]—

Rawan: —the kids, they loved it!—

Yusr: —love story!

Rawan: And then, we watched this YouTube video—because Sayyidina Muhammad (ﷺ) he loved Sayyidina Khadija so much—

Amal: —yes, oh yes.

Yusr: Yes!

Amal: Especially at this age! [the age of the students: Grade 7]

Rawan: Yeah. And we would talk about the way in which Sayyidina Muhammad was treating his wife—

Amal: —and remembered her after her death—

Rawan: —yeah, even after her death.

Yusr: And the hadith where Sayyidina Aisha [a later wife] asked him, “Are you happy because Allah (ﷻ) gave you a younger wife after the older one?” and he gave her a very hard lesson. He said to her, “Allah (ﷻ) gave me a wife that, when everyone denied me, she supported me; when everyone made me down, she was beside me.” [...] that made Aisha surprised at how much Prophet Mohammed loved Sayyidina Khadijah, *radiya Allahu anha* [may God be pleased with her].

Rawan: Even though she was older than him by 15 years.

Yusr: Yeah, right! They enjoyed it.

Rawan: Yes, because, you know, at the end, they need to know that the Prophet Muhammad, our role model, he was a human. Yes, he was married. He had kids. We have some other prophets, but we don’t have like—

Amal: —full details of their lives! (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 370–404)

The enthusiasm that each one had for a particular pedagogy (conducting a research project) on a topic particularly suited for the students’ age (the historical love story between Muhammad and his wife Khadija) brought the pedagogy to life. Particular to the halaqat method, reporting on each other’s pedagogies illuminated pedagogic dimensionality.

In addition, in speaking together in halaqat, participants sometimes presented perspectives that *in interaction* revealed differences, which may not have been captured in individual interviews. An example came in the halaqah with Faris and Nadia. After remaining silent for several minutes, while Nadia and I discussed the challenges of being visibly Muslim in a Canadian society colored by Eurocentrism, Faris finally interjected:

One of the things that I have noticed, as a Muslim coming to Canada when I was 31—and that’s very old compared to a lot of other people who have grown up here; I have a sense that both of you have grown up here—and I am coming from former colonies, to be clear, so I am *fierce* in my opposition to colonization, but, on the other hand, I am very aware of the dirty reality of the Muslim world. And, so, there is hardly any advantage that we can claim over the Western world, at least at this point. [...] We are not just falling short in terms of practice, but even in terms of discourse—even in terms of normative discourse as to where we *want* to go! So, I am personally more willing to give Western societies more credit in this discussion. (H1, 4/15, 174–183)

Here, while Faris recognized shortcomings in Canadian society, he pointed out that at least the normative discourse is going in a positive direction. His recent arrival in Canada from “former colonies” enabled him to see nuances in social and educational discourses within which Islamic education in this city was embedded. These nuances seemed to direct his perspectives on pedagogy, particularly in terms of future imperatives in teaching and learning Islam (discussed in section 7.5.3 ‘Doing Islam Right’). Speaking together in halaqah made opportunities for distinction possible.

A third way in which the method of halaqah made meanings visible that individual interviews might not have involved disagreement. For example, Reem was strident in her discomfort with the Canadian cultural context in terms of teaching and learning Islam with Muslim children:

It is so hard for them to learn Islam because this community or culture in this country: it never supports Islamic activities—good behavior as a Muslim, not as a Canadian. I know that Canadians have good behavior, but they have their culture and it does not belong to Islam. (H1, Subha, 4/19, 246–249)

While Reem asserted that cultural differences in definitions of “good behavior” made it difficult for adults to teach children Islamic iterations of good behavior, she went on to root the problem in the fact that Muslim parents primarily speak to their children in English. She contrasted this phenomena with the Canadians from China, who she described as speaking to their children in Mandarin: “We try to support our culture but it never happens because our people they

communicate with their kids in English—they *only* communicate with their kids in English” (263–265). Reem’s contention—that speaking to Arab-Muslim children in English, as part of Canadian culture, made it more difficult for children to learn Islam—was immediately countered by her colleagues in the halaqah. Layla responded first and the following dialogue ensued:

Layla: This is a general statement that is not necessarily *real*. I think you are just focusing on whoever is surrounding you. I really think that, first, let’s face it—Arabic or English or whatever language it is—it just a way of communicating. We are in this country—

Reem cut her off to say: —yeah, see, this is the problem with the parents. [a kafuffle broke out with everyone speaking at once]

Layla: I was going to say that—

Reem: —I was speaking, and you—

Layla: I just want to make one point. Just let me finish my sentence because—

Reem: —you interrupted me!

Layla: No, that’s not true. You know, in this mosque, we have 80% non-Arabs. . . I want to tell you the bad news: the non-Arabs are the ones that actually *win* the Qur’an competition. They are the one who memorize the Qur’an. I am challenging any Arab that is here to show me one Arab imam in this whole province! All the imams are either Pakistani or Indian or even from Africa, or wherever—

Reem: —This is what I am talking about!

Layla: If you brought them [your children] to this country, you have to give them the tools to succeed. To succeed in this country, you have to do it in English. (H1, Subha, 4/19, 266–292)

Here, Reem asserted that Arab parents and teachers need to speak to Arab children in Arabic, while Layla contended that all Muslim children in Canada—Arab or otherwise—need to be fluent in English first. As two Arab Muslim educators, working at the same school and speaking together in halaqah, the sharp differences in perspective were obvious. Had I engaged the two educators in individual interviews, surely, I would have seen a difference in perspective but the awkward interface between the two, which revealed latitudes of differences in perspectives, would not have been present.

#### **4.3.3 Artifact Construction and Mediation**

In engaging with research participants, I noticed a common occurrence: spontaneous expressions of *what Islam is*. Sometimes, these expressions would come after a question on pedagogy. When

I asked about methods, I rarely received a direct response. This was puzzling, but I came to realize that it was actually pointing to a large phenomenon: *holism*. What Islam is and pedagogies in teaching it were subsumed within a larger whole. This phenomenon was made visible to me, suddenly, along with Ruby, the participant whose artifact we were examining in an artifact-mediated halaqah. This was Ruby's description of her artifact (see Figure 4.1. Ruby's flower):

Imagine the learner as a flower. The teacher is a tool, a water pitcher. We plant the seed in the environment that the child will be raised in, surrounded by family, parents, school, mosque, community, friends. When they go to the school, the teacher should have the three basic things: she should be a good role model, have a strong relationship with the students, and creativity. She will provide the seed with what it needs—love, confidence, Islamic studies, *akhlaq* [ethical behavior]—for when the plant will grow up. You will find the leaves as outcomes—a strong relationship with Allah and Islamic knowledge—and, at the same time, the leaves are important in reaching the goal: the leaves provide the plant with nourishment! These two leaves will lead toward these goals: Islamic personality, sincere worship, strong belief, Islamic behavior. (I2, 7/25)

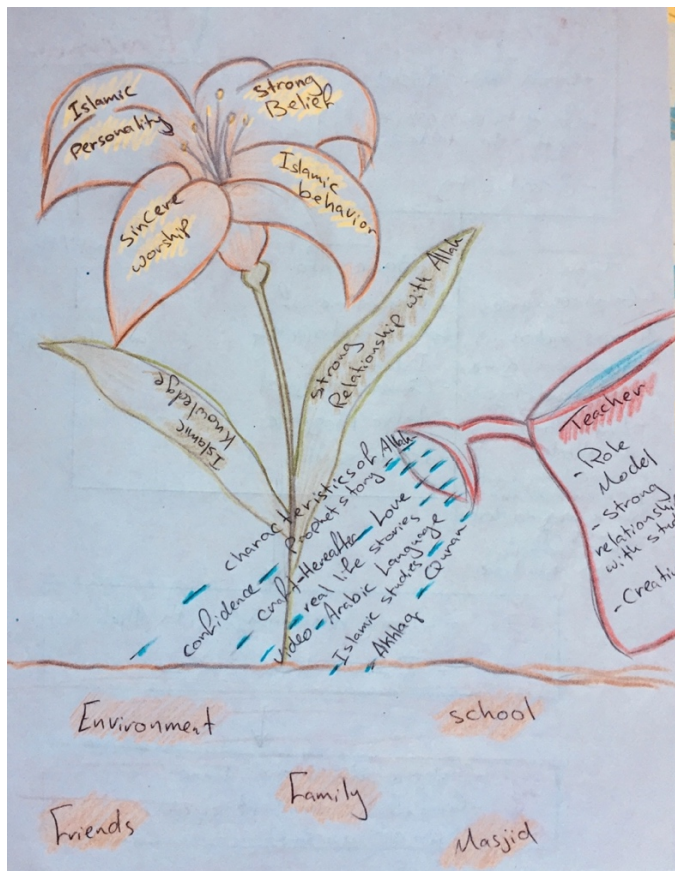


Figure 4.1 Ruby's Flower

To clarify, I asked Ruby the difference between Islamic personality and Islamic behavior:

A child who has an Islamic personality is confident, strong, and proud of his Islamic character and doesn't try to hide that he is a Muslim. One thing, as a teacher, we are trying to give our students is to be a confident Muslim. To like who you are. Islamic behavior is the akhlaq, the manners, the morals, how they are acting with the community, truthful and sincere. (I2, 7/25)

As Ruby and I considered her artifact, I was struck by the whole picture that she had come up with in response to my request, which focused on methods. In inviting participants to construct an artifact, I aimed for straight-forward language: "I am wondering if you would be interested and able to diagram, or draw, your thoughts on methods of teaching Islam?" I asked them this question within the second halaqah. If we ran out of time, some participants requested to construct one at home. So, I followed up with the same question over email. Ruby described reading my written request several times, deliberating over methods, hesitant about what to draw. She considered a castle or a strong building, but then she had the idea for the flower, because, she said:

It is not only *how* the teacher is teaching. It is about the environment, all these things around the student: the family, the parents, how they are interacting—some parents don't encourage their children to pray at the mosque!—the teacher's personality, the child himself. Because these are all affecting the teaching methods. This is why it is not *only* about the teaching methods. (I2, 7/25).

Ruby's artifact made practically visible the situated position of pedagogies within a larger Islamic conceptual framework, which is described in the small body of literature on pedagogies in Islamic Education. She *extended upon* that positioning to include the fact that pedagogies are simultaneously situated within a sociocultural educational environment composed of schools, mosques, families, and interactions between textual sources and lived praxis. I had crafted my research questions to effectively isolate pedagogies, yet Ruby's artifact illustrated that pedagogies cannot be parsed out of this larger system of Islamic education. We puzzled over this new knowledge together, as revealed in the following exchange:

Claire: Have you done this drawing before?

Ruby: No, this is my first time.

Claire: But had you thought of this *analogy* before? The flower analogy?

Ruby: No, I hadn't... But I think I will go with it!

Ruby described that the process of expressing her thoughts in a *drawing* prompted her to think about her teaching in new ways. For me, it provided a different window on the data, with sometimes startling effects in generating new insights on the research questions.

#### **4.4 Chapter 4 Summary**

This chapter aimed to provide a sense of the research participants' characters and offer a taste of the fieldwork experience, while describing how methods of data collection, extending from an Islamic paradigm, made visible different angles on the data. I provided biographical information on the 35 research participants as educators; I explored their motivations in teaching Islam as undergirding pedagogy and offering the first inklings of the importance of a framing the research in Islamic paradigm. I also reflected on how they received me, as a white convert. Even before sharing the results of our research encounters, I aimed to share nuances in data generated by the three methods of interviews, halaqat, and artifact-construction/mediation, which brought to light the situated specificity of pedagogies within dynamic Islamic learning environments. Each method highlighted a different perspective on this specificity and enabled a different angle on the research questions. In inquiring into pedagogy, amongst related and liberally offered descriptions of what Islam is, Yassine, a complimentary-school leader, contributed: "Islam is the religion that shows what all the religions teach, which is goodness. But Islam teaches us practically how to achieve that goodness" (H1, Ameen, 4/14, 321–323). Each of the themes constructed from data gathered in the research encounters highlight slightly different pedagogical approaches towards achieving that goodness. First, Islamic conceptions of human beings call for particular pedagogies. Second, affordances and constraints posed by the cultural and temporal context call for particular



pedagogies. Third, responding to evocations of transcendence, from beyond the reach of corporeal sense perceptions, calls for particular pedagogies. The three themes constructed in this study illuminate overlapping modalities of pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam. Together, they form a pedagogical typology towards illuminating the research questions—What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in teaching Islam? How do educators relate their pedagogies to objectives? How do they imagine new pedagogies?—which aims towards overarching educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education.

## Chapter 5: Theme 1: Dimensional Pedagogies

*“When you understand something, you’re in a better position to deal with it.”—Abid<sup>154</sup>*

Throughout the data corpus, educators made references to dimensions of the human being particular to an Islamic conceptual system, beyond those included within a dominant secular perspective. Abid pointed out that the Qur’an “speaks about the ruh (soul), speaks about the nafs (lower self), speaks about the qalb (heart), speaks about the ‘aql—intelligence” (I1, 4/18, 205–208). In terms of the soul, Amal described: “The soul needs food as the body needs food. Islamic practice, or Qur’an, or prayer, this is the food for our spirit. We really need it” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 2–21). These particularly Islamic dimensions of the human being seemed to represent aspects of Muslim subjectivities that are important culturally, religiously, and pedagogically; Muslim educators described significant intentionality and effort in nourishing them. In addition, they are not widely recognized in the dominant culture, which Nadia perceived as a void:

People in the Western world, their focus is so much on the physical things they forget that—they don’t believe that—we *have a soul*. Atheism is on the rise, and so there is this huge disconnect between the material world and what we actually need to nurture ourselves spiritually. (H1, 4/15, 50–53)

In this excerpt, Nadia described that in dominant Canadian culture fundamental human dimensions are being neglected. She continued, “People have a spiritual void. They try to fill it with yoga and other stuff. But if we have a comprehensive, amazing system in place anyway, why not go back to it? Why not go back to Islam?” (61–62).

These Islamic dimensions of the human being, originating in the primary sources and intending to move learners towards the objectives of teaching and learning Islam, might be

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<sup>154</sup> Within the data excerpts that comprised each theme, there were one or two iconic statements. Sometimes, these statements alone alerted me to the existence of the theme itself. Along with each title of the three themes of this study, I include an iconic quote that indicates the theme’s essence.

considered teleologic in that they are simultaneously intrinsic to human beings, shared, and the means via refinement by which an individual can embark upon a process of self-development towards an elevated state. The first theme of this study, Dimensional Pedagogies, are pedagogies that directly engage these dimensions of the human learner towards unique educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education. In other words, Muslim educators' conceptions of the human being in light of the objectives *necessitated* particular pedagogies. These pedagogies, then, act as pivots between the elements of the human being and its loftiest reaches of development. While the pedagogies of this theme shed light on each of the research questions, they had special significance in terms of the second one: How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives? In order to understand Dimensional Pedagogies, we need to examine destinations as objectives and origins as conceptions of the human being.

### **5.1 Destinations: Intended Educational Objectives**

Despite this study's focus on pedagogies, none of the educators isolated pedagogies. Instead, pedagogies were embedded within rich descriptions of Islam and Islamic education. Fatima described: "When we're teaching children about Islam, we want to make sure that we are teaching Islam as *a way of life*. It's the air that exists that you breathe; it's water that you drink to keep you alive" (I1, 4/19, 481). In this section, educators' perspectives on what Islamic education is, and its objectives, paint a picture of the purposes behind pedagogies highlighted in the sections to come. Beyond a common intersection of fostering in children awareness of God and the basics of a Sunni Muslim interpretation of Islamic principles and practices, educators' articulations of their objectives in teaching Islam differed widely, even amongst educators at the same school.

At its most fundamental, Sara described teaching Islam as a divine responsibility: "The Prophet taught Islam to his companions. They taught the people of their time. If we don't teach

the religion—not just to the kids, but to the whole community—it will be lost, and Allah will ask us one day” (H1B, Hikmah, 4/23). Thus, the educators were engaged in a central and ongoing aspect of Prophetic Sunnah. Rasha described the purpose of engaging children in teaching and learning Islam as “giving them why” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 45), as a solid sense of reason underlying Islamic principles and practices. “Being born in a Muslim household is not a good enough reason” (Sideen, I1, 429), nor is, “Because it’s written in our Qur’an and Sunnah” (Fatima, H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 366–372). Hamza noted that “being a Muslim is not enough, you should understand *why* you are a Muslim” (Hamza, H1, 4/13, 6–8). From there, the main objective branches into, “helping them believe in it and, at the same time, to answer the questions they have in mind or they may face during their life” (9–10). Rasha described a proper understanding to *why* in light of the greater purpose: “I am doing this for the satisfaction of Allah (ﷻ) [...] And by *this*, we’re giving them a way to live; to observe Allah (ﷻ) in their hearts and in their life, every single minute, which gives more purpose for their life” (52–54). Amira, too, described Islamic education as intended for divine-satisfaction (I2, 8/23).

Of the above descriptions, some seem more instrumental and some more spiritual. Bilal described two facets of the objectives of Islamic principles and practices: *positive externalities* that, while beneficial, may not actually encompass the more important reasons underlying acts of worship, as *illuminated internalities*. These two facets comprise lines of reasoning in understanding Islamic practices. Bilal described how young Muslims, in the face of questions from non-Muslim peers, often jump to the positive externalities first:

‘Why do we fast?’ And they’ll say, ‘Oh, well, we fast because it’s good for you’ or ‘We fast because it helps us empathize with needy people.’ And I say, ‘Take away all of those positive externalities. Let’s say that there is a study published that says fasting is incredible bad for you—would you still do it?’ ‘Yes!’ ‘Why?’ At that point, *why*? And it boils down to: ‘This is an act of worship, God has commanded us to do it, therefore we do it.’ And so that is what makes the initial lines of reasoning so important. (I1, 4/23, 153–171)

Bilal's description, containing an important pedagogy of engaged reasoning, provides a way of organizing examinations of key objectives of Islamic education: positive externalities and illuminated internalities. Both are discussed below as aspects of educational objectives.

### 5.1.1 'Positive Externalities'

At its most obvious, positive externalities of Islamic educational objective included moral, spiritual, and physical knowledge, protection, identity, and belonging. Huda described that knowing the tools of their *deen* [religion], as well as its "very, very, very deep meaning in this life" was important for Muslim Canadian children: "The *deen* is the only thing that can protect them from *anything* [whispering]. So, if they don't know it very well, they will lose, rather than gaining anything [in life] (I1, 4/14, 16–19). Sideen described Islamic education as fostering resilience: "Life is hard enough *as is*, especially if you're growing up in the West. There are so many challenges. You need that anchor. You need that faith that something will carry you over when you're going through hard times" (I1, 4/19, 210–213).

Other educators described Islamic identity as foundational: "We want you to understand *who you are*" (Layla, H1, Subha, 4/19, 226–229). Nadia stated: "Being a Muslim is our identity" and she elaborated:

A lot of the youth I see now, they are so confused about who they are. They want to build and belong and fit-in in Canada, for example, but they are really unable to fit in. But, at the same time, they don't seem to find themselves in a Muslim identity either. And, so, they are stuck between two worlds. (H1, 4/15, 28–34)

Nadia noted that an Islamic education relevant to young Muslim–Canadians could potentially contribute to solidifying identity, building a foundation of belonging within a Muslim community, as a base from which to approach fitting-in in Canada (described in Chapter 6). Similarly, Jina described the role of a weekend school as fostering a sense of belonging as linked to building

identity because, as she described, “Research has shown that kids whose parents are immigrants, they get lost when they are in high school, at the age of adolescence. [... They] do not feel that they belong to a certain community; belonging is very, very important” (I2, 4/21, 1-4). Nadia and Jina both identified the purpose of Islamic education as helping children build strong foundations of identity.

#### **5.1.1.1 Religification of Young Muslims in the ‘Right’ Islam**

In the context of the UK, on the level of society, Panjwani (2017) lamented *religification* as the “amplification of Muslim identity” (p. 597) as constituting a reduction on two levels: diversities of identity-attributes compressed into a single religious attribute (religification) and diversities of religious perspectives homogenized into a single Muslim essentialism (p. 604). While, in this study, participants expressed differences in perspectives on Islam, identities, and pedagogical approaches, religification was evidenced in the primacy of collective religious identity attributes, expressed in the sentiment, *we are all Muslims, first and foremost*, despite their varied cultural backgrounds, and exemplified in data extracts such as Fatima’s: “It doesn’t matter if you’re a Canadian or Egyptian or Lebanese or Syrian—you are a Muslim.” (I1, 4/19, 706). Many of the educators articulated a primary pedagogical imperative as establishing an Islamic identity from ‘pure Islam,’<sup>155</sup> which may have been anticipated, given this study’s focus on a subculture of faith-centered Muslim educators, serving faith-centered families, in precisely aiming to build such a Muslim identity (whereas Panjwani was examining Muslim identities in multicultural UK societies more generally). The Islamic–educational focus of the schools in which the research participants

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<sup>155</sup> Fatima, Hamza, Huda, Layla, Nadia, Ruby, and Yassine all independently made references to ‘pure’ or ‘right’ Islam.

worked encouraged coalescence around *Islam*, rather than varied cultural backgrounds and identities, as Layla clearly described:

Being in this country, let's be honest, we are offered an opportunity to teach our kids a *pure Islam*. This is exactly what I personally love about being in Canada, that I am teaching the children *Islam*—not the culture. I'm not teaching Moroccan; I am not teaching my daughter to be a Moroccan Muslim. I'm teaching her to be a *Muslim*. (H1, Subha, 4/19, 390–395)

Dalia, too, described trying to separate culture from religion, providing an example of her younger siblings, newly arrived from Syria, being given a pumpkin on Halloween by a well-wishing neighbor: “And they love it. They play with it and it's good. But we don't *want* this; we don't *need* this... We teach them: ‘You can play with this. You can do whatever you like. But this is not in our *religion*’” (H1, Ameen, 4/14, 155–159). In other words, the adults pointed out to the children that Halloween is part of Canadian *culture*, but never to think that it is included in as part of *Islam*. Layla continued: “We don't judge the Moroccan way, the Egyptian way, the Pakistani way—we are doing this the *Islamic* way. We are taking Islam from a very *pure minhaj* [way or path]. Taking it by the book” (403–405).

Layla's words raise the thorny issue of what *pure Islam* actually is. Illusive and identified in different terms, many educators mentioned pure Islam—some in passing, some directly. Ruby described full-time Islamic schools as offering “the pure religion without confusion” (I1, 161). Huda described it in terms of a larger objective of preserving Islam itself: “I want to have them know their deen—from the pure sources—and to continue with that after they grow up [...], when *we* are not here anymore. To continue in our life, this circle, generation-after-generation” (I1, 4/14, 5–11). In terms of this sentiment of passing on the pure religion, generation after generation, Abid raised two interesting, related points. First, the important roles that some of Muhammad's youngest companions served in proliferating Islamic knowledge. Abid said, “Note that Ibn Abbas was a young boy [...], he was taught these things by Nabi (ﷺ) himself, he memorized the hadith and

reported hadith to generations after him to benefit from this wisdom” (I1, 4/18, 109–111). Second, Abid pointed out a verse in the Qur’an that describes its own preservation,<sup>156</sup> which he used to suggest that *understanding* was more important than memorization. Abid thus articulated that while the passing along of Islamic principles and practices is important, the Qur’an as primary source text is itself preserved. Nadia was more tentative in identifying a ‘real Islam,’ but described a process of collective inquiry in searching for it:

Why not raise our children in an environment where they are proud of being Muslim, where they actually *know* what real Islam is? I am not claiming that I know what real Islam is, but I think that we need to work together, finding places where we can come together and really learn together what real Islam is. (H1, 4/15, 59–62)

Although Nadia did not claim to know what real Islam is, she placed value upon searching for it. Fatima was more direct: “We want to make sure that we teach them the *right* deen that’s in *written* in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Not the deen that we have learned from our parents back home. Or we what we have learned from the society” (I1, 4/19, 221–223). In another example of ‘right Islam,’ as favorable to home cultural practices, Fatima described: “Is it haram for the girls to go out and party? No, it’s not haram—as long as they’re not going to drink alcohol, or as long as they’re not going to be doing something bad with boys. *Why not?* If you give that right to boys, why don’t you give it to girls?” (I1, 4/19, 225–227). Here, Fatima lamented the different social standards applied to boys and girls in her native Egypt, which could not be justified Islamically; instead, she offered specific (Islamic) criteria. Jina identified another angle on the importance of teaching a ‘proper’ Islam: averting extremism:

It is very important to give them the proper image about Islam. [...] Later on, if they don’t get it now, they might get it in a wrong way. That is what’s causing all the problems around

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<sup>156</sup> “We have revealed the Reminder, and we are *preserving* it [guarding, protecting]” (15:9). While the word Reminder centrally includes the Qur’an, which scholars assert has remained free from alterations since it was first articulated by Muhammad (Asad, 1980), others have suggested that the word Reminder includes all aspects of Islam, which are preserved through chains of scholars in multiple disciplines over time (for example, Dr. Walead Mosaad).



the world with extremism: not the proper way of Islam was taught to these kids at a younger age. (I1, 4/13, 3–10)

Jina here emphasized that the way Muslim educators teach Islam here and now could have global impacts. Layla summarized,

Not that we forget about our culture: we can teach our kids how to dress up in our culture—it's our culture—hang out the way we do it; dance the way we do it—whatever it is. But... Islam has to be purified from our culture—or *any* culture. (H1, Subha, 4/19, 405–407)

These data excerpts illustrate aspects of the religification of Canadian Muslims, whereby emphasis is placed on religiosity and young, second-generation Muslims come to see their parent's cultural practices as: “innovations, nothing to do with pure religion, which many of them associated with the Arab-centric religious interpretations” (Panjwani, 2017, p. 603). These data excerpts also reveal (as will others to come) that the local Canadian context bears heavily on the topic of ‘pure Islam.’ While Panjwani (2017) described that a singular, religified image of Muslims is “empirically untrue” (p. 607), and therefore problematic, in this study, a religified image, while not singular, was a distinct and positive aspect in the amplification of Muslim identity as an educational objective. Educators' intentions to ascertain and engage together in internalizing a ‘pure Islam,’ a ‘right Islam,’ and a ‘proper Islam’ was an empirical reality.

#### **5.1.1.2 Self and Social Development in Developing Canada**

Individual and collective developmental objectives of Islamic education constituted a primary aim for many of the educators in this study, which converged into a particular character development that resonated with the literature (al-Attas, 1980; Obeid, 1988). Starting with the individual, Rasha described:

If I am praying seven hundred *rakat* [cycles of ritual prayer] a day; I am reciting Qur'an every single day; I am fasting every other day—I am doing all of this—but if I am actually oppressing people, or I am not even nice, or I am talking badly about people—*nothing counts* [pause]. So that means we have to be whole, holistic: our behavior must be as good as our rituals. (I1, 4/23, 104–107)

This excerpt made visible excellence in both acts of worship and aspects of social etiquette as a holistic objective of Islamic education. For Nour, “Islam increases good manners” and so Islamic social etiquette practices were important, especially given that so many of the children attended Canadian public schools, where “manners” differ from Islamic ones: “They’re going to general [public] school and they learn about other manners—not from our Islam (H1, Subha, 4/13, 15–20). She described how an Islamic weekend school created an environment for the children to learn and practice those social etiquette practices as consistent with the home. Yassine described that a complimentary school curriculum, built upon aqidah and expressed in ways that engage the learners, has its end in self and social development: “If they continue this system, it is very beneficial for them, as well as for society” (H1, Ameen, 4/14, 491). Beginning with the earliest days of being human, Fatima described: “I want to bring good Muslims in the community that serve the community and be good citizens [...]. if you are looking for a strong, good, tolerant, respectful, acceptable community, you have to start with children” (I1, 4/19, 9–10; 16–17). Hana described serving one’s neighbors, including the non-Muslims amongst them, and sharing love with people in moving closer to God: “Allah (ﷻ) doesn’t need from you a lot. He needs from you to be a good person in your society, in your community, to help the poor, your neighbor—doesn’t matter whoever that neighbor is, Muslim or not-Muslim.” (I1, 49–52).

Marya articulated that an objective of the Ihsan Weekend School, where she was school leader, was to help Muslim children fit in to the larger community: “Our way here, at this school, is to help them *outside*. Islam is not against anything good in the community [...], like being honest, giving back to the community, charity, anything good about Canada. So, they would feel more confident: ‘Ok, we fit in’” (I1, 4/14, 6-9). Yassine said: “We want our children to learn how to be the best peace-builders in the society, how to make society peaceful around you. This is our

main goal” (H1, 4/14, 12–19). Halima added: “And there’s one more aspect: to build this earth” (I1, 8/8, 469). At its furthest extension, this concept of self and social development culminated in an objective of developing Canada, as their own country. Jina described:

If they build up a Muslim identity—they know about their *deen*; they know about their *mu’amalat* [actions], and how to behave with others, either they are Muslims or non-Muslims, how to be Muslim Canadian citizens—they can also contribute to the development of Canada. I want them to feel they are Canadians, to feel love towards Canada, and to think about ways to contribute in the future to develop the country. It’s not like we belong to another place. They *belong* to their Muslim community here. But that community *belongs* to a country, which is Canada! (I2, 4/21, 120–127)

In this excerpt, Jina described that a Muslim–Canadian identity is foundational in enabling the children to contribute to developing Canada. Halima described working with children to develop the *desire* to contribute, starting with identifying the sense of volunteerism in Canadian schools and societies: “They have a huge concept of volunteering: ‘It’s part of being Canadian, to volunteer. It’s cool; something cool’” (I1, 8/8, 316–337). Halima noted this concept as being something for Muslims to cultivate to be more efficient as a community.

Taken together, the data on Muslim educators’ perspectives on social development suggests that a trajectory of development from self and Muslim community all the way to developing Canada is an aim of Islamic education. While it may be surprising that a primary objective of an Islamic school is to nurture Muslim children into being helpful, positive, contributing members of an overarching secular society, it mirrors the literature that describes individual education and development as the fabric of society (al-Attas, 1980, p. 15).

### **5.1.2 Illuminated Internalities**

Ultimately and internally, the educators emphasized connection to God as being the primary objective. “We try to connect the kids with Allah in every, every single movement, as long as we can” (Huda, H1, 4/21, 129–130). Rasha emphasized: “The most important thing that we have to

teach them, number one, is the love of Allah (ﷻ)” (I1, 4/23, 83–84). She continued that the only thing distinguishing teaching Islam from teaching anything is the *one* purpose towards which all content and pedagogy is directed:

Whether you are teaching Qur’an; whether you are teaching Sirah, which is the life of the Prophet; whether you are teaching *Shariah*, which is Islamic law; or even Arabic—you are learning Arabic *only* because it is the language of the Qur’an—it is only to communicate with Allah (ﷻ). The thing that makes teaching Islam unique is that the objective is one. (I1, 4/23, 18–26)

**5.1.1** In other words, every pedagogical approach has a unified *internal* objective. Even more esoterically, Amira suggested that the educators’ main objective is to connect an individual child to a Divine but unseen reality in the most excellent way. She described: “There are realities, there are expectations. Allah is expecting *ihsan*! Ihsan is excellence in *everything*. [...] The student comes, and you say: ‘Okay, how was your prayer this week?’ And they say, ‘We don’t pray at home!’ So, this [school] is a bridge to the *reality*” (60–64). Here, Amira highlighted the school, and its’ educators, as a bridge, connecting children from a mundane, material life to an exalted Divine reality. Faris articulated his objective as two-dimensional: “My main objective is to furnish Muslim youth and adults the *means* to connect with Allah and live an ethical life” (H1, 4/15, 189–190). Illuminated internalities characterized by consciousness of God, and transcendent pedagogies in consciousness-raising, are explored in Chapter 7, the third theme of this study.

## **5.2 Origins: ‘Who is the Insan?’**

Related to destinations as educational objectives, origins as conceptions of the human being are also important in eliciting particular pedagogies. References to unique conceptions of human beings can be found within the small body of literature on Islamic Psychology and such conceptions significantly resonated within the data corpus of this study. Bilal described in detail the way he worked with his students to realize foundational qualities of human beings from Islamic

perspectives, which would then help them later, in having conversations on topics such as evolution, where Islamic perspectives might diverge from secular ones. Bilal said:

What does it mean to be an *insan*? Who is the *insan*?<sup>157</sup> What is the human being? Words have actual meanings to them. The *insan* is one who has ‘*aql*, intellect, to decipher between right and wrong. The *insan* is the one who has language, and the *insan* is a descendant of Adam. [...] Allah teaches Adam (*alayhi salaam*) the names of things, which is language. A verb is just a name of an action; words are just names of things. And this is an ability *unique* to the *insan*. No other species in the universe has language. [...] The real purpose of language is encapsulating thought. So, if a species looks like a human, walks like a human, and has bendable thumbs, but does not have language, does not have ‘*aql*, and is not a descendent of Adam, they do not the minimum requirements of an *insan*. (4/23, 237–258)

While Bilal’s description of the qualities of the *insan* actually constituted a segue in an explanation of how he prepares his students to make rational and empirical arguments in their academic futures (see section 7.5.3), his description was particularly insightful in terms of considering whether unique conceptions of the human being may have any pedagogical significance, described below.

Rasha described human beings as confident to the point of being arrogant: “Allah (ﷻ) offered the responsibility to many creatures but they rejected it.<sup>158</sup> The human being accepted it. We accepted because of our arrogance: ‘Oh yes, we can do it. It’s so easy, what’s hard about it?’ (I1, 4/23, 86–94). In addition to our confident arrogance, making mistakes are part of our nature too: “Allah created us as human beings, we are *not* angels. We have preferences, we have instincts, we have choices, we have downfalls. [...] Who are the best of people? Those who make mistakes and then make *tawbah* [repentance]” (I1, 4/23, 96–100). Here, Rasha described aspects of the human being described in the Qur’an. Asifa added, “We are also learning as we go along. No one’s perfect,

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<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, this question was posed by both Bilal and Abid—who each then proceeded to describe the *insan* and pedagogical approaches related specifically to the *insan*—as echoes of Nasr (2012), who asked, as part of understanding Islamic educational philosophy: “Who is man, men and women, *insān* [human being]? What are we here for? What is the ultimate goal of life?” (p. 12).

<sup>158</sup> “Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up—for, verily, he has always been prone to be most arrogant, most foolish” (Qur’an 33:72)

right?” (Asifa, H1, ME, 4/26, 147–149; 154–155). Thus, while the insan aims to refine oneself and one’s actions, making mistakes are part of being human and points of connection with a forgiving God.

Integrated with the biological, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the insan, there is the aspect of character: humans are born with particular characteristics but can change. Rasha identified the logic behind the human being’s potential for change and how she discussed it with her students:

Allah (ﷻ) is not going to hold us accountable for something that we cannot change ourselves. So, if Allah (ﷻ) said “Don’t do this,” that means, practically, that *I can change*. That gives the kids confidence that they have control on their instincts, that they have control on their life, and that they *can* change because Allah (ﷻ) is not going to hold us accountable for something that we cannot change. (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 64–69).

In other words, behavioral guidelines in the Qur’an are indications of possibilities for change, and development. Rasha provided examples: “I cannot change my skin from black to white, from white to black. These things Allah (ﷻ) is not going to hold me accountable for. But to be something—to be a liar, to be a deceiver, to have, you know, wrong relationships—all of these things I *can* control” (70–73).

These conceptions of the human being, rooted in the Qur’an, can also be shaped by methods and pedagogies in the Qur’an, which are explored in the chapters to come. Fatima gave an immediate example:

My daughter likes to make slime. I told her, ‘If you’re making slime and it’s screwed up, do you know how to fix it?’

She says, ‘Yeah, Mom, I know how to fix it. I can add lotion; maybe it needs more of the activator. Yes, I can correct it.’

I told her, ‘Allah created us and shaped us. He knows the rules, how to be better, and what can lead us astray. So, those things, Allah and Prophet Muhammad asked us to stay away from. Because He knows that the nafs [self, ego] is very weak” (H1, Ihsan, 4/19, 350–354).

Here, Fatima described Islamic principles and practices as functionally guiding our development, taking into account our proclivity for making mistakes. From these common conceptions of the *insan*, educators had specific conceptions of child learners and adult educators, and vice versa: they described instances of children teaching adults and adults learning from children.

### **5.2.1 Conceptions of the Learner**

Educators had clear conceptions of the young learners with whom they worked, starting with their pure human nature (*fitra*). Some educators (Yassine, Ruby, Fatima, Layla) used a metaphor of *seeds* to refer to Islamic pedagogical processes in nurturing this *fitra*. For example, Yassine described a learner's education as like a seed, "and the educator is like the soil; if the soil is of poor quality, then the seed will be lost and wasted, but if the soil is good, the seed will grow and develop" (artifact, 8/2, 16–17). Fatima was passionate about the seed metaphor: "Now, let's plant the seed first. [...] This is what I want to do. I want to put a plant in them [learners]: the morals and behaviors of Islam at a certain age, when they are cognitively and intellectually able to understand" (I1, 4/19, 96–106). While the meaning of the seed metaphor seems quite apparent—in order to nurture and educate a child, the surrounding conditions are important—there were other conceptual nuances. First, as Fatima described, seeds need to be planted in optimal weather in order to grow, which is explored in Chapter 6. Second, the seed metaphor situates a growing child in a holistic learning environment within which pedagogies cannot be isolated because they function as part of a system, as Ruby's artifact illustrated (see Figure 4.1). Yet children also have agency, including in that they have their own direct connections with God as ultimate source of knowledge and nourishment. Fatima exclaimed: "They are human beings! They have their own emotions; they have their own intellectual thinking; they have their own dreams! They are not puppets that we manipulate to do what we want them to do" (I1, 4/19, 188–190). Amina

highlighted the importance of recognizing differences among learners, saying: “Always, students are different; these differences are normal. This is a grace from God. Differences are a grace from God” (I1, 4/20, 38–40). Given these inherent differences, educators then teach children in ways responsive to their differences.

### 5.2.2 Conceptions of the Educator

While educators shared constitutional qualities of learners, including a primordial nature (*fitra*), a demanding lower self (*nafs*), and a soul (*ruh*), they also shared the designation of life-long learners. Asifa described how she and the other Islamic and Arabic teachers at the Muslim Elementary School made a point of attending every professional-development course attended: “It’s never-ending learning! As a teacher, you learn— from the cradle to the grave—till the end! As an Islamic teacher, it’s really important to always go to the professional development days” (H1, ME, 4/26, 354–365). Educators also described sharing with the students their own learning processes, including mistakes. Lulu related telling her students: ““I was not focusing during the salat! [laughing] My mind was busy with something, so I promised myself to be more focused, and with *kushua* [presence with the Divine]!”” (H1, ME, 4/26, 168–169).

Conceiving of themselves as being simultaneously educators and learners, sharing their processes in a collegial atmosphere of mutual development, had pedagogical implications. Faris for example described how:

We are *all* students. We are at different stages of learning, and that’s why some of us take on these roles to facilitate others. But we’re all students. And so, usually, I try to give my students the space to disagree with me, and to engage with me. They if feel very strongly about certain views that they bring from their families, I give them the space to contest. (H1, 357–360)

Here, Faris’ pedagogical approach of egalitarian grappling with ideas seems to be directly tied to his conception of himself as a learner as well as an educator.



Conceptions of human beings, learners, and educators—often tacitly present in the data corpus, rather than directly articulated—and which differ considerably from secular Western perspectives on the human being, are at the heart of the pedagogies that the educators described employing with children.

### 5.3 Dimensional Pedagogies

The first theme of this study is that there are developmental dimensions as constituting qualities of the human being, the *insan*, which have implications on pedagogies. Educators selected particular pedagogies in response to particular qualities in learners; educators themselves were characterized by these same qualities. Pedagogies link qualities of the *insan* with objectives of Islamic education, and understanding both is required, as Abid described: “When you *understand* something, you’re in a better position to deal with it. That’s why there’s a French proverb, *un homme averti en vaut deux*: ‘a man who knows equals two men [who don’t know]’ [laughing]. Another possible translation is: ‘Forewarned is forearmed’” (4/18, 202–205). In other words, an educator who understands human dimensions is in a better position to educate a person. Abid made clear a link between understanding the human learner and pedagogic approaches. He elaborated with a pedagogic example: conducting a key-word search of the Qur’an for the word *insan* [human being], which yielded a rich description, including that the human being panics quickly, is a tough opponent, doesn’t like to share, argues, and many other aspects:

But when you understand how the *insan* is, then you try to purify yourself from all these blemishes that Allah mentioned in regard to the *insan*—this is *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* is to purify yourself. Who is *insan*? Now that you understand who the *insan* is, you understand how to purify yourself” (I1, 4/18, 572–577).

Abid related that within the descriptions of the *insan* are the methods to purify oneself from the blemishes of the *insan*. Self-purification for self-development is a fundamental aspect of Islamic

education.<sup>159</sup> Qualities of the insan and processes of purification are noted in the conceptual literature, whereby Sahin (2018) contrasted secular perspectives on the human being that privilege cognition and abstract thought by describing both the holistic dimensions of the insan along with imperatives for self-refinement through processes of self-control guided by taqwa:

[T]he Qur'an and the prophetic traditions put forward a much more holistic perception of human nature and its perfection into a balanced maturity that integrates bodily, rational, emotional, moral and spiritual elements. The idea of human excellence, harmony and just balance is expressed not with the brute power of control or possession of abstract knowledge but with the concept of *ihsaan*: that is, perfecting one's conduct in life and showing values of kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality and openness. The inner control is tied with increasing self-awareness and God-consciousness (*taqwa*). (p. 16)

Inherent in Sahin's description are expressions of human dimensions engaging in prosocial actions in processes of increasing self, social, and spiritual awareness. Inner control, an aspect of Islamic education, is related to the deepest objective: God-consciousness. Pedagogies of this first theme—Dimensional Pedagogies—intentionally work with dimensions of the human being, each of which has particular pedagogical imperatives, on a course of self-development towards educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education, the quintessential being God-consciousness (Sahin, 2013, p. 201).

### **5.3.1 Honoring a Child's Dignity**

“By fitra, a human being has dignity and honor. *Don't break that!*” (Abid, 4/18, 181). This is perhaps the first dimensional pedagogy in that it is rooted in a human's primordial nature, which has connections to all other dimensions of the person, and to social, cultural, and spiritual worlds. Abid continued that the ways educators relate to children should cultivate a love of learning

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<sup>159</sup> Sahin (2013) warned against over-emphasizing negativity: “While the Qur'an warns against the deceptive tendencies of self, it also emphasizes the self's potential to overcome these negative traits. Thus, care for the self should include nurturing trust and confidence in one's self so that healthy self-criticism facilitates maturity and growth into faithfulness” (3922).

through fostering, not eroding, their self-images as dignified learners. Upsetting a child—with or without intention—may be a way of eroding that dignity. “You have to be very careful, because he’s born with fitra, and dignity is part of the fitra. [...] You have to respect his opinion, answer his questions, give him the ability to ask—there is no silly question” (191–192). Avoiding putting a child in an embarrassing situation is another way of maintaining their dignity. Jina described an example in terms of the learners practicing Qur’anic recitation and pronunciation of Arabic words. She said:

I understand that most of them are not native Arabic speakers, so there are some sounds that they cannot pronounce correctly. So I work with them on that. [...] When the student is having a hard time, there is a moment where I have to stop asking him or her to repeat it, because it becomes embarrassing for the student. I don’t want him just to back out because of that. (I1, 4/13, 102–106)

Although correct pronunciation of the Qur’an is of the utmost importance, a child’s dignity may be more so. Therefore, Jina preferred to work one-on-one with children to avoid the embarrassment of mispronouncing the Arabic words in front of the class.

### **5.3.2 Fostering a Child’s Trustworthiness**

Abid described how the prophet Muhammad dealt with a child companion, Anas Ibn Malik, whose mother brought him to Muhammad to work for him when he was still a boy. Once, Muhammad came to Anas while he was playing with some other boys, greeted them, and sent Anas on an errand. Abid described, in the child’s words:

This delayed my return to my mother. When I came to her, she asked, ‘What detained you?’ I said; ‘Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) sent me on an errand.’ She asked, ‘What was it?’ I said, ‘It is a secret.’ (169–171)<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Riyadh as-Salihin. The Book of Good Manners. Book 2, Hadith 688.

The Prophet trusted a child with a secret matter and the child took it so seriously that he did not even tell his mother. Abid continued,

This is something we can teach our children: if you want to teach a kid to be trustworthy, trust him with something! Twenty dollars. ‘Can you keep this for me?’ And then, next week, you ask for it. And then you say, ‘Thank you. You are *amin*, you are trustworthy. I can trust you with things.’ (4/18, 161–171)

Here, Abid described the importance of an adult first *giving* trust and then, later, *reflecting* that trust. “This is something that we can do, in practice. But, also, you can trust a child with a secret!” (172–173).

Fatima described a situation whereby she seized a chance to both enable her daughter to be trustworthy and simultaneously to illustrate some Islamic principles. She described:

My girl found \$5 in the Superstore:  
‘Mom, I found this \$5.’  
‘Oh, yeah, what will you do with it?’  
‘I will go and give it to the Customer Service.’  
‘Okay, good job. What a good girl! This is honesty.’

At this point, Fatima related how that might have been the end of the situation, but she realized that it was a good moment to illustrate an Islamic principle in practice. She asked herself, “Why don’t I take this and relate it to Islam?” So, she said to her daughter, regarding the \$5:

‘*Masha Allah*, this is honesty. This is what Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) taught us. And this was his nickname: *Al Sadiq al Amin*: the most truthful, the most honest.’ You did something that Prophet Muhammad was called for, because even when he was assaulted, he was always telling the truth. And he was *amin*—he was so honest and he was so loyal.’ (I1, 4/19, 485–497)

In this excerpt, Fatima first gave her daughter a chance to decide what to do with the \$5—she did not tell her what to do. Second, when her daughter came to a decision that involved honesty, Fatima highlighted that this was an aspect of Muhammad’s character and an important Islamic principle that he taught us to strive towards.

### 5.3.3 Facilitating Child Leadership

One day, nearing the late-afternoon prayer-time, as I was preparing to interview some teachers in the Subha Mosque, I heard a child's voice ring out over the loudspeaker: it was a child calling the prayer (*athan*). The next day, while meeting with Jina, I inquired into the mosque school's practice of having children call the prayer. Jina said: "Once I brought my son and he did the *athan*. So, since that time, all the kids want to do the *athan*! [laughs] (231–232). Then she told me the whole story, starting with her nine-year-old son:

In his regular [full-time Islamic elementary] school, they encourage them to do the *athan*. He was telling me, 'Mama, I am scared to do the *athan*!' And then they did an *athan* competition, and he got a prize for it. Since that time, every time he comes here [to the mosque school], he tells me, 'I want to do the *athan*,' and I tell him, 'Okay, you can go.' But at the last minute, he decided not to do it. And once I just heard him doing the *athan*. He went by himself to Brother Muhammad [the imam] and he asked him if he could do the *athan*, and he let him do it. And since that time—whenever he's here in the *masjid* [mosque]—he really wants to do the *athan*. (232–249)

This is an example of adults supporting a child's interests while facilitating the next step. Here, several adults contributed facilitation: first, the teachers at the child's full-time Islamic school, who taught the children to call the *athan* and held an *athan* competition; second, the child's mother Jina;<sup>161</sup> third, the imam at the weekend school, who paved the way for the child to use his previous knowledge in a new context and, in doing so, inspired many other students in the entire weekend school.

Amora expressed the concept of building children's leadership in terms of raising their awareness of their roles as ambassadors in the school and in the larger community: "'Mama and Baba invested in you, we are investing in you here. Please, you're the ambassador!' And they get it and they smile. And lots of occasions present [themselves] *everyday*: 'You see it; it's part of

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<sup>161</sup> This data excerpt, and the previous one—Fatima and her honest daughter—illustrate the ways in which Islamic education overlap contexts of home, community, and Islamic school—both formal and complimentary.

you!” (H1, ME, 4/26, 209–211). Here, Amora described perspective-taking in building dignity: helping children see themselves as ambassadors. Part of fostering a child’s dignity and trustworthiness may be to provide them chances to lead, which, in the practice of leading, also reflects back to them their own dignity, trustworthiness, and leadership qualities.

#### **5.3.4 Recognizing a Child’s Intelligence**

A key finding of this study was that the epistemological principle of knowledge having a divine source has implications upon pedagogy. Every person has infinite potentials for knowing, a child might even attain to knowledge that her teacher does not have, and particular pedagogies recognize this potential. Abid described the Prophet Muhammad’s relationship with a child companion, Ibn Abbas, which is a profound source of pedagogical insight for contemporary educators. Ibn Abbas spent time with Muhammad when he was a young boy, yet Muhammad used to speak to him as if he was speaking to an adult.<sup>162</sup> Abid recounted, “This is how Nabi (ﷺ) used to talk to kids. So, when you talk to kids, don’t underestimate their intelligence! [laughing] Because they are able to understand” (I1, 4/18, 108–109). Abid continued with a story: Omar Ibn Khattab, a close companion of Muhammad, used to take the child Ibn Abbas with him to the gatherings of the companions, all of whom were adults. One them said: “Why are you bringing this kid with you? We could have brought our kids too!” (112–113). To illustrate why he was bringing the child with him, and Omar asked Ibn Abbas a question about a verse of the Qur’an to which Ibn Abbas supplied an answer that none of adults knew. “Omar said, ‘That’s the only explanation that I know

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<sup>162</sup> Ibn Abbas said: “One day, I was riding behind the Prophet (ﷺ) when he said, ‘O boy! I will instruct you in some matters. Be watchful of Allah (Commandments of Allah), He will preserve you. Safeguard His Rights, He will be ever with you. If you beg, beg of Him Alone; and if you need assistance, supplicate to Allah Alone for help. And remember that if all the people gather to benefit you, they will not be able to benefit you except that which Allah had foreordained (for you); and if all of them gather to do harm to you, they will not be able to afflict you with anything other than that which Allah had pre-destined against you. The pens had been lifted and the ink had dried up.’” (Hadith narrated by Al-Tirmithi, Riyadh as-Salihin. The Garden of the Virtuous. Book 1, Hadith 62).

of this *surah* [chapter of the Qur'an]<sup>163</sup> (120). Clearly, then, Ibn Abbas possessed special knowledge and understanding at a very young age. Abid summarized the pedagogical meaning he made of this story:

When you teach the kids—of course, you are going to simplify things according to their level of understanding—but don't say, 'Oh they are still kids: they will not understand.' Rather, explain to them the meanings according to their level of understanding. (126–128)

Here, Abid emphasized the importance of sharing meaning with children and youth, which may only be a starting point for them, or a trigger to deeper understanding and meaning.

Faris described a situation that he experienced, similar to the child, Ibn Abbas, attending adult gatherings:

When I was growing up, a large part of my experience was hanging out with my dad and going to these gatherings that were actually meant for adults. But they were *fascinating* for me. I was so interested in hearing what these elders had to say about these different things. And so that was part of my experience. They weren't thinking, 'Oh, he's a child. So, we have to make arrangements for him.' They were just taking me wherever they were going. And I was *absolutely* enjoying it. Even though I wouldn't have been able to *name* it as a method as such, outside of this conversation, but this was part of how my experience was shaped" (H1, 4/15, 620–629).

What Faris described *is* a pedagogical experience, and one that fostered dignity and intelligence, even if it was not an intentional method on his father's part. Participating with adults is educative. In addition, recognizing a child's deep potential for intelligence may be providing that child with new opportunities for meaning making. Nadia linked Faris' experience to ways in which she understood children participating as respected members of the community at the time of the Prophet:

There were no schools, children were at the mosque with the adults, and they were all spending time together, learning together. The children were respected just like the adults were; kids weren't sent away, 'Oh you go play outside, the adults are talking'—there are no hadiths that ever say this. In many of the hadiths, you actually hear that children were present, whereas I don't see that this is the case now" (H1, 4/15, 65–69).

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<sup>163</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Al-Maghaazi, Book 64, Hadith 452).

Here, she suggested that multi-generational participation in lived experiences, including religious ones, was a pedagogical approach lacking today.

### **5.3.5 Engaging in Reciprocal Development**

As human beings, learners and educators share psychological dimensions, objectives, and the means to self-develop towards those objectives. Many educators spoke about sites of Islamic education as sites of reciprocal development. At its most basic, this involves educators and learners participating together in practices in which they reciprocally learn and develop. So, the first pedagogy of reciprocal development is participation together in Islamic ritual practices; prayer, supplication, reciting and studying the Qur'an, for example. In engaging in these practices—as well as leading, following, mediating, correcting, reflecting, and sharing the insights they inspire—both educators and learners develop. Thus, Islamic ritual practices are themselves pivotal pedagogies in that they link people together towards a divine objective, as Amal noted: “Islamic practice, or Qur'an, or prayer, this is the food for our spirit” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 21). At a further extension, the entire school community might be considered as reciprocally developing. Amira referred to the teaching and learning at the Subha Mosque School as “a great opportunity to *improve*—all of us, hand-in-hand—mash Allah, to excellence” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 65–67). Another iteration of reciprocal development includes exploring together new ideas through inquiry and research, whether it originates with a learner or with an educator. Both Marya and Huda described children coming to them with questions that prompted them to engage in research to be able to engage those learners in discussion the topic. Educators described grappling together over meaning-making, working towards increased awareness and refined excellence of action.



A primary pedagogy through which this reciprocal development seemed to happen was through role modeling,<sup>164</sup> whereby children could see and engage with a more-advanced insan and educators could practice being one. Fatima asserted that “We have to start with ourselves being good—to be their mirror and to be *first* a role model in our own behavior. This will make a good chance for Allah to intervene. [...] this can *open* a way, a gate, for your children after you. [...] (I1, 4/19, 617–625). Layla said, “And, let me tell you, if you are not the best example for the children, *nobody’s* going to follow you or listen to you” (H1, Subha, 452–453). Fatima elaborated with an example:

I have to be careful with *everything* I do—every movement, the way I talk to the other teachers. Like sometimes I’m mad because of other teachers doing something. How do I treat the other teacher? How do I treat—even ants! We go outside and see ants. I tell the children, ‘Don’t step on them! Don’t kill them!’ I used to step on them [laughing]. ‘But, no, don’t step on them! We have to be merciful. This is right!’ So, we have to be careful. And we have to practice what we preach! (I1, 4/19, 634–638).

Fatima here described that if she is teaching the children the principle of not speaking badly behind someone’s back, she has to be very careful in dealing with the other teachers in the school so that the children see her practicing what she preaches.

This type of role modeling included an educator’s recognition that their development was shaped by their role as a more-advanced Muslim. In other words, in upholding standards of excellence in the process of role modeling, educators themselves develop. Bilal described in detail how being a role model for his students had a reciprocal impact on his own behavior and development:

I’m a Palestinian from Jordan. I have other friends who are Palestinians from Lebanon, who grew up in the camps there and things like that. And we would get together and play *tarneeb* [a game] and smoke *hookah* [water pipes] when we were university students. Sometimes my

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<sup>164</sup> Role modeling appeared in various iterations across the data corpus and was initially coded differently into three subthemes: more-advanced insan role modeling (discussed here), context-specific role modeling (in Chapter 6) and illuminated role modeling (in Chapter 7).

friends will call me and be like, ‘We’re going to the hookah place. Come with us!’ I say, ‘I can’t!’ I actually can’t. Because if there’s a kid there who I taught four years ago, who’s in grade 11 now, who’s there, I’m not going to be shocked by seeing him there. But he’s going to be shocked by seeing me there! Because I know that there are other people who *expect* me to be a certain way, at a higher standard. And, so, it’s been *good* for me. I haven’t always asked for it! [laughs].” ( I1, 4/23, 657–682)

In describing how the social optics of the community contribute to disciplining his own self, his own nafs, Bilal simultaneously acknowledged that this was good for him.

In addition, and prior to, offering up their own selves as role models, many educators offered Muhammad as the ideal role model of the insan—“At the end, they need to know that the Prophet Muhammad, our role model, he was a human” (Rawan, H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 380). Part of the pedagogical intention of paralleling the challenges Muslims face today with those faced by Muhammad and his companions may be to emphasize the humanness of Muhammad, in making life choices and working hard for goodness in the community, and in giving the children an ultimate historical role model. Hamza described knowing and loving the Prophet as part of coming to know and love Allah: “For their relationships with Allah and the Prophet, they need to learn more about Allah and the Prophet. The more they *know*, the more they will *connect*” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 170–171). Hamza described doing that by emphasizing Muhammad’s humanness; that he went through so many challenges like us: “He was living in a society that was not Islamic; and still he was always close to Allah and he was doing the right things. So, we give examples from the sirah [Muhammad’s life story] and we connect it with the students’ real lives” (172–177). In addition, Muhammad’s companions offered varied perspectives on evolved Islamic character development.

So, we try to show them actually the best role models from the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). There are many, many different personalities, many different characters, right? So definitely, they will find someone in the sirah to relate to or, like, a companion who had similar situation to you, or similar way of thinking. And then encourage them to associate themselves with the style of those people. (H2, Subha, 4/20, 339–344)

This pedagogy of engaging in reciprocal development acknowledges that both learners and educators are human beings with common attributes, and that our methodologies in our own self-development involve others and are aiming in the same direction. The essence of this pedagogy is recognition that relationships between educators and learners are mutually and reciprocally self-developing.

#### 5.4 Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter described the first theme constructed from the data of this study: Dimensional Pedagogies. The pedagogies by which Muslim educators engage learners are linked with the ways in which they understand the human being, which are, in turn, linked to educational and developmental objectives of education. The requisite dimensions of the soul (*ruh*), demanding lower self (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), and intelligence (*‘aql*), as well as the pure human nature (*fitra*)—and their trajectories through the positive externalities towards the illuminated internalities as objectives—contribute to the ways in which educators engage children and youth in teaching and learning Islam. A key epistemological principle offered by an Islamic conception of the human being is that knowledge, as light in the heart, can illuminate any heart—beyond biological age—which means that children can surpass adults in knowledge. Knowledge is not only gained through life experience but through illuminated inspiration. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, which also makes visible elements of the Muslim learner, objectives, pedagogies in enabling a particular type of development:

This is not story-time! It’s our history and we have to copy them because they are human beings, like us. Omar Ibn Khattab used to do really bad things. But after he became Muslim, he became Al Farouk, the one who protected Islam from all the *fitn* [disturbance]. What changed Omar? Is it possible? Can I change like Omar? Or at least take him as a role model? This sahaba, what motivated him was love—love of Allah. He used to recite the Qur’an—the whole Qur’an—in one night. For me, it’s kind of hard. But Omar explained that *if* our hearts love the words of Allah, and our hearts are pure, we will *not stop* reciting the Qur’an.

So, we are trying to strengthen the connection between kids and Allah. This is what we call *taqwa*—in their heart. [...] This is the purpose. This is the *most important* thing” (Amal, H1A, Hikmah, 82–95).

This excerpt is resplendent with uniquely Islamic references to conceptions of human beings, pedagogies, and objectives. Amal asserted, first, that sharing the stories of historical role models is a pedagogy intended for contemporary people to emulate the highest expressions of character. Next, Amal selected a historical role model, Omar Ibn Khattab, one of the closest companions of Muhammad, who, at first, fought against Muhammad and the first Muslims. Then, she identified that Omar was transformed by love, suggesting that the *heart* is a key aspect of the human being and human transformation. She also described the dynamic between a pure heart and a key act of worship: reciting the Qur’an—but she described it as going one way: “*if* our hearts love the words of Allah, and our hearts are pure, we will *not stop* reciting the Qur’an.” Elsewhere, educators described the dynamic going the other way as well: *if* we recite Qur’an, our hearts will be purified and fall in love with (the words of) Allah. Finally, Amal connects the story to a primary objective of Islamic education: *taqwa* as connection with Allah. Where? In the heart. Pedagogies, including those with the power to change, which appear in this story are story-telling, role modeling, reciting Qur’an, purifying the heart, and loving Allah. They are premised on unique conceptions of what human beings are and where they are going, and they continue to feature in the chapters to come.

## Chapter 6: Theme 2: Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies

*“You need to plant seeds that match the weather.”—Fatima*

The purpose of the last chapter was to examine *origins*, as dimensions on the human being, and *destinations*, as objectives of Islamic education—and the pivotal pedagogies linking the two. But along the trajectory between origin and destination, pedagogies pass through context, which changes them. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the cultural and temporal context in which these Muslim educators were situated and how they described this context as coming to bear on their pedagogical approaches. Directly addressing the first research question of this study—What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners specifically in teaching and learning Islam?—educators emphasized various pedagogies as effective in the here and now. They also described some that were less effective. An important emphasis in this theme was *pedagogical change*.

Some scholars have lamented ossification of Islamic education, including in pedagogy, while others have lamented change. In this study, some educators described pedagogical improvement, while others described pedagogical deterioration. As such, the data corpus is populated with examples of dynamism and change, which provide groundwork in answering the third research question of this study—How do educators imagine, design, and/or implement new or contextually-relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam? In terms of change itself, most educators emphasized that *methods* change while *content* remains the same: “Islam is one. How we teach it differs” (Hana, I1, 178). Yassine described: “Overall, the message will be the same, but *how* to reach to the children, *how* to go deep inside their hearts. ... New methods have been developed” (H2, Ameen, 47–48). Jina added that pedagogies also change over “the students’

attitudes and backgrounds and life circumstances” (I2, 4/21, 14–16). Pedagogical change is not only a reality, it is a necessity.

Illustrations of pedagogical change arose in educators’ characterizations of how Islam was taught in the past and in other places (‘back home’) as compared to today. Hana summarized: “The way how I *learned* Islam is not like how I’m *teaching* Islam now” (Hana, I1, 4/20, 9–10). Fatima, in a halaqah at the Ihsan school with three other educators, elaborated:

When I was back home at their age, [...] we had a subject at school—*Tarbiyah Deeniyah*, Religious Studies—so we memorize, have an exam, and *that’s it*. Even if we had questions, teachers—maybe, correct me, Huda, but—they didn’t have this kind of connection to ask questions. No, you just study what’s in the book, go to the exam—

Huda: —read, study, succeed—

Fatima: —and that’s it.

Huda: And that’s it. (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 204–214).

In describing how Islam used to be taught 15 years ago in Egypt, Fatima, supported by Huda, emphasized the focus on memorization, recall, and lack of connection with teachers to ask questions. Problematically, Fatima described that many Muslim teachers want to teach in the same way, here and now, in this Canadian city. Sideen asserted a similar problem: “It is a Western society. So, the way we practice our religion also has to change. You’re not going to take the same methods that you had in the Middle East, pluck them in here. You can’t. Expectations are different. Relationships are different” (I1, 4/19, 69–72). Jina offered a specific example: “Bringing a curriculum from Saudi Arabia and just putting it *as it is* here. I don’t think it will work!” (I2, 4/21, 34–38). Even a teacher from Saudi Arabia who has experience teaching Muslim children born and raised in a different environment, Jina continued, may have different, and inappropriate, behavioral expectations of the children that are, “not really relevant to the context here” (40). The concept of *relevance* is central to this theme: Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies.

## 6.1 Canadian Cultural Relevance

*Canada* featured prominently in the collective consciousness of each research encounter. The country, its contemporary culture, and the affordances and constraints it posed to Muslim educators engaging young Canadian Muslims in teaching and learning Islam were *central* to the educators' pedagogies. Evidenced in all three themes of this study, the Canadian educational, cultural and even natural context featured pedagogically. Marya, aiming to pique children's curiosity about God by talking to them about one of the 99 divine attributes that refers to the incomparable beauty of the divine—*Al Badia*—provided an example of a Canadian affordance: “‘Let us talk about Al Badia! Here in Canada, masha Allah, we have this opportunity to see the difference in the colors of spring and listen to the birds—see all this beauty around us!’” (I1, 4/14, 89–91). In other words, Marya highlighted Canada's natural beauty as a similitude for God's beauty. Many educators capitalized on active learning in Canadian classrooms, which emphasize making learning fun, creative, and active. Yet Fatima suggested that not everyone understands these aspects of Canadian pedagogic culture:

I have some friends, they come from back home. [They say] ‘Education in Canada—I thought it would be super-duper, but children just go there and play!’ I say, ‘You know what? There is a great method is called *learning through play*. You can teach *a lot* through play. And the children will absorb it way faster and better than in the classroom.’ (I1, 4/19, 161–168)

While making learning fun as a pedagogical approach might have escaped recognition across cultures, Fatima herself recognized its pedagogic value and its importance with Canadian Muslim children.

Bilal's experience teaching social studies to Grades 6 and 7 at Hikmah Elementary provided intriguing evidence of the ways in which Muslim Canadian children are culturally situated in a Canadian context. He noted: “Muslim children tend to find themselves as tourists in their own

[Islamic] civilization—they even look at their Islamic identity as an outsider looking in” (I1, 4/23, 35–36). He explained this phenomenon as revealing a particular distance that Muslim Canadian children seem to have vis-à-vis Islam:

The impact of living in a secular culture is that things that would historically be outrageous in an Islamic context, they may find acceptable. They may know that it is wrong in an Islamic sense, but not have a visceral response to it. Whereas things that may be acceptable in an Islamic context, but in a Western context are *not* acceptable, they would have a viscerally uncomfortable response to it. (I1, 4/23, 42–46)

Bilal provided an example of a situation that might evoke a visceral response: A child whose cousin goes to Jordan and marries another cousin. “They will tell you rhetorically: ‘I know that there is nothing wrong with a cousin marrying a cousin [...] it’s just yucky; I don’t like it’” (58–60). Bilal continued:

Whereas, if they were watching a popular show—*Riverdale*, *Thirty Reasons Why*, or *The One Hundred*—and they see an openly homosexual character who meets another openly homosexual character, they are actually quite ok with that storyline. [...] They may say, ‘I know Islam doesn’t accept this,’ they just don’t have a *real response* to it. (54–61)

In other words, the children’s *stronger emotional responses* are more in line with the dominant culture. Bilal summarized, “The dominant culture that they live in seems to be dictating their *real* responses to these things that are happening” (56–58). The phenomenon that Bilal described suggests that Muslim children are comfortably situated within a dominant Canadian cultural atmosphere, and educators need to take into account this situatedness when engaging young Muslims in learning Islam. This might be considered *Canadian cultural relevance*, as a pedagogical imperative whereby educators teach in harmony with both the affordances and constraints characterizing Canadian public schools and society.

### **6.1.1 Affordances: Canadian Culturally Relevant Pedagogies in the Air**

Canadian culturally-relevant pedagogies seemed to originate in the integrated ethos of Canadian public schools embedded in a larger secular socio-culture. These pedagogies included teaching



and learning Islam in the language of Muslim Canadian children and youth—in “*their* own language, their own perspective, not *our* perspective” (Fatima, I1, 4/19, 368). This language may be an amalgam of secular Canadian principles and practices *and* Islamic ones. In other words, Canadian culturally relevant pedagogies are asset pedagogies that take into account *affordances*—as educational, pedagogical, and even ethical principles—within Canadian public schools and societies, and work around *constraints*, in teaching Muslim Canadian children Islam. Canadian cultural relevance is premised on the idea that Canadian affordances do not contradict Islamic ones and may actually *enhance* Muslim children’s understanding of existing Islamic principles.

Fatima made visible a fundamental challenge in constructing Canadian cultural relevance in pedagogy: “Here in Canada, most of schools, most of the curriculums, are based on reason: *seeing* is believing. Yet, many things in our religion are based on *ghayb* [beyond immediate perception]: so, things that we believe in, but we cannot see!” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 88–89). Islamic schools may be places within which to reconcile these two perspectives, and the pedagogies that follow suggest that many of the educators were aware that Canadian cultural relevance was a crucial pedagogical approach in engaging Canadian Muslim children in teaching and learning Islam.

#### **6.1.1.1 Language of the Land: Reasoning in English**

An expression of Canadian cultural relevance, at its most basic, was a teacher’s ability to speak English. Sideen described that language was the first barrier teachers needed to overcome in teaching according to Canadian cultural relevance: “Many of the teachers in this city—as far as I am aware—are from *back home*. And so, while they have a lot of great knowledge, how to get that to the students requires good command of English, because that’s the first thing that kids will need” (I1, 4/19, 223–227). Layla, too, was adamant about the importance of English for both teachers and students in empowering children to succeed in Canada: “If you brought them to this

country, you have to give them the tools to succeed. To succeed in this country, you have to do it in English. Unfortunately, they cannot go to university in Arabic!” (H1, 4/19, 288–295).

Beyond language, teachers need knowledge of Canadian culture: “An understanding of the culture; an understanding of what ‘peer pressure’ means; an understanding of what ‘suicidal thoughts’ mean—and when that starts and what resources out there” (Sideen, I1, 4/19, 227–229). In other words, in teaching Islam, educators need to understand *current social issues* within Canadian schools and societies. Sideen added: “When I put my kids through Islamic school, I found that a big part of the challenge was finding teachers who understand the culture we live in but *also* have a good grasp of their deen [Islam]” (221–223). Ability to merge Canadian culture and Islamic religion is fundamental to Canadian culturally-relevant pedagogies.

A more subtle aspect of the cultural language of here and now is *reason*. Many educators described encouraging learners to search for reasons behind Islamic principles and practices in assembling meaning and coming to their own why. Fatima recounted:

I know some parents, they say: ‘We have to pray. That’s it. Don’t ask why.’  
[Children ask:] ‘Why do we fast Ramadan? It doesn’t make sense’—  
‘Because this is what God ordered us to do.’

*This is not the way*—no! It’s not an Islamic country. It’s a country based on *reason*, based on *thinking*. You *have* to teach them with the methods that they are raised up with. They go to public schools. They learn about reason, about science, about seeing is believing. If you’re teaching them things, and they cannot see it, it’s hard! (I1, 4/19, 266–271)

Here, Fatima highlighted the importance of educators (and more-experienced others) ensuring that children understand the reasons behind the acts of worship. Halima too emphasized reason in terms of understanding meanings and purposes: “I get up in the morning and I come here [to her work]. What does my work mean to me? The same thing with Islam. What does *Islam* mean to me? So, I think the purpose, the meaning of it. This is where the reflecting part comes, all the time” (I1, 8/8, 408–410). Here, Halima asserted the importance of sharing with children the purposes of Islamic

practices, as clearly as the purposes behind getting up and going to work. Mona described a reasoned approach to solving interpersonal problems, which she learned in Canada: inquiring into reasons behind another's behavior. She described: "If someone did something, go and ask him, *why* he did this to you. And ask him to stop. Because in our culture, we would never do that" (I1, 4/14, 66–69).

Canadian cultural emphasis on reason may have catalyzed realization that *reason* is a substrate underlying the very foundations of the deen. For Yassine, reason constituted both a definition of Islam and a pedagogy. As a definition: "What Islam means is that you are using your reason; you're using your logic—you are reasonable and logical in *every* aspect of your life." As a pedagogy: "Everything should make a sense; only then you will do it. Otherwise, you will not do it. Once you use your mind, use your brain, you use your cognitive abilities, you lean towards the oneness of Allah" (H1, 4/14, 81–88). In other words, if a young Muslim is not convinced of the reason behind an Islamic principle or practice, s/he cannot be expected to engage in it with any sincerity. On the other hand, if a young Muslim sees the reason behind a principle or practice, s/he may engage in it and, in doing so, come to understand the oneness of Allah.

Bilal described reason and rationality as important aspects of a common language across difference, highlighting that early Muslim scholars emphasized this commonality: "There needs to be something that everyone recognizes. That's the role that rationality has to play: a common belief that things don't come out of nowhere; that when I open my hand, a pigeon should not appear" (I1, 4/23, 335–337). Yet he lamented that rational arguments have become more and more difficult to find, partially because "the schools and the teachers and the books and the curricula that are pumped out of certain regions in the world tend to be so strongly against maintaining those lines of argument" (339–340). Without rationality and reason, Bilal asserted, "Your conversation

is over, there is no common ground—forget it—there’s no common *language*. You’re not speaking the same language, at that point, sometimes literally” (330–332). Here, Bilal identified a literalist approach in downplaying reason and rationality to the detriment of Islamic education more broadly.

Fatima too described the imperative of speaking the language of reason, in English, across lines of difference. She recounted how Muslim educators in the past, in Canada, used to teach children Islamic studies in Arabic, but later they switched to English: “We found it didn’t make sense to teach them *here* [in Canada] in Arabic” (670)—not only because the non-Arabic speakers were excluded but also for another reason: “What if my girl has a question? What if someone [in Canadian society] asks her a question? She needs to be able to answer back. And, in our deen, there are terminologies that she has to be aware of—in English—to be able to answer back. In *reason*. She has to answer back in *reason*” (674–680). In other words, if a young Muslim is asked a question, s/he needs to answer in English and in reason, otherwise the answer will not be accepted because, as Fatima stated: we live in “a material world of reason” (680). Emphasizing that the language of the land is the language of reason in English highlights a pedagogical imperative for Islamic educators to “relate religion into reason” (683).

#### **6.1.1.2 Freedom, Options, and Choice**

Critical thinking, inquiry, and engaging in independent research are skills taught in public school and required in university—“in science especially, and in physics, challenging their minds to do the research by themselves” (Marya, I1, 4/14, 96–98). Thus, sites of Islamic education need to be places where young Muslims hone these skills through engagement with Islamic material. Marya described: “In the education system here, kids do both research and they challenge their ability to know. For high schoolers, they don’t want to go to university without these skills. They want to

motivate and challenge themselves—and we need to put that idea of *research* [in Islamic education]” (H1, 4/21, 35–39). Halima echoed this thought: “We need to teach the child the *skills*, rather than *words*: how to navigate, how to research, how to think, to reflect” (I1, 8/8, 146–147). These educators described that teaching and learning Islam must constitute opportunities to teach research and critical-thinking skills. Yassine described this as a defining criterion for teaching and learning Islam today, as compared to the past:

Before the last few decades, people were not so much open in discussing things, and critical thinking. But now, since there is a lot of freedom to think, people are pushing freedom—freedom of thought, freedom of expression—so now we have modified the version of teaching Islam to the children. (H2, Ameen, 37–41)

While Yassine described cognitive freedom, Faris emphasized the dire importance of supporting young Muslims in questioning everything. He provided an example: “Even the existence of the Prophet in purely historical terms: Was he a historical figure or is he a mythical figure? Did somebody make it up? *Yes*, we’re going to engage with this question!” (766–767). Faris maintained that if young people are fooled into believing something, or pushed, they will give up on it: “And that’s why I’m convinced that there is absolutely *nothing* that we are going to push. And that’s why that freedom is *absolutely essential*. And it’s in the air; it’s the *Zeitgeist* of our time” (H1, 4/15, 758–759). Faris emphasized that freedom is an essential aspect of Islamic pedagogy that is contextual and contemporary. In this time and place, Muslim educators cannot do without it.

Nadia and Halima both argued that freedom to question is not a new phenomenon; it predates Islam, according to an example in the Qur’an whereby “Ibrahim questioned the existence of God” (Nadia, I1, 4/15, 785). Halima elaborated: “He was looking at the sun, and then the moon, and he said: ‘Oh, this is my god.’ But then it was gone—so there must be a bigger God. And he got the others to *think*, to look, to reflect!” (I1, 8/8, 216–221). Nadia summarized that “the Qur’an gives clear examples of people questioning *everything*” (788) and Muhammad’s companions sometimes

questioned him. “If you can disagree with the Prophet, you can really disagree with anything” (818–819). Supporting these two voices, Faris concurred, but he identified Ibrahim as an exception, whereas today Ibrahim needs to be the norm. Thus, while an impetus for questioning may have come, for these Muslim educators, from Canadian schools and societies, Nadia asserted that Muslims in the past were empowered by Islam to reflect and to question everything. These educators’ words challenge Halstead’s (2004) assertion that a characteristic of Islamic education is: “to play down the importance of certain skills within education, such as questioning, verifying, criticizing, evaluating and making judgments, in favour of the uncritical acceptance of authority (p. 526). The educators of this study suggested that young Muslims need to question *everything*—even the literal existence of their prophet Muhammad—as part of a contemporary Canadian Islamic education with roots reaching back to Ibrahim.

With freedom and inquiry comes the possibility of options and choice (in direct response to the contextual challenge of *force* described in section 6.2.2). Many of the educators paired choice with reasons: children and youth need to know the reasons behind Islamic principles and practices and be given options if they are going to be able to make an authentic choice: “We have to let them make Islam their choice. It’s not something that they inherited because they were born with it” (Fatima, I1). Options and choice meant making visible for learners multiple ways of interpreting Islam. This included presenting diverse interpretations of Islamic principles so that young Muslims could see room for diversity within even orthodox expressions of Islam and so that they could begin the process of assembling their own understanding and application. “We cannot here force *one way*—that’s the way—and we have many scholars who say different things!” (Marya, H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 47–48). Sideen described her process of presenting the children with different interpretations, options, and fatwas [legal rulings], and recommending an option, saying: “This is

what I have found peace within. And this is what I have found success within. And this is what Prophet Muhammad has taught us—and what better example to follow, but him?” (I1, 4/19, 337–340). Sideen then leaves the children to choose their own path because ultimately it is their choice, and that of their family.

Faris was perhaps exemplary in emphasizing choice. He asserted that young Muslims have to assemble their own sets of beliefs and practices, “their *own* repertoire of Islam” (H1, 4/14, 372).

Primary to Faris’ pedagogical approach was to present options:

I have certain views, but I am not going to just share those views as the *only* views. And I am not going to share the traditional views as the only views either—let’s say, a commentary of Qur’an coming out of Saudi Arabia—I’m not going to just pass those on, I’m going to complicate it: ‘The majority at this point in history believed *this* way. There are *other* people—and as recently as the 20th century—who thought so-and-so about this.’ (341–347)

Faris referred this pedagogical process as “democratizing their understanding of history” and informing what the learners put together “as *their* Islam” (349–350).

Some educators went beyond choice as to *how* to be a Muslim to suggest that *being Muslim* is a choice itself: “I am not just going to be Muslim because someone has told me to be Muslim. *Why* am I following this path? Being born in a Muslim household is not a good enough reason for it!” (Sideen, I1, 4/19, 415–429). Pedagogically, Sideen then directed the children to conduct research on what else is out there, both for peace of mind—“Yes, I have chosen the right path. This is the one that makes the most sense”—and to be able to converse with people from other backgrounds, “ So you have an idea what *their* books say, and what *their* beliefs are [...] what their questions are going to be and what their limitations are” (I1).

Part of fostering choice may include enabling participation without splitting hairs, especially with the youngest children. An exchange with Jina unfolded as follows:

Jina: I have a son who is seven years old. Sometimes he tells me, ‘I don’t want to do my *wudu* [ritual ablution].’ So, I tell him, ‘Ok, that’s fine. Just come to prayer without wudu.’ [both laugh]

Claire: My eight-year-old daughter, she sometimes shows up to pray with us and I notice that she’s not wearing hijab! [laughs]

Jina: It’s fine! Just getting the habits! (I1, 262–270)

In this excerpt, we exchanged examples of supporting young children’s choices to participate in important Islamic rituals *imperfectly* in order to foster a sense of choice, love, and belonging.

### 6.1.1.3 Teacher Investment in Locale

A final quality of Canadian cultural relevance, at its most subtle, was teacher investment in local context, as Bilal detailed: “I am *totally* invested, *one hundred percent* focused on the place that I live now. That’s not to say that I don’t care about what’s happening elsewhere,<sup>165</sup> it’s just that *here* is where I feel I can have the single greatest impact” (I1, 4/23, 499–502). In other words, in building Islamic community, *as an objective of Islamic education*, Muslim educators need to be invested in local expression of that community. Fatima elaborated on the ‘seed’ analogy, presented in Chapter 5, which summarizes the concept of Canadian cultural relevance:

You need to plant seeds that match the weather. I will say *mango*. Mango needs hot weather. Can you believe it to take the mango seeds and plant them in Alaska? [laughs] *This is what we do with our children!* This is what we do with our children. We cannot say, ‘No, you have to do that and that’s it.’ The environment is different. The culture is different. This society is different. Everything around them is different. We have to speak their own language. We have to [help them] seek their own way. We have to feel the way they feel. We have to put ourselves in their shoes. I cannot teach them the *same way* that my mom or dad taught me. (I1, 4/19, 277–284)

In creating an Islamic educational environment within which to nurture Canadian Muslim children, educators need to match pedagogies with the local weather conditions. In order to teach Islam well,

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<sup>165</sup> “For as much enthusiasm as you see that I have about this subject matter, I have done *significantly* more research, and spent *significantly* more time studying, researching, and talking about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. If you think of something that has occupied *most* of my life, it’s been that. Most of my intellectual energy went into memorizing the names of villages and populations and Israeli operations and who were the generals and who were the... So, it’s not that I don’t care!” (Bilal, I1, 4/23, 482–487).



an educator needs to be both cognizant and invested in the local culture in which young Muslims are learning and developing.

### 6.1.2 Constraints

Not all aspects of the Canadian cultural context of schools and societies were as generative as the affordances previously described. As with other asset pedagogies, a critical lens on the cultural context must be maintained to raise critical consciousness (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 92). This subtheme of Constraints examines some of the issues that educators described as facing Muslim children in Canadian schools and society. Many of the pedagogies they described seemed to be in *direct response* to these constraints, referred to as Context-Response Pedagogies below. Halima identified two groups of challenges that Muslim families and educators face in raising and educating their children in this city. First, “shifts in the Canadian system” including changes in technology (I1, 8/8, 46). Fatima elaborated, saying: “We are we’re living nowadays in a very open world. It’s a huge world, but with technology you feel it is within your *own hand*. Our children here, they face a lot of challenges that I have never experienced before” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 215–219). Part of this concern was overt exposure to cultural phenomena on the internet, including pornography, sexualization of society, familial breakdown, and social media premised primarily on showing off and feeding the ego (*nafs*), with popularity determined by ‘likes.’ Rasha expressed an opinion on some of these challenges in relation to civilizational movement across historical time:

The signs of civilization according to *their* history books—Canadian history books—are to get rid of our instincts and be rational. To use our mind and brain to make decisions. What they are doing right now, they are taking us back to the barbaric life. Because civilization is based on rationalism, is based on education, is based on thinking. To go back and act based on our instincts, this is going back to square one, where *instincts* and *needs* control our lives. We are losing our civilization. (I1, 4/23, 201–210)

Here, Rasha is lamenting aspects of Canadian culture—primarily involving servitude to base sexuality and substances—which she feels are moving backward in a civilizational sense.

Halima's second group of challenges involved encounters between home-country and Canadian cultural principles and practices: "the new culture that Muslim families are meeting" (I1, 8/8, 46–48). Other educators had related sentiments; including the loss of languages (primarily Arabic) in the children and youth. Reem described Arabic-speaking parents not speaking to their children in Arabic because, she described, parents think: "we try to be as a Canadian because we are living in Canada. We must be a part of this country" (H1, 4/19, 257–8). As a result, the children cannot read the Qur'an. Many educators stressed Arabic in their curricula as a means to the Qur'an, which Amira described as one of the most prominent signs of Islamic civilization (H2, Subha, 4/20, 428). While these perspectives set the tone for considering constraints within a Canadian context, educators had specific groups of concerns involving fitting into public schools, marginalization, and double identity.

#### **6.1.2.1 Problems with Public Schools**

Jina elaborated that educators must keep in mind "difficulties the children face: the *public school environment*" (I2, 23–28), include peer pressure, wanting to fit in, the challenges of wearing hijab, and being a visible minority. Nadia went further, describing Canadian public schools as homogenizing cognition and functioning like a police order: "You bring kids, you literally brainwash them with ideas, then you give them a degree, and they leave. [...] You are feeding them the same message, like a factory. The schools then produce people with the same kind of mentality, the same kinds of knowledge" (H1, 4/15, 122–126). Nadia's description evokes epistemic hegemony, whereby "the same kinds of knowledge" are encompassed within secular, Eurocentric knowledge. Bilal suggested that philosophies underlying Canadian public education

are colonial constructs (I1, 4/23, 397) that have infiltrated Islamic education, too: the rush to get people to market, whereby schools pump students out as quickly as possible, also characterizes Islamic education, which was traditionally taught to mastery. Nadia suggested that, “We need to disrupt this a little bit. To decolonize the curriculum, to decolonize our education system, to build a new way” (H1, 4/15, 122–128).

Along with pedagogical problems in public schools, some of the educators described discrimination and the ways in which Muslim children may feel inferior: “Like, because we are Muslims, we are inferior than the other students—Caucasian students, I will say” (Jina, I1, 46–48). Nadia also described that even youth who were born in Canada are ashamed of their identity in various ways:

They are ashamed of looking Muslim; they are ashamed of their parents, if their parents look Muslim—kids don’t want their parents to drop them off at school because their mum wears the hijab or their dad has a beard. They try their best not to speak their language ever. You can tell how hard they are trying to let go of their past identity and jump into being more white, more Western. (H1, 34–42).

Nadia described that this desire to fit in—“as sad as it is”—kind of makes sense for two reasons: one rooted in the epistemic marginalization by the dominant Canadian culture and one rooted in the ways in which Muslims themselves have marginalized Islam.

#### **6.1.2.2 Epistemic Marginalization**

Epistemic marginalization is different from racial discrimination or even Islamophobia, although, when directed at Muslims, it contains traces of both. As described in section 2.2.2, it is about decentering and delegitimizing ways of knowing different from a dominant way. Nadia described epistemic marginalization as resulting from dominant anti-Islamic sentiments in Canadian society:

We have *internalized* a lot of the messaging that has been said about Islam for the past a few decades. [...] I hear stories from Muslims telling me, when they see a man with a beard at the airport, they get a bit nervous. One of them is married to a guy with a beard. And I’m like, ‘You sleep in a bed with someone with a beard and you’re scared of someone with a

beard?’ [laughing] It makes no sense! But that is how powerful the socialization and the messaging is we keep receiving about Muslims in general, in the West. And, so, our ways of *knowing* have become inferior, our ways of *being* become inferior to us. (H1, 4/15, 77–92)

In describing how dominant-culture messaging has marginalized Muslim ways of knowing, she imagined collective spaces for Muslim educators and learners to regroup and think together about Islam and ways of being Muslim in Canada. Jina illustrated epistemic marginalization in drawing a parallel between Aboriginal systems of healing and Islamic ones: “Of all the suffering that Aboriginal people went through, until now, their youth are not given the opportunity to feel that they *belong*. An Aboriginal child or youth, who is going through difficulties and sees a counselor, if the counselor is using Westernized ways of counseling with him or her, it is not helpful!” (I2, 4/21, 144–148). Both of Nadia and Jina saw a need to widen ways of knowing beyond a epistemic hegemonic frame to include all kinds ways of knowing. Nadia said: “It could be a Muslim framework, but it also could be another way of knowing”—Chinese, Indian, indigenous traditions, for example—“We are so used to just the Western, North American paradigm that we start to believe this as the right way: it is scientifically proven, it is *common sense*” (H1, 88–92). This echoes the literature describing dominant culture in Canadian schools and society camouflaging values as neutral and universal (Omar, 2011).

Marginalization of Muslim ways of knowing is a particular constraint within Canadian cultural contexts, and so is the marginalization of Islam itself, often by Muslims. While Nadia suggested that “Islam is a way of life; it is a part of who we are, it is this amazing thing. But then we reduce it to just a set of rituals: you pray, you fast, you wear the hijab” (H1, 4/15, 42–47), Jina asserted that we need to change stereotypes through our *own* behaviors in order “to change the how others perceive Muslims” (I2, 4/21, 151). She described a section in a textbook for one of her courses on child and youth care on Islam and Arabs, describing women as inferior to men in Islam:

“And the head of the tribe is making decisions—[laughs]—’No, please, this is not true! This is not true!’ I told them, ‘Okay, I can use myself as an example: I moved to Canada, by myself, to go to school. And then I met my husband here—without the head of the tribe making decisions for me! [laughs]” (Jina, I2, 4/21, 152–162). While she laughed at this absurdity, Jina revealed a significant challenge that she, and her students, faced in this Canadian community.

### 6.1.2.3 Two Hats: Double Identity

Along with challenges the educators faced inherent within contemporary Canada, a second major group of challenges were struggles that Muslim families faced in adapting to new Canadian culture, as Halima identified, “living very far away from their community [...] so the needs of Muslim families in the West are totally different than the East” (I1, 8/8, 47–48). In moving between Muslim homes and communities embedded within a larger secular society, many educators pointed out that Muslim Canadian children have two identities; they wear two hats: “They *know* the hat to wear at a certain time and the hat that they need to wear in another context. And they switch hats constantly, without even being cognizant of the fact that they are doing it” (Bilal, I1, 4/23, 38–40).

Fatima described the situation as involving *more* than two contexts:

Sometimes my girl, she’s 12 years, tells me, ‘Mom, sometimes I feel like I live in different countries in one day! When I go home, this is a country. When I go to school, this is a country. When I go to the beach...’ [laughing]

Huda: That’s a different *continent*! [laughing] (Fatima & Huda, H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 257–263).

Helping young Muslims navigate multiple contexts may be a primary task of Muslim educators and their approaches differed. But Layla described that parents and educators might be doing it backwards: “People are trying to *protect* their kids from the Canadian culture, while they are putting them in public schools, public activities, and they are exposed 80% to this Canadian culture, yet they are telling them: ‘No, we don’t do that’” (H1, Subha, 4/19, 229–230). As such,

Layla asserted that this creates a paradox in the child's brain; it actually *entrenches* the two hats and may eventually push the child away from Islamic education:

He will come to the point where he will tell himself, 'Actually, I am Canadian. I'm not from *wherever* you are telling me.' And he will give up on everything! Well, that is not what we're looking for! We are looking for children who are Canadian because they are living here. But at the same time, *Muslim Canadian*, and they know what their identity is. (230–238)

Instead of creating confusion, Layla emphasized that mediated participation in Canadian cultural activities may help build Canadian Muslim identity.

Halima, too, pointed out that some complimentary Islamic schools, if they are lacking teacher skill and effective pedagogy as compared to public schools, may actually *worsen* a sense of double identity: "When they go to the public school, they start to see the difference between a skilled teacher and a non-skilled teacher, and this is where the double identity starts. This is where our children are falling apart" (I1, 8/8, 80–82). Shockingly, although complimentary Islamic schools have significant potential to play an important role in mediating between a Muslim home environment and a secular public-school environment, Halima said that rather than helping children *integrate* a dual identity, the Islamic schools were actually precipitating a *dichotomy*. She explained a reason behind it being that the weekend schools are focusing on the curriculum rather than the child: "So what are we doing to the child? We are doing no good. Because when he sees the other side of the world: they're having fun, they're playing" (Halima, I1, 8/8, 95–101). This echoed Fatima's emphasis on centering active, fun pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam.

On the other hand, some educators strived to help children integrate the two hats. Asifa described an integrated process within students within the Muslim Elementary School:

Eight hours you're in an Islamic school: you pray salat; in the morning you create a climate and culture you welcome the kids by 'Salaam aleikum.' Sister Sharifa stands there. I stand there. Sister Lulu, Sister Amora. Morning *dua* [supplication] is being read first, then the national anthem—because we have to respect the country we live in; we have to show them that too: 'Yeah, we are Canadians!' (H1, ME, 4/26, 238–243)

In this case, the school environment aimed the integration of Canadian and Muslim identities.

Fatima aimed for integration by constructing an overarching identity: being Muslim. She described her children asking her,

‘Are we Canadian or Egyptian?’ I tell them, ‘Don’t think too much about your identity as Canadian or Egyptian—just as a Muslim. It doesn’t matter if you’re a Canadian or Egyptian or Lebanese or Syrian—you are a Muslim. You are a good human being; it doesn’t matter where you are. This is your identity. You are a Muslim. (I1, 4/19, 704–707)

The key to this overarching identity was Allah: “If you are in Canada, if you are in Egypt, if you are in Lebanon, if you are in America—if you are even on the moon—you can still see Allah!” (I1, 4/19, 701–704). For Fatima, Allah was the reason and method behind integrating the double identity in tawhid (unity), although she acknowledged that this was difficult, in the onslaught of secular culture, which threatened to knock off the Islamic hat. To this end, Fatima described doing dua for *herself*: “Even me, as an adult, I keep asking, ‘Please Allah make me keep my hijab; make me keep my faith! Protect me from my *nafs*—from myself!’” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 221–227). Fatima thus illustrated agentic hijab as an indicator of spiritual wellbeing and the wilderness of the nafs, in combination with the constraints of secular context, in threatening her faith. In this one statement, Fatima encompassed the three pedagogic themes of this study’s typology: she engaged in supplication (dua), as pedagogical engagement with divinity, in asking for protection of her faith in light of both a secular context and a unique human dimension, the nafs, or lower self.

## 6.2 ‘Connecting Islam to Negative Feelings’<sup>166</sup> and Other Mis-Pedagogies

Along with constraints of the Canadian cultural context, educators identified challenges intrinsic to Islamic education and material, which included conceptual complexity and the esoteric

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<sup>166</sup> This title comes from Halima’s critique of pedagogies as “connecting the Islamic study with the *negative* feelings of the child” (I1, 8/8, 97).

(ghaybiat) nature of Islamic material, especially in an age of materialism and reason, and specific approaches to teaching Islam in this Canadian community, which might be considered as *mis-pedagogies*. While these pedagogies might have been premised on good intentions, they were not described by the educators as methodologically effective. Some of these mis-pedagogies were imported from other parts of the world; others homegrown and exacerbated in a Canadian cultural context. Bilal, for example, identified a push against rationalism and rationality: “The learning centers and the books that are primarily funded, or established, by movements out of the Arabian Peninsula tend to be such that if something is not found in the *apparent* meaning of the Qur’an—the one that is in your face—or it is not found in revelation, it is not useful knowledge” (I1, 4/23, 317–321). As irrationality-as-pedagogical-substrate is untenable in a Canadian context, many educators had rational solutions to offer, as direct response to that context, which are explored in the section 6.4. Context Response Pedagogies. Sideen pointed out that Islamic material is too often taught in limited and theoretical ways and offered an example of learning Islamic manners when she was a child:

We would be learning [the Qur’anic verse]: ‘Be good to your parents, don’t say ‘uff’ to them.<sup>167</sup> Don’t be loud and aggressive around them.’ But it sort of stops there. We didn’t take it a step further to where there’s different levels of obedience to your parents. There is your mom nagging for you to do it [laughing]—and that’s actually the lowest level of obedience. There is a *higher* level where you’re doing it [thinking], there’s so much more that I can do! (I1, 4/19, 42–53)

Sideen actively worked against this phenomenon by exploring with her students lower and higher levels of application of Islamic principles in order to take the material to the most expansive and practical level possible. In this section, I detail these mis-pedagogies, one involving ways of

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<sup>167</sup> *Lā taqul lahumā uffin walā tanharhumā*; “And do good unto [thy] parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in thy care, never say “Ugh” to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech, (24) and spread over them humbly the wings of thy tenderness, and say: “O my Sustainer! Bestow Thy grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!” (Qur’an 17:23).



engaging with the primary sources; another involving teacher methods; and a final one involving pedagogies that equivocate: they might be more effective or less effective, depending on how they are engaged.

### **6.2.1 Teaching Islam as Ancient, Irrelevant, Negative, and Difficult**

Many educators lamented the ways in which Islam in general, and the Qur'an and Sunnah in particular, were presented to children as ancient and outdated. Abid described: "Some people teach Qur'an as if it's something that is very old, outdated, or not for this era! That's not true! (I1, 344–345). Fatima, too, recounted that people suggest Islam is history, not meant for now, which makes a teacher's job more difficult in making Islam a way of life relevant for now. Jina described that some contemporary Arabic media perpetuate this image of Islam as old and irrelevant: "Some sheikhs come up with a fatwa [legal ruling]—a very, very old fatwa—and start arguing about it! Myself, at my age, with my experience here [in Canada]—being born and raised in a Muslim country—*my* mind does not accept such fatwas. So how would students here recognize them?" (I2, 4/20, 112–117). In other words, it would be impossible for Canadian Muslim youth to accept argumentation over an outdated legal ruling, if Jina herself could not, having been born in a Muslim country.

Compounding the problem of irrelevance, Halima described the problem of negativity, which she described as happening all over the world: "We are connecting Islamic study with the *negative* feelings of the child. [...] This is where our problem lies, we do not remember the *deen* except when a negative thing comes up!" (I1, 8/8, 252). Halima emphasized that neither student nor teacher would get *anything* out of negative learning and may, in fact, push children away. In addition, some teachers threaten: "'He *needs* to memorize!' And if he doesn't memorize, what? He will have punishment or something?" (97–104). Halima lamented that this type of

learning is not only painful in this life, those teachers are threatening that the next life will be painful too, prompting her to query: “So what are we giving the child? There is no desire for the child to look forward to the religion. There is no desire for the child to dig deep!” (107–108). Instead, Halima wondered how teachers could “create the elements for them to connect and reflect *all* time—not only when they’re doing something wrong?” (252–256).

In addition to irrelevance and negativity, educators raised the problems of technicality and difficulty. Abid described that while correct recitation of the Qur’an is important, practical use is more important than theory:

Teach them proper *tajwid* [pronunciation] without focusing on the *theory* but on the *practice*. [...] I just tell them to repeat the verses exactly like I am saying them. And, then, when they say it later, they will know that what they are doing is called *tajwid*. If you give them too much theory of *tajwid*, chances are they won’t be interested. (Abid, 4/18, 329–335)

In other words, Abid described having the children learn the proper pronunciation by engaging with it. Fatima expressed a similar concept, but used examples drawn Islamic Studies, rather than Qur’an. She said, “Can you imagine a child of five years that you tell him *aqidah* [creed]? *What?! Or shariah* [law]. Like, *what?* [...] ‘What’s *aqidah*? Why should I learn about *aqidah*? I’m in Canada. I want to play! I want to draw! I want to listen to music! I want to have fun!’” (4/19, 104). In expressing the point that educators must not present Islamic material as technical and difficult, Fatima simultaneously underlined the Canadian cultural relevance of fun, play, and active learning. “Giving the child those names from the very beginning will give him that message that Islam something complicated, very hard, and boring. [...] He will pretend that he is listening. But he is not listening” (104–110). Instead, Fatima advised: “So teach them everything that you want. Plant the seeds first. And then when they are ready, by the age of 11 or

12, ‘Yes, this is Islam. This is aqidah’” (117).<sup>168</sup> Here, Fatima emphasized a point similar to Abid: engage learners with the technically-correct aspects in practice; later they can study the science and theory behind those aspects, if they are interested.

### 6.2.2 Ineffective Methods: Skills, Stuffing, and Forcing

Along with teaching Islam as ancient, irrelevant, negative, and difficult, a second major challenge involved teacher methods: “What are the ingredients that we are actually making our lessons out of? Our *way* is very important” (Rasha, I1, 4/23, 127–128). Some of the educators identified is that teachers themselves are lacking skills. Halima suggested that one of the biggest challenges in Islamic schools is that: “They hire anybody who speaks Arabic—without any [pedagogic] skills” (I1, 8/8, 74–75). Fatima elaborated: “There are lots of great and amazing teachers out there: they have the knowledge, they have the power, they have the skills, but they don’t have this small thing [...]—the *right methods* to deliver that message” (I1, 4/19, 54–58). Here the educators decried a basic lack of pedagogical sensitivity.

Another mis-pedagogy involved *informational stuffing*. Faris described:

There is a sense of loss that many of these first-generation migrant parents have, ‘Oh, our kids are losing it! [Islam]’ And they want to just *stuff* them with it and hope that they will somehow hold onto it. But this is not organic. If anything, it is actually fueling that tension the kid is experiencing, the dichotomy of being a mainstream Canadian and a Muslim, and that is what our Islamic education is doing, as of now, in most settings. (H1, 4/15, 204–210)

Here, while the educational intention may be to have young Muslims learn and love Islam, the pedagogy of stuffing children with Islam, Faris noted, may actually have the opposite effect.

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<sup>168</sup> Aqidah is considered one of three primary disciplines, with which a Muslim would engage in living a complete life; the other two have been identified as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), as an Islamic code of ethics, and “the science devoted to the nourishment of the soul, known as tazkiyah or tassawuf” (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013, p. 235), which involves self-refinement and the congruence of practice and belief. Iterations of all three appear in the data corpus, primarily in terms of the content material by which educators engaged learners in pedagogy.

A significant and widespread mis-pedagogy that educators identified was teaching by *force*: “I have seen so many teachers, they teach by force, maybe by hype, and they do it wrong” (Hana, I1, 4/20, 39–43). Layla described that teachers can actually “mess up” children’s formative early years if they teach by force. She said: “I really don’t believe in forcing kids; there is no point. [...] ‘Go pray now! Go make wudu [ablution] and pray!’ Okay, he would go make wudu and pray—but he is doing yoga, he is not praying! Prayer has to come from the heart” (I1, Subha, 4/19, 132–133). Layla presented an alternative way. If children are invited, but do not participate in the ritual practices for the first decades of their lives—“Let’s say they are 20 and now they *want* to pray because now the religion hits the heart” (129), it is okay: “Because Allah (ﷻ) can *forgive* those [earlier] years. But if we mess up those years by forcing them, I think they will never reach the time where they will *love it*” (138–140). Loving prayers and seeing that prayers are ways of *communicating* with God, “I think *that* is what Allah (ﷻ) wants” (146). Hana pointed out that there is no concept in the Qur’an of forcing people to engage in the acts of worship (H1, 4/19, 418).

Of all the educators, only Reem described wanting to give children “orders” and make aspects of Islam “mandatory.” Reem overtly decried the lack of force used in teaching and learning Islam this Canadian city, and the fact that learning seemed to be negotiation:

In this country [...], you have no right to try to punish the kids. You have no right to do anything with your kids or with other kids. We have a lot of problems with our kids in this country because everything is about *negotiation* with your kids. But sometimes you have to give them orders; they must do this by *mandatory*. They never do this [in public schools]! (H1, Subha, 4/19, 87–93)

If Reem’s argument seems unusual or outdated—that problems with children in Canada stem from negotiating with them, and not being able to punish or force them—then it is highlighting Canadian cultural relevance. The other two educators in this particular halaqah immediately disagreed with

Reem—including Layla, who said, “I think it is cultural” (422)—and Reem defended her argument by saying, “In our countries, it is different” (108).

### 6.2.3 Equivocal Pedagogies: False Choice, Habits, Competition, and Rewards

Beyond ineffective pedagogies, there was a category of *equivocal pedagogies* or pedagogies of questionable intrinsic value, and/or internally contradictory, and/or of widely different value depending on how they were used. While most, but not all, of the educators mentioned the importance of choice, an insidious type of choice was apparent in the data corpus: *false choice* as an equivocal pedagogy characterized by internal contradiction, whereby the educators framed something as a choice, but it wasn’t a free and authentic choice because it was laced with coercion.

An example might be Hana’s description of a conversation with the students:

You have the right to *choose*—even Allah gave you the right to choose [between] the correct way and the wrong way! What do you think, is getting to Jannah [heaven] much better or going to Jahannam [hell]?’ You have to show them these two ways: ‘When you get in Jahannam, it is fire; you get burned. How do you feel? Is it pain?’ ‘Yeah, it is pain.’ ‘Okay, when you go to Jannah, whatever you wish for, you find it. Is not that nice?’ They say, ‘Yeah, nice!’ (I1, 4/20, 42–48)

This pedagogical dialogue begs the question: which child would chose burning and pain over something nice? Likewise, Layla said: “I always tell my students one thing: ‘Look, you are children now; nobody is forcing you to pray, not even Allah (ﷻ). But if you pray at this age, you are guaranteeing your parents Jannah. Do you want to see your parents happy in Jannah? Because they will get Jannah just because of you!’” (H1, Subha, 4/19, 430–441). Again, what child would not want to make their parents happy? And is sending your parents to heaven versus not sending your parents to heaven a fair choice to offer a child? Layla summarized by equivocating: “Even though they are not making a choice, it should be a choice” (442). In some cases, this mis-pedagogy may have been that educators really wanted to offer children choice but did not know how to do

so authentically. It could also have been paying lip service to a prevailing culture that favored choice.

An annual Qur'an competition was a fixture at many Islamic schools, which Amira described as an important *way*, a method, of accessing Qur'anic content. Its equivocal nature, as a pedagogy, lay in the *competition* aspect, which seemed to negatively affect some children. At the time of the study, competition was being contested at the Subha Mosque School because some children had become so upset over not winning that some teachers had suggested canceling it. Amira described:

Yesterday: level six boy *crying*: 'Why I am second?' He said, 'I am an Arabic speaker, so how come there are others ahead of me?' So, we were trying to give him, you know, the *right* reasons for why we are doing this competition: 'Wish for the others what you wish for yourself!'" (H2, Subha, 4/20, 381–391).

Although this boy was crying over not winning the competition, Amira was not in support of the idea of canceling it: "No. Why? If it was an Islamic Studies competition, we may. But Qur'an? No. Because it's *shifa al sudu* [healing the hearts in our chests]. It's *shifa* [healing] for everything. Allah is taking care of our emotions!" (395–397). This entire data excerpt contains some uniquely Islamic conceptions, including identifying Allah, via the Qur'an, as the source healing and care for emotions. Amira attributed the suggestion of canceling the Qur'an competition to the whisperings of *Shaytan* [the devil]. The idea of competition seemed equivocal for Nour, too. While she saw it as a good opportunity for children to work hard and stay focused, she said: "But we need specific psychological views to deal with kids who are sensitive, who are crying, who have strong emotions and are too sad if they are not first!" (H2, 4/20, 497–500). Hamza, who was also present in the halaqah, described his take on it: "The idea of *competition*, I think it's good in the sense of setting goals to encourage people have to work hard to achieve those goals" (524–525). But he noted that the educators also encouraged the learners to focus more on the process than the

results: “The effort they are spending on it; that’s what we want, right? Whatever the result is!” (514–519).

Like the Subha Mosque School, the full-time Muslim Elementary School also had a Qur’an competition and the teachers spoke favorably about it, in particular, in creating a social atmosphere within which the Qur’an was valued: “We call the parents, we show them what their children did, we give a grade,” Asifa described (H1, ME, 4/26, 401), and pointed out that the winners are “supposed to be recognized for their hard work, in front of their parents, in front of the whole school [...] and you can show the world you learned the duas of the Prophet and you learned this much Qur’an!” (404–406). She described telling the other children, ‘You are also all winners, because you tried, and you worked hard!’ Ruby had a similar pedagogical approach. Before the awards ceremony, she asked her students who they thought the three winners would be and they started suggesting names. But Ruby told them: “No, all of you are winners. Do you know why? Because all of you, you did your best and tried hard! You memorized Qur’an to please God, so Allah (ﷻ) has *already* rewarded you!” (I1, 4/26, 184–189). She followed it up by asking them how they will feel towards the winners; some responded, “I will be sad.” Others, “I will be angry.” So, Ruby said, “Let’s be happy for them and celebrate them—because Muslims love for *each other* the same as they love for themselves!” (188–189). Ruby here used the Qur’an competition to teach the children valued Islamic principles. Ultimately, the pedagogical value of competition seems to depend on the ways in which each educator engaged the children.

Competition also raises a final equivocal pedagogy: giving rewards. Whether or not to give children rewards for good work—or even for participating in practices like ritual prayer—was a contested subject. Hala spoke about giving her students chocolates, small toys, or balloons so that they would enjoy attending school (I1, 4/13, 50). Dalia mentioned telling the students: ““This is

prayer time. We have to respect Allah. And if you pray in a good way, I will give you a gift!” (I1, Ameen, 4/14, 391–2). She referred to this as forcing the children “in a good way” (H1, 4/13, 396). Halima, on the other hand, outright rejected the idea of rewarding children, saying: “I am totally against rewards; I don’t believe in it because it will never show anything and soon they will start hating coming to school because they’re not as good in some areas as others, while they have their skills in different areas!” (I1, 8/8, 621). She elaborated that rewarding some children diminished the fact that each child has something to contribute and each child has something to work on. Offering a common, instrumental perspective, Yassine linked earthly rewards to divine ones: “Allah gives us reward for everything that we will do. And so, of course, we should reward our children in the school when they do good; we should reward them with a small gift or something” (H1, Ameen, 433–436). Wanting to trouble this a little bit, I asked Yassine: “But sometimes Allah will give us something *very* difficult. You only realize later that it *was* the reward, because it didn’t like taste like chocolate or anything! [laughing]” and Yassine replied in a way that revealed another perspective:

If we are going to study Qur’an—spiritually, with the meaning—Allah tells us that we are in this life and this life is an illusion: ‘I will give you challenges and hardships in this world.’ So, once you are ready for this challenge, whatever trouble, whatever hardship, comes your way, then it is easy for you! But if you think: ‘I will have all the luxuries and everything!’ when any trouble comes to you, then you get depressed. (H1, Ameen, 469–485)

Here, Yassine described a deeper mindset than surficial rewards and punishments: how we view hardships to begin with. Seeing them as intentional challenges and connection points to God may make them easier to deal with. Within an Islamic frame, the concept of rewarding children was both equivocal and complex: educators acknowledged that reward-giving may be a divine pedagogy; sometimes coming in the form of challenges. Yusr offered additional insight on rewards and challenges, illuminating that Muslims have endured hardships throughout history—and, on a



longer historical timeline, that previous prophets have endured hardships—yet they were always supported in the end. Yusr recounted Grade 6 and 7 students seeing Muslims suffering around the world on the news: “I tell them that we are like prophets: before they will suffer because they are Muslim. [...] Allah will reward us because we learn *now*, we are patient *now*, [...] and how, in the end, Allah (ﷻ) may give us support” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 116–122). Marya, too, said, “We have been talking about Prophet Muhammad and what was happening for him in Ta’if<sup>169</sup> and after the hard time is over, ease comes. It’s a very important thing for us to keep saying: ‘No matter what happens, we cannot lose hope. Life will get better because that’s what Allah said!’” (I1, 4/14, 148–152). Thus, regardless of whether they give candies or gifts, educators might help children develop an Islamic resilience perspective, whereby challenges are part of life; challenges are divine tests; and enduring challenges with patience will ultimately be rewarded. Giving rewards illustrated the essence of equivocal pedagogies: they are not intrinsically positive or negative.

#### 6.2.4 Pedagogical Deterioration

While most of the educators saw positive pedagogical changes in Islamic education here and now, others described broad ways in which Islamic education has deteriorated. Nadia described that Islamic education has become removed from day-to-day practices: “For the most part, the teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ) happened as people were going on, doing their daily stuff. And so, it wasn’t removed from daily life” (H1, 4/15, 565–568). People learned Islam by living it. Today, Nadia described: “In a secular country, we’ve reduced Islam to just praying and fasting—the do’s and don’ts; you’re going to go to hell; you’re going to go to heaven—and that’s it. But Islam is not incorporated in daily life” (576). She inquired:

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<sup>169</sup> In the early days of his prophethood, Muhammad (ﷺ) went to Ta’if to see if the people there would be interested in Islam but they rejected him and his message, chasing him away by throwing stones.

Isn't work an act of worship? Isn't going out and supporting indigenous people part of being a Muslim standing up for justice? How are we telling our kids that? Stealing is haram. But how do we have a conversation on what it means to be praying on stolen land? How are we bridging the gap from, *Islam is not just a bunch of ayahs* [verses] *that you need to memorize, to Islam came as a way to change our lives?* I think that is missing. (576–581)

In this excerpt, Nadia recognized a gap between what Islam was *intended* to do—guide us in standing up for justice and changing our lives—and the increasingly normative practice of just memorizing a bunch of Qur'anic verses. As such, Nadia recognized that the way people were practicing Islam in this context was not living up to its cultural and spiritual imperative; Islamic practice was not addressing the social issues of the time, relevant to Canadian culture.

Bilal also shared a negative perspective on large-picture change, reporting that the quality of Islamic education has atrophied over time. Without doubting the sincerity of Muslims today seeking knowledge, he contrasted the lifelong, teaching-to-mastery methods of past Islamic education with the modern, four-year-degree Shariah colleges of today, “the mother of all scams” (360). Bilal's summary was:

The way that we teach Islam now is generally on the K-to-12, move-you-along, now you're going to learn this, now you're going to learn this, now you're going to learn this—the fact that you didn't understand these things for the last five years isn't super relevant. And you end up with a pretty substandard understanding of things that are actually *really* important (408–412).

And Bilal's description referred to the Muslim Canadian children who were attending *full-time* Islamic schools, which doesn't say much for the complimentary-school education that children attend a few hours per week.

### 6.3 ‘I Don’t Want you Just Writing a Test’<sup>170</sup> and Other Sound Pedagogies

Asifa’s quote in the title referred to her assertion that pedagogies of Islamic education can, and must, be active, attractive, and creative: “At this time—in this era and generation—creativity is very important. You can have it be *boring*; you have to attract them to the religion!” (H1, ME, 4/26, 138–140). For Marya, good pedagogy starts with a “rich curriculum—fun, colorful with tools” (I1, 4/14, 25) and shared ideas: “I’m glad we have a lot of websites and Facebook pages [...] With many ideas to choose, not leaving them [teachers] to invent or think how to teach it for a different age” (27; 35). Hamza described getting Islamic education out of the classroom and into activities and camps: “We don’t want to teach Islam as any other subject in school. Islam is not a *set of information*; a *subject* to be learned, like math and history” (H2, Subha, 4/20, 212–217). Instead, Islam is to be lived and experienced in life and surroundings. Along with detailing constraints facing, and within, Islamic education, these Muslim educators described sound, beloved, tried-and-true pedagogical approaches.

#### 6.3.1 Learner Uniqueness; Educator Responsiveness

Educators described forging relationships with students by responding to their concerns and passions, in interaction with the Canadian context. Layla detailed keeping up with trends: “I always listen to what they say; to what they want to do. And I don’t say, ‘Don’t tell me this,’ or ‘Don’t tell me that!’ No” (H1, Subha, 4/19, 219–222). Layla recounted that she knows a lot about the new music, the new trends, and she is living contemporary culture with the young people around her. “And, then, when the kids want to talk to me about something, I don’t want to block them! I want to show them, especially here in Canada, that you can be a Canadian—do whatever a Canadian

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<sup>170</sup> Asifa uttered this sentence in the context of using creative pedagogies to work with learners on effective life skills, which they will need out in society (H1, 4/26, 419).

will do—just your faith that is different” (224–226). Marya described mirroring public schools, whereby teachers encourage children to discuss topics of interest to them: “When they talk about things *they* know, then I think they will learn better” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 55–56). Jina described mirroring public schools in working on interpersonal skills: “Choosing topics that are relevant to their everyday life—this is very, very important—topics that they need to know about, helping them improve their interpersonal skills; how to be self-confident” (I2, 4/21, 32–46). She emphasized staying close to the children and youth as they grow, and understanding their concerns and their difficulties.

Attending to the child’s interests includes recognizing the uniqueness of each child, as Fatima said: “Each child develops in his or her own way. So, I have to know what this child is interested in. And from that entrance, I can teach him whatever” (I1, 4/19, 59–61). She described using an emergent curriculum approach:

Let’s say a child is so interested in music. Why can’t I can teach him what I want to teach him about Islam through music? I cannot go and tell him, ‘Music is haram! No, put your music and instruments away! Allah is the greatest. You have to make wudu; you have to pray five times a day, you have to listen to your parents.’ Is this is going to make him listen? No way! But if I say, ‘Okay, how about singing songs? Islamic songs? How about singing these songs while playing your best instrument? [...] let’s say *Five Little Ducks*. I can make up new words: instead of five little ducks, five little prayers!’ [...] Can you see how he can receive the information through the words and music? (I1, 4/19, 71–84)

Here, Fatima—like Jina, Marya, and Layla—described engaging children in teaching and learning Islam with pedagogies revolving around their own interests. While working with individual interest and talent was reported in descriptions of Muhammad’s pedagogy (Ramadan, 2007; Sahin, 2013), and thus may be considered intrinsic to an *Islamic* pedagogy, these educators were simultaneously and syncretically drawing from the Canadian context in which they were embedded.

### 6.3.2 Open Dialogue

Educators also described including the day's lesson time for open, context-related dialogue in making sense together. Hamza expanded upon the Subha Mosque weekend school's curriculum each class by inviting the students to decide the day's lesson topic and then engaging in open discussion on their topic. "Students bring their own topics and they share it with the class, I always try to make sure everyone in class gets heard and I encourage them always to actively participate in discussions" (H1, Subha, 4/13, 137–140). Hamza also described offering the students ideas or particular Islamic viewpoints and then facilitating ensuing discussions. Nour also mentioned the importance of free time: "We give them free time, at the end of the lesson, to make connections" (H1, Subha, 4/13, 155). Huda used discussion time as a way of exploring with the students always-fascinating aspects of an Islamic worldview beyond the reach of our sense perceptions: "Part of our faith is in *al-ghayb*, the unseen world. So not everything, I can smell it or touch it. There is unseen world; I'm trying to balance that with them" (H1, 4/14, 145-149). Hamza pointed out that discussion is actually a Qur'anic pedagogy, whereby Allah talks to us in the Qur'an as "a form of a discussion" (H1, 172).

### 6.3.3 Discovery Learning

Several educators supported the students in discovering and making meanings for themselves. Sideen, for example, when teaching social etiquette practices, had the children take home a logbook to record their actions, as well as other people's *reactions*: "Try to read what the other person's body language is, and record it. And then tell me, 'What did you feel? How did they feel?'" (66–68). Thus, Sideen encouraged the children experiment for themselves physical and emotional reactions to aspects of Islamic behavior. In class, they would explore principles in imagined situations: "I will propose a scenario, for example, and say, 'Okay, so pretend this is our

family right here. And this just happens. Where do we go from here?’” (92). Then, Sideen would support the children’s role playing. “And if they’re just not getting to the level where I want them to be, I’ll jump in and give them that piece. I try make it so that they are coming up with the ideas, because I think it sticks a lot better than me *instructing* them to do this or do that” (92–99).

Similarly, after teaching an Islamic studies lesson, Jina described: “I try at first to *elicit* the morals from them. Usually they come up with the ideas I want them to come up with. [...] And then they talk about how they can use this, like, for example, kindness, how can you be kind in your daily life?” (31–33). Then, in the next class a week later, she asks them: “‘What did you do? What did you do during the week?’ about how they applied the learning; about how they applied the morals into their daily life” (59–61). This was one of Jina’s ways of helping the children apply the Islamic principles.

One of Faris’ approaches to studying Qur’an involved the students searching for key points in the verses: “Sometimes I let *them* identify the take home message for themselves. Other times, after some discussion, I would specify, this is what I want you to note down” (H1, 281–282). Similarly, one of Abid’s pedagogical approaches to the Qur’an was a type of thematic hide-and-seek, whereby he would read a surah, discuss its major themes, and then invite the children to find echoes of the themes themselves. For example: “Surah Al Nahl. One of the major themes of this surah is the *na’ma*; the favors of Allah (ﷻ) and His blessings. ‘I want you to find this blessing.’ And I give them time. [...] We use the English translation and also the Arabic. And everyone finds something! Because there are so many blessings in there!” (272–277). With many of the educators emphasizing processes of children’s meaning making, Nour linked it to Islam itself, saying that meaning and reason are always present, but cannot always be taught directly: “They must learn and discover by themselves” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 213).

#### 6.3.4 Bringing Islam Alive Here and Now

Many educators had ideas on how to diametrically address the problems of teaching Islam as if it was ancient, irrelevant, negative, and difficult by making it timely, relevant, positive, and easy. For example, Marya turned the problem of the ancientness of the Qur'an around, as actually constituting the miraculous nature of the Qur'an: "People said, 'It's a 1500 years old book, it's for people who died long time ago. It's talking about them. But the miracle of Qur'an is that it is for every time, place, and people'" (I1, 4/14, 161–163). In it, we learn from other people, "people who lived before us" (167). Marya, and other educators, described the primary purpose of stories in the Qur'an as being sources of wisdom, which we apply here and now. The following is an excerpt from a halaqah of Islamic Studies teachers at the Muslim Elementary School:

Sharifa stated: "Allah is not giving us these stories as just bedtime stories.

Asifa: *No, no* [whispering].

Sharifa: Children have to listen, they have to *apply*, the values that are included in these ayat [verses]! In addition to good recitation, the good reading, the good tajwid—

Asifa: —morals, values, ethics!

Sharifa: —these are the values that we take to the community out there.

Asifa: *Subhan Allah* [above and beyond is God]. (H1, ME, 4/26, 310–317)

Together, Sharifa and Asifa connected principles from Qur'anic stories to their application in Canadian community; that is the purpose of the stories. Huda too warned against taking stories in the Qur'an as "bedtime stories" because within each story is a principle relevant to here and now: "Don't take the story as a story; you will not learn from it and reflect on your daily life. No. There is always a connection. I try to connect them in real life" (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 164–165).

Abid emphasized the importance of *impressing* the children with scientific details from the Qur'an on modern science: "Science, space, discoveries, fingerprints, biology, geology [...] What Allah mentioned in the Qur'an 14 hundred years ago is more advanced than what science

discovered recently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (I1, 345–349). Fatima’s approach to making Islamic concepts relevant in the moment was relating them to everything we do, like feeding birds outside:

Islam teaches us how to be merciful with animals. So, you want to let them know that this great morality, it is not with no base. *This is Islam*. You don’t teach Islam that was thousands of years ago. [...] that Islam is something for them like space: something that’s far beyond; something that we’re not reaching; something that is not among us on earth. No, we live with it” (I1, 4/19, 500–508).

In this extract, Fatima provided an example of linking Islamic principles in the moment, with children. Halima recommended relating Islamic concepts to positivity, for example, making the Qur’an time one of wonder and connection between adult and child.

#### **6.4 Context-Response Pedagogies**

Context-response pedagogies involve ways of teaching in direct response to both positive and negative contextual aspects of the dominant Canadian culture. Many of these pedagogies aimed to prepare young Muslims to face Islamophobia and other challenges in schools and society; many aimed to help children develop themselves as strong, fair Muslims (Sharifa, H1, ME, 4/26). A prime example is the motivation Ruby described in becoming a full-time homeroom teacher in the Muslim Elementary School, which, at the time, had only one another Muslim homeroom teacher (the other homeroom teachers were not Muslims and the Muslims primarily taught Islamic Studies and Arabic). In direct response to the epistemic marginalization of Muslims as scholars and educators, Ruby said: “My first reason to teach in this school was that I want the Islamic schools to have Muslim staff. The children have the right to have a Muslim homeroom teacher who teaches math, English, social studies and science” (I1, 120–128). She explained that children need to see that Muslim people can teach these subjects and be successful in other aspects in life beyond Islamic studies. While Ruby’s pedagogies extended from this primary motivation, each of the pedagogies described in this section involve such cultural, contextual interaction.



#### 6.4.1 Curriculum Integration: Islam in the Day-to-Day

Both Bilal, as a social-studies teacher in Hikmah Elementary School, and Ruby, as a homeroom teacher at the Muslim Elementary School, countered Canadian cultural dominance by integrating Islamic material into the Canadian curriculum itself. Bilal described doing his best to integrate Islam and Islamic issues into Social Studies as much as possible: “I try to give real-world contexts of the things that we are learning and how they apply to Muslims and the Muslim community” (I1, 4/23, 22–24). He noted that the Canadian social studies curriculum is “being rewritten in a way that is broad enough that I can incorporate these things legitimately” (162–163). Ruby described a second reason for becoming a homeroom teacher was to infuse Islamic topics across the provincial curriculum, which she described as “kind of a flexible one” (I1, 4/26, 19), and to “help the students realize that Islam is a way of life” (128). When introducing emotions and their causes and effects, in the “Physical and Health education” section of the curriculum, for example, Ruby introduced techniques to control feelings derived from Islamic sources, including Prophetic recommendations for controlling anger.<sup>171</sup> Ruby also described populating the discursive environment with Islamic expressions like *Masha Allah* (an expression of appreciation), *Alhamdulillah* (thanks are due to God), *Subhan Allah* (above and beyond is God), *jazakum Allah kheir* (may God reward you with goodness). She said, “When the teacher uses these Islamic words children realize, ‘We don’t use these words *only* when it’s Qur’an time or Islamic Studies periods—no, it’s part of *our daily life*” (I1, 4/26, 45–47). These teachers interacted with a flexible provincial curriculum, widening its dimensions to include aspects important within their Muslim communities.

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<sup>171</sup> “When I was teaching that lesson to the students, I went through the techniques to control our feelings and I connected it to the Prophet Muhammad’s (ﷺ) hadith. I taught them what Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) taught us to do when we get angry: change our position; sit down if we are standing; make wudu to calm ourselves down; and say ‘authu biAllah min Ashaitan arajeem’ (I take refuge from Shaytan the rejected)” (Ruby, I1, 4/26, 21–27).

#### 6.4.2 Answering Back; Answering Ourselves

An important context-response pedagogy was working with children and youth on the ability to answer challenging questions. While Fatima previously explained how Muslim Canadian children must be able to answer back in the language of the people around them—in English, and with reason—another rationale behind answering challenging questions reasonably was to answer the questions in one’s own mind. Fatima described:

Some of my daughter’s friends ask her, ‘Your mom is covering her hair; your mom is covering her body—why?’ So, I want to teach her so that she can answer. Because when she answers them, in fact, she doesn’t answer them: she answers herself. The same questions are just knocking on her brain. When she has the answer, she’s not answering them, she’s answering herself.” (H1, 4/19, 298–302)

This is why it is very important for Muslim educators to model both questioning and answering with reason. We cannot sufficiently answer children’s questions, as Fatima pointed out, by simply stating:

‘Because this is what’s written in our Qur’an and this is what’s written in our Sunnah. And that’s it. If you do this, you go to Jannah. If you do that, you go to Nar [fire; hell].’ We cannot tell them that! We have to help them get the answer themselves, in their own way. (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 359–364).

While this may be an example of Reem’s complaint that, with Canadian Muslim children, “everything is about negotiation” (H1, Subha, 4/29, 89), Fatima asserted that, “They are living in a reasonable world. What if this *why* is not shaped well? She has to be mentally and emotionally satisfied with the answer. It has to come from within” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 370–372).

So, in response to people in the larger society commonly equating hijab with oppression of women, Fatima described seizing chances to engage in pedagogical dialogue, to equip her students (and her daughter) with the *reasons* behind Islamic practices. For example, passing the frozen section of the grocery store, Fatima described saying: “The things that are in the fridge, you have

to put a glass, right? So that you can see through. Because it's a product. A product we want to buy. Muslim women are not a product—we are not even for free! No!" She continued:

Our body is that *valuable* that God, He wanted to make sure that it is in a safe place—covered. [...] I will only show what I want to show: my face, to know me; and my hands, to help, to support. Why do you want to see more? Why do you want to see my belly button? What do you want to see my breast? Why do you want to see my *back*? It's not your business! I don't want to show you. I want to show you my face" (I1, 4/19, 307–316).

So, Fatima concluded, practicing with her daughter on answering challenging questions may empower her to answer: "My mom is not covering herself because she's oppressed. No. She's covering herself because she feels that she is just *so valued*. And she's not—I'm not—a product" (I1, 4/19, 298–305).

#### **6.4.3 Barreling Towards Contention**

Related to the pedagogy of working with children to answer back was the pedagogy of barreling towards contention. Some educators intentionally aimed straight for the most challenging questions that Muslim children were facing, the "really hot-button issues from their friends" (Bilal, I1, 4/23, 138). He described:

I want to take the *most contentious*, the most difficult issues that I can and address them absolutely head on, and barrel right towards them. In both the weekend school and here [at Hikmah Elementary School], the issues that they [the administration] come and tell me, 'This issue, maybe you should steer away from,' *that* is one that I dive right into. (122–125)

Examples of hot-button issues include three particular ones: the existence of God, the nature and source of the Qur'an, and the prophethood of Muhammad. Bilal described his process of thinking through them with his students, "If you have agreed to the first two [God and the Qur'an as God's words], then the third [Muhammad's prophethood] is pretty easy to accept. If you haven't accepted the first two, then the third is nonsensical! Children are already making these connections in their own minds. But they just have to be boiled down" (150–156). Bilal's reasons behind his pedagogy of barreling were three-fold: first, he wanted children's first existential moment to be in an

environment of support: “Many of them have never thought about, *Does God really exist or not?* Because they haven’t had some secular or atheist friend ask them these questions [...] What I try to avoid is a massive existential crisis that turns into a spiritual breakdown (211–212). A second reason was to prepare children for confrontation with a difficult question, piece of information, or a scientific fact, so that they would not be intimidated by it; they would have the tools to handle conversations around these questions. For example, evolution:

Is it an empirical argument or a rational argument? It is a *very good* empirical argument and not something that I would encourage the students to dismiss. We are not here to wave a hand at it—‘My mum said it’s not true, therefore it’s not true.’ Let’s tackle it head-on and give the *best possible defence* of what this is actually saying. (217–225)

Third, this pedagogy was intended to foster a child’s connection with God at the most rational level, by exploring and making sense of the most contentious questions. By the end of Bilal’s thought process, “we discover that there are only two or three things that, Islamically, we would find contentious here. One being the idea of randomness. Not just in evolution, but in *anything*”; a few important concepts remain:

A Muslim would have to hold true that God does exist; that the universe is meaningful and that your existence is meaningful; that randomness does not exist—that everything has a purpose associated with it, even if *you* cannot observe that purpose. And that Adam existed and existed whole. (233–236)

In this way, Bilal described taking his students through the thinking behind some of the most contentious questions they would be bound to face in society.

Sideen, too, described teaching the students things that the other teachers shy away from:

What is my relationship with boys? What has Allah said? You live in a Western society, so what are the expectations? You don’t go to school in an all-girls setting or an all-boys setting—so how do you navigate? How do you do your day-to-day? You also don’t want to come off as rude or, uncooperative, so how do you navigate?’ I like to talk about these things because that’s essentially, that’s why the parents send them to Islamic school. (I1, 4/19, 252–260).

These are some of the questions Sideen described as arising amongst Muslim Canadian youth. Exploring them is a primary reason behind the existence of Islamic schools and a prime responsibility of Muslim educators. She noted: “It’s great if you’ve got the entire Qur’an memorized, but if you can’t practice that on a day-to-day basis... [laughing] Finding guidance on the day-to-day, I think that’s really *our* role” (260).

While Faris did not describe his pedagogical approach as *barreling*, it might be considered in a similar vein to Bilal’s and Sideen’s approaches in that he deliberately confronted *complexity within* Qur’anic and Prophetic material with his students: sharing compelling aspects along with less-compelling aspects that might “actually pose a challenge in our relationship with Qur’an” (H1, 412). He described:

I share with them how certain things that we run into in Qur’an poses a problem in relating with the Prophet. Not everybody would be comfortable with that. So instead of apologizing on behalf of the Prophet, I actually tease the issue, and make them aware that like: ‘Are you comfortable with this? Isn’t this strange?’ So, making the familiar unfamiliar; making the unfamiliar, familiar, is sometimes what it entails (H1, 4/15, 384–391).

In role modeling how to have “this complicated relationship with the text” (444), Faris shared a pedagogical objective with Bilal: to preempt existential crisis. Faris described sharing with the students “a realistic sense of what being a Muslim is going to look like. [...] I share with them and I complicate things for them because I don’t want them to get surprises later on” (411; 384–385). Importantly, this pedagogy of barreling, in itself, seemed intended to foster a deep divine connection in attending to contentious issues by addressing them reasonably so that more soulful activities could take place.

#### 6.4.4 Standing Up, Public Speaking

Educators at the Muslim Elementary School described Islamophobic sentiments they faced in society and how those sentiments informed their pedagogies with the students in terms of what they wanted the students to know and to be able to do in facing life outside the school:

Asifa: It happens everywhere—

Amora: —eyes are always on us.

Sharifa: Oh, it happens to us all of the time—

Asifa: I get stronger and stronger and stronger all the time.

Sharifa: —but we ignore. That’s the best way to respond.

Asifa: Yeah, I just say, ‘Allah guide them, give them *hedaya* [guidance]. Give them the understanding.’

Lulu: And, also, that the Muslim has the *kalima tayibbah* [a good word]—

Asifa: —yeah, and we try not to hurt anybody—

Lulu: —the true Muslim keeps away from fighting and saying any bad things to them, or anyone.

Sharifa: You have to use your nice words. And you have to have your *right* also!

Amora: Oh, yeah, you are not going to surrender that.

Sharifa: You are not just going to give it up that way. Okay, we smile, smilingly. You talk nicely, but at the same time you have to have your *right*.

Amora: For them [people who are acting in Islamophobic ways] to get the message, too.

Sharifa: We have to be nice but strong.

Amora: Right. Definitely.

Sharifa: Nice, but strong. I teach my kids this—

Asifa: —all the time. (H1, ME, 4/26, 252–291).

In this excerpt, each of the four educators who were present in the halaqah contributed some insight on the apparently-common experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamophobia, and how those experiences came to bear on their pedagogies. The flow of conversation moved from what happened, to how each responded—including supplicating for the harassers (“Allah guide them, give them *hedaya*”) and referring to Prophetic example (staying away from saying bad things)—to taking one’s right and being strong, to passing the learning along to the children. Sharifa elaborated: “We don’t want them to be *weak Muslims*. They have to be strong Muslims! To be fair, to be right, to defend themselves, to talk about themselves *clearly*! [...] We teach the kids to stand up for themselves—because of the things happening outside” (H1, ME, 299–303). Here, the

pedagogical links between Islamophobia and cultivating strong, fair Muslims ran through standing up for themselves and public speaking.

The educators at the Muslim Elementary School described various ways of giving children chances to develop confidence in public-speaking skills, including doing presentations and MCing events. Asifa described:

I am trying to work on their public-speaking skills; their speech presentation: ‘I don’t want you just writing a test. [...] As a Muslim, you need to be strong and firm and you can speak up. Look, Sister Asifa can speak in front of all the people—you can do it too! You can!’ That’s why we have them do the speeches. I said, ‘In your own words, in two weeks, you’re going to stand in front of the class. And you’re going to tell them the six rights of a Muslim!’ So, they’re making their posters, they’re bringing their props. [...] I said, ‘The introduction, the narrating I’ll teach you. After that, you’re all by yourself. Collect all the materials, say it with your integrity, in your own words.’ Speech presentations. (H1, ME, 4/26, 418–431)

In this excerpt, Asifa supported the children but also challenged them to do deliver speech presentations in their own ways. The assertion ‘I don’t want you just writing a test’ referred to both *developing practical skills* to be used in society and *creative pedagogies* in processes of developing those skills, like making posters and props in support of their speech presentations.

Along with practicing public speaking—standing up for themselves, speaking clearly, and developing confidence and self-esteem—another motivation behind this pedagogy seemed to be keeping up with what children at Canadian public schools were doing.

#### **6.4.5 Developing Cross-Context Adab**

As part of a larger conceptual paradigm, surviving as Muslims in a secular society was not only about standing up, answering back, and public speaking, it was about enacting a better way, a more polite way, a more beautiful way of being. Educators described working in harmony with the dual-identity situation to develop with the students cross-context adab (social etiquette practices), as a particular type of character development, whereby the social etiquette principles and practices they learned inside the Islamic school were applied outside of school—even in the most hostile

situations. Amora, for example, brought her experiences facing Islamophobia outside of school *into* the school for children to practice when they lined up at the classroom door. First, Amora described a real-life experience of Islamophobia while she was waiting in line at a store, and a woman cut her off:

[The woman said]: “But you are not in the line up!”

I said: “Yes, as you can see, I am in line.”

And she said, “No, but you’re not.”

And she was really very, very rude. And it really hurt me. The whole day, I was out of my mind. And then, the second time, recently, I said, “It’s not worth it, it’s more peaceful, it’s more rewarding for me to keep quiet. I can smile to her and just communicate very gently.” And I remembered the message of our Prophet (ﷺ)—so beautiful. And I felt much better actually. I smile, I do naturally. I just simply communicate and smile—a good smile—and even the way other people [bystanders] were looking makes me feel more peaceful. This is: ‘*You’re an ambassador for Islam.* [Amora speaking to herself] The best example for me is my Prophet. And it’s more rewarding’ (H1, ME, 4/26, 173–193)

Amora described sharing this experience with the students and how she came to embody a peaceful response. Then, Amora described how she transferred this example to lining up school. She said to the students: “Please, gentle with words. Don’t slam the door! Remember, how did our Prophet spread the message? It was his gentleness, kindness!” (196–197). She then shared her experience in the store lineup as a basis for the children to practice in the school lineup, transferring learning from society to school and back again.

Principles of adab, rooted in the primary sources, constituted a foundation for an Islamic character development that educators emphasized must be applied within Muslim contexts and beyond. Sharifa summarized the three, related pedagogies of Standing Up, Answering Back, and Public Speaking as outlining a strong foundation for developing cross-context adab:

No matter what’s happening outside, we are teaching the right way of Islam. I am teaching them Qur’an; I teach them values, the values of the ayat, the surahs that they learn; the background stories. So, when they stand up for themselves, when they talk about themselves as Muslims, they should know what they are talking about. They have to be in a *strong foundation*. And this is why we want them to be strong Muslims. Fair and strong. (H1, ME, 4/26, 304–307)



Building this strong foundation was the primary aim of context-response pedagogies, which worked together for its manifestation.

#### **6.4.6 Contextually-Relevant Role Modeling**

Engaging in contextually-relevant role modeling was a way of developing strong, fair Muslims as part of cross-context adab. While many educators emphasized the primary pedagogy of role modeling in Islamic education—from adab, values, and social etiquette, to mastery of ritual practices—some of them highlighted the importance of context-specific role modeling. Ruby explained: “There are thousands excellent examples in our Prophet’s daily lifetime but, besides that, they [the students] need to see someone who is in *Canada* and who is interacting with non-Muslims, living *their* lives, and applying the teachings of Islam. Happily and successfully, yeah [laughs]” (I1, 4/26, 106–109). To this end, one day, when Ruby was teaching them about the importance of *salah* (prayer), she showed them her pocket prayer mat, which she always carries in her bag. They were surprised to know that: “No matter where I am, I don’t miss *any* prayer—even if I have to pray in public. I am proud of my religion and when I speak about the importance of praying on time, I mean it!” (94–96). So Ruby was a practical example for the students in specifically Canadian context.

Asifa told the students about her own process of coming to wear hijab: “Hey, once upon a time, Sister Asifa was born here, raised here, in Canada. She did not wear it; did not understand it” (H1, ME, 4/26, 222). Asifa continued:

Reality did not hit me. Once I learned, once I studied, once I did my scholar course, once I became a teacher, once reality really hit me, once I really knew who my Allah was, once my *iman* [faith] was strong—I could do this too now!” And they are so, so, so shocked. And they are just, “Wow!” I said, “Nothing hurts me now. I’m fine. I’m strong. I can do it. (223–227)

Here, Asifa described the importance of sharing lived experiences with the children to let them know that the educators themselves were all once where the learners are now.

As the educators emphasized, part of being a strong Muslim is being a fair Muslim. An example is Sharifa's description of teaching children to be fair by being fair to them; modeling fairness: "We are fair to the kids all the time, we show them fairness in the test, in the competition, everyday life [...] In an issue of bullying, we are fair to both parties. This is what we are teaching them in life!" (H1, ME, 296–299). In participating in fairness together, inside the Islamic school, the goal was for the learners to engage in the larger society as fair Muslims.

Huda seemed to understand the power of contextually-relevant role modeling, although she recognized her own limitations because she herself had not grown up in Canada: "Sometimes they [the students] will be a little bit shy in front of me [...] I wasn't raised here; I was raised back home" (I1, 4/14, 89; 57). Instead, she organized for her grown-up children to come into her complimentary-school classroom to talk to the students about their own life experiences. Her rationale was that because they had grown up in Canada, they would be closer in perspective to the children and understand their experiences growing up as Muslims in a predominantly non-Muslim culture: "So I introduced my sons and I left them to stay together alone—to be more open and ask whatever questions they like" (49). They spoke about experiences in public school, their identities as Muslims; "how they can deal with the teachers, if they have a project, which may be a little bit against our values as Muslims" (I1, 4/14, 39–40). Essentially, what Huda did was provide for her students culturally and contextually-relevant role models to make meaning together.

An aspect of contextually-relevant role modeling may be to reconsider the utopic conception of Muhammad's early context. Many educators described him living in a context that was generally hostile to Islam, just like today, as Hana described: "Prophet (ﷺ), where did he live? He

was living with Christians, with Jews, with people who don't believe in anything" (H1, Subha, 4/19, 207). She highlighted a main message that can be learned from Muhammad back then: we need to work with the people in building the local context: "He gets in with them and they *love* him! Because he's *amin* (trustworthy); they trust him! [...] Someday, they are going to look at us, at this community [and say], 'They are not helping!' And, actually, 90% I am with them: Muslims are not integrating with them. They are not helping" (H1, Subha, 4/19, 207–211). In this way, educators used the example of Muhammad himself as a contextually-relevant a role model for Muslims living in Canada today.

## **6.5 Chapter 6 Summary**

While literature on Muslim students in secular public schools described an Islamic iteration of *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995), whereby Muslim children should not have to lose aspects of their Islamic identities by participating in public education (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Ipgrave, 2010), in this study, educators teaching in Canadian Islamic schools described the importance of a particular *Canadian cultural relevance*, whereby Muslim children should not have to lose aspects of their Canadian identities by participation in Islamic education. This Canadian cultural relevance was characterized by both cultural and temporal dimensions and offered both affordances and challenges to pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam. Making Islam relevant in the places people live is not a new consideration; it has been a primary consideration across history. Bilal described some of the most contentious of issues today, in a Canadian context, as "rehashes of old debates" (I1, 4/23, 137), thus providing more evidence that the heterogeneous cultural conditions Muslim educators and learners find themselves in today are not diametrically different from the earliest Muslim communities. Bilal described:

When the Muslim world first began expanding outside of the Arabian Peninsula, outside of the Hijaz, the Muslims were *immediately* confronted with the problem of *new* Muslims who

were from old traditions, who said, ‘Look, we accept this religion. We just have these issues—these are things we have been debating for a long time. Tell us how you reconcile this...’ And, so, the ulema did! (174–178)

Thus, part of Bilal’s work—here, today—was to take the disciplines that these scholars devised 1500 years ago in addressing these contentious questions<sup>172</sup> and synthesize them in ways “digestible for a 12-year-old” (183). As Muslims in all times and places have grappled with synthesis for cultural relevance, this arose as a primary task for Muslim educators, here and now.

In inquiring into what pedagogies are educators currently using to teach Islam, educators described a wide spectrum of practices—some of which some found effective and others did not. They shared different experiences with similar pedagogies; similar experiences with different pedagogies. They concurred; they disagreed; they illustrated wide variation in pedagogical practice and efficacy. A major subtheme was Context-Response Pedagogies, as ways of helping Muslim Canadian children and youth thrive in a Canadian context. Later, when Muslim principles and practices are not so marginalized, these may be called context-*interaction* pedagogies. But right now, they are too oriented towards responding and protecting children against challenges leveled at Muslim communities by dominant ones to be truly interactional.

This theme of Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies is not only about relevance to Canadian culture; it is about relevance to *contemporary* culture as an evolving phenomenon which Muslim educators must support young Muslims in both critiquing and contribute to building. Importantly, both the cultural context itself, and the Muslim community situated within, require critique and construction as foundational for growth. Faris described:

It is about forging a fresh Islamic culture and a fresh Islamic tradition that will, of course, borrow from the past and from other times and places, but will at the same time *critique* them. And that is how growth happens. Unless we are willing to critique our own culture, traditions, and history, we cannot grow. And in that sense, I am also willing to

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<sup>172</sup> Ilm usul al din or ilm al kalam (Bilal, II, 4/23, 180).

borrow from and acknowledge the contributions that others can make to our growth moving forward. I am totally open to hybridizing what we have learned from our own traditions and borrowing from what we learn here. (H1, 4/15, 197–201)

In Faris' description, growth comes from self-acknowledgment, self-critique, and cultural hybridization. As such, these pedagogies may support young Muslims in crafting their own repertoires of Islam, premised on degrees of personal independence in light of divine accountability, which disables conceptions of Islamic education as indoctrination, as Halstead (2004) described as problematic in its denial of personal independence and control over one's own life. This data thus supports the literature contending that *criticality* is not only an integral aspect of an Islamic conceptual system, it is integral to true faith (Ahmed, 2016; Ramadan, 2004, 2007; Waghid, 2014; Sahin, 2013, 2017; Zine, 2007, 2008).

An overarching message of the theme of Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies is that pedagogies need to be relevant to the particular cultural moment. Such relevance brings to life Kazmi's (2003, p. 278) point that tradition needs to be maintained by people's active participation, and people will only participate if they find the tradition meaningful. Muslim educators must strive to make relevant pedagogies in teaching Islam, for here and now, by listening to young Muslims' identifications of which pedagogies are culturally meaningful for them.

## Chapter 7: Theme 3: Transcendent Pedagogies

*“It’s our secret”—Amira*

One of the driving concepts underlying the research questions of this study—and echoing urgent questions in the literature on Islamic Education including Memon’s (2011), “What is an *Islamic pedagogy*?”—was the idea that there *may* be pedagogies unique to teaching and learning Islam that are not, as of yet, categorized within the Islamic Education literature. If these pedagogies existed then, arguably, they would be oriented to responding to specific and primary educational needs constituting an Islamic education, starting with helping young Muslims “see Allah in everything around them; from within and outside” (Fatima, H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 72–74). These Islamic pedagogies might even be pedagogical responses to evocations of transcendence, from beyond the reach of corporeal sense perceptions. Amira described: “In Islamic education, we have a layer—an *unseen* layer; an unseen hand that is pulled in our way of teaching—and we cannot deny it” (I1, 4/20, 416).<sup>173</sup> As a way of engaging with the unseen, or spiritual, dimensions of education, Amira shared a Qur’anic supplication with which many of the educators began their lessons, *Oh my Sustainer! Open up my heart to Your light*.<sup>174</sup> “This is one of the bridges to ask Allah, ‘Open all the hearts of these listeners... Because I am going to start something *huge*’ [laughing]. They don’t do that in the secular. *It’s our secret!*” (418–426). Amira’s secret is an example of esoteric, subtle pedagogies, situated so far beyond a secular Western epistemic frame to be barely visible, which

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<sup>173</sup> While Amira’s assertion of an undeniable spiritual dimension to education may be a minority perspective in contemporary Canada, it is reflected in the Islamic Education literature: “All scholars, teachers, and educational authorities, however secularist some may be, acknowledge that religious consciousness is an undeniable fact, and that to ignore it is to ignore a dominant aspect of human personality” (Ashraf, 1986, as cited in Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 112).

<sup>174</sup> *Rabbi ishrah lī ṣadrī* (O my Sustainer! Open up my heart [to Your light]). *Wa-yassir lī amrī* (and make my task easy for me). *Wa-ḥlul ‘uqdatan min lisānī* (and loosen the knot from my tongue). *Yafqahū qawlī* (so that they might fully understand my speech)—Qur’an, 20:25-28.

coalesce in this third theme. Transcendent Pedagogies highlight pedagogical functioning at the esoteric core of an Islamic paradigm, whereby educators and learners—independently, as pedagogical dyads, and collectively—interface with that which is beyond the reach of corporeal sense perception (the *ghayb*), centered around the concept of the Divine/God/Allah.

I noticed distinct aspects of these Transcendent Pedagogies in the coding stage. They struck me, at first, as pedagogical approaches, characteristics, or features that *might* be unique to Islam. In combining Islamic content, objectives, conceptions of learners, general pedagogical knowledge, and considerations of context into a pedagogic whole, they may constitute a type of Islamic pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987, p. 7). But I soon realized that this was an incomplete consideration because their distinguishing feature is in their unique functional aim: to awaken God-consciousness within young learners. As Amira described: “In our faith, we have a lot of things that are unseen, like *baraka*, like blessings from Allah, but they [the learners] don’t feel it. One of our missions here, as teachers, to get *this* to them” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 55–57). Transcendent Pedagogies are a way towards making visible, tangible, experiential the unseen. These are not pedagogies that educators would learn in a formal, Western, teacher-education program. In this study, the educators who had had formal teacher-education seemed particularly able to take effective general pedagogies and creatively apply them to an Islamic setting (as described in 6.3: Sound Pedagogies) but it was the educators who *did not* have formal secular teacher-education who provided most of the insights into these Transcendent Pedagogies specific to Islam. Abid, for example. He conducted his interview in Islamic parlance with few, if any, references to ‘good pedagogy’ in a secular Western sense. Yet, he almost singly enabled construction of the theme of Dimensional Pedagogies because—although other educators described unique human dimensions, objectives, and Transcendent Pedagogies—Abid made

visible links between them. For example, a child's fitra (primordial pure nature) required particular pedagogical approaches in moving towards educational objectives, including taqwa (God-consciousness). Fitra is not on the syllabi of most Western formal teacher-education programs; nor is taqwa, mizaj (spirit), or ghayb (realm beyond the reach of perception). Yet all are centrally situated in Islamic pedagogical engagement. Paying particular attention to such topics, across the research encounters, and tracing them to their pedagogical root, formed the basis of this theme: Transcendent Pedagogies are directly tied into the least-visible but perhaps most crucial aspects of an Islamic paradigm.

### **7.1 Approaching the Limits of Corporeal Perception**

Thus far, insufficient examination has been given to who or what is Allah and the realm beyond corporeal sense perception. Yet, a major objective, appearing and reappearing in the themes and subthemes, was striving to develop in children a sense of God-consciousness, a sense of Allah. Some, like Fatima, employed a direct and reasoned approach:

I keep teaching them: 'If you look behind *anything* around you—it's Allah. It's related to Allah. Nothing is *not* related to Allah. Starting from your brain, your thoughts, ideas, and inventions. Even the rockets that go to the moon in space. Who invented these things? The brain of the human being. Who made the brain? Who created that great, amazing machine? It's a great machine. Who created that?'" (I1, 4/19, 543–545)

Here, in a pedagogical expression of tawhid, Fatima aimed to cognitively stimulate a sense of theistic awareness. Many educators used reflections on nature. Ama described using a method that she herself used as a child, inquiring into Allah's existence by considering nature: "'Who created all of that, if not Allah?' Helping children ponder nature will connect them more closely to Allah" (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 490–491). Jina actively encouraged her students to build their faith through practicing. She started by asking them: "How do you know that Allah exists?" And then: "I ask them to practice: 'On your way to home today, when you are with your parents in the car,



just look outside—look at the trees, look at the sunshine, look at everything that Allah created, and then you can *feel* Allah” (I1, 4/13, 152–156). Thus, Jina revealed a transcendent pedagogy as a form of intuitive, reflective practice. Cultivating *love* of God—a key motivator in living Islam as a life system—was initiated by *knowledge* of God (Ruby; Hamza). Given common negative trajectories of associating fear and punishment with God, Rasha asserted the importance of a positive perspective: “Allah (ﷻ) is trying to find for us ways to actually *save* us, not punish us. And if they [the students] know this, they are not going to go the other way” (I1, 4/23, 125–126). In other words, far from presenting Allah as a fearful or negative force, in presenting Allah as a helpful force for our betterment, children may be more likely to accept that force as their own. In assisting children construct perspectives of Allah, it became clear that a *how* an educator presents Allah to the students is a method in itself.

In assembling a sense of who or what is Allah from the myriad references in the research encounters, we must first get a sense of the *ghayb*, which is translated as “that which is beyond the reach of human perception” (Asad, 1980, p. 25), and cannot be conveyed to human beings “in other than allegorical terms” (p. 111).<sup>175</sup> Situated in a secular Western society, premised on discernable evidence, the *ghayb* posed a major conceptual and existential problem with which the educators seemed to be constantly grappling in engaging children in understanding Islam. Fatima recounted the difficulty exploring the *ghayb* with Canadian Muslim children:

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<sup>175</sup>Asad (1980) further described: “Al-ghayb (commonly, and erroneously, translated as ‘the Unseen’) is used in the Qur’an to denote all those sectors or phases of reality which lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proved or disproved by scientific observation or even adequately comprised within the accepted categories of speculative thought: as, for instance, the existence of God and of a definite purpose underlying the universe, life after death, the real nature of time, the existence of spiritual forces and their interaction, and so forth. Only a person who is convinced that the ultimate reality comprises far more than our observable environment can attain to belief in God and, thus, to a belief that life has meaning and purpose. By pointing out that it is ‘a guidance for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond human perception,’ the Qur’an says, in effect, that it will—of necessity—remain a closed book to all whose minds cannot accept this fundamental premise” (p. 25).

Back home, we had this [concept of] *ghayb*, *ghaybiat*: there are things that the human brain cannot go beyond: What's going on after death? Or what's going on after the soul travels to the Creator, to Allah? Lots of things that we don't know, and our mind is not created in a way that we can go beyond this. And we know that this is *ghayb*. But when you tell your children, 'ghayb,' for them it doesn't make sense because they have been raised in a country where science and reason are the base of everything. (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 238–244)

Here, Fatima described that the *ghayb* was part of taken-for-granted reality, growing up Egypt.

Yet, in Canadian normative discourse, there is no accepted reality beyond the corporeal senses.

Regardless, Fatima asserted the importance of raising Canadian Muslim children's awareness of the *ghayb*, in part, by telling them:

When you are dealing with Allah, the Source of the Source, you have to believe in the *ghayb* because the power of Him—subhan Allah—is beyond our thinking. Even is science is limited in the human brain; whatever we have reached from that scientific world, it's still very tiny! [...] Our human brain is tiny compared to Allah's greatness! (244–250)

For Fatima, finding ways to bring children to an awareness of the *ghayb* was a worthy struggle, as it was for Amira, who articulated a central challenge: “How we can formulate the *ghayb* and put it in a visible way” (I1, 4/20, 430). Educators had ideas on how to approach the *ghayb* with Muslim Canadian children in striving to make it ‘visible.’ Halima described: “There is a lot of *ghayb* in our *deen*. However, the children need to have the *right* understanding of the *ghayb*” (I1, 8/8, 204–205), towards which she suggested constructing “living experiences” that make visible the invisible. Halima drew from a historical example to illustrate a living, learning experience:

Somebody gave the children [learners] each a little chicken and said, ‘Kill the chicken in a place where no one can see you.’ And all of them came back with a killed chicken, except one child. ‘Why you didn't do it?’ And the child said, ‘There is nowhere Allah does not see me.’ So, these kinds of living experiences are where we need to invest more within our curriculum. (173–180)

In this description, the tangible chicken was the key to intangibility and, presumably, all the children learned from the one child who could not kill her chicken because there was no place beyond of divine vision.

Huda described her method of helping children make sense of the *ghayb* using the analogy of air: “We are not seeing Allah directly, but we can see everything around us saying that there’s only one God. So, I try to connect them by the small things. We can’t see the *air*, for example, but we would die without it” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 157–159). Fatima elaborated: “You cannot see air, but it still exists; you cannot see your soul that makes you alive—you cannot see it, but you are alive! So, yes, there are things in our religion, we cannot *see* it, we cannot *feel* it, we cannot *touch* it—but it still exists” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 93–95). Abid pointed out discernable evidences of the *ghayb* in nature, science, and human cognitive and technological advances, whereby knowledge contained in the Qur’an has been corroborated by contemporary scientists: “there is scientific evidence that everything [in space] is floating right now<sup>176</sup>” (437–8) and Qur’anic descriptions of embryology and how the fetus forms. Abid summarized that these are things “that could only have been understood or said by somebody who *saw* all these things” (438–9), in other words, from a lofty, *Divine* perspective. “So, all these things together make the kid believe in the unseen” (442–444).

Amira described the *ghayb*, with Allah at its center, in terms of a different struggle: Muslim educators’ perspectives in light of secular ones. She identified resistance that Muslim educators receive from their non-Muslim colleagues regarding unseen spiritual dimensions: “I don’t see anything! What you are talking about? This is philosophy!” (I1, 4/20, 417–418). Yet, Amira asserted that despite this collegial negation, the *ghayb* is crucial:

For us, it is the key to enter into any of the subjects whatsoever: Islamic Studies, Qur’an, and Arabic as well! It’s a kind of knocking on the door of knowledge, in a way. [pause] They don’t say to the kids, ‘We are going to study math *for the sake of Allah* [whispering]—they don’t do it in secular settings. But we do it as *jama* [in congregation]. (418–423)

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<sup>176</sup> “neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day, since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws]” (Qur’an, 36:40).

Here, Amira described evoking the realm beyond the senses as the very doorway into knowledge itself—which echoed the literature describing knowledge as divinely sourced;<sup>177</sup> together, educators and students knock on that door, at the beginning of a class, and set a *collective* intention to seek knowledge for the sake of Allah, evoking Allah’s help through dua. Thus, despite resistance Muslim educators will get from people in the rest of society who do not understand the *ghayb*, Amira asserted that they cannot leave it aside and say, “No, this is not a tangible thing; keep it aside because they are not going to understand it” (430). The *ghayb* is too central to an Islamic conceptual system and, thus, to Islamic education, to leave it aside.

### **7.1.1 Measuring the Unmeasurable**

If primary objectives of Islamic education lie beyond the reach of corporeal perception, then absolute measurement of whether or not children are attaining them must also be out of reach. Contributing an angle on this challenge, Yassine described knowledge as “a light that is instilled in the heart, by means of which a person may understand issues on the basis of truth and be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood” (artifact, 8/2 13-14), thus echoing Nasr (2012, p. 15), and raising an implication that an educator may be able to ascertain approximate levels of light in a learner’s heart by his or her *distinctions*; clearly an imprecise measurement. Yassine also described Islamic approaches to the basics of knowledge assessment, often demonstrated through speech and speech quantity in formal Western education, as being different in traditional Islamic education: “Even our most towering scholars did not speak much”; instead, they expressed the light in their hearts in concise, purposeful words. In measuring, or assessing, Islamic ways of knowing, Rasha described how the teachers at the Hikmah Elementary School measured children’s

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<sup>177</sup> “Traditional Islamic thought sees reason as being the ray of the sun of the Intellect shining upon the mind, and the ray and the sun are never cut off from each other” (Nasr, 2012, p. 15).

knowledge by looking at “how *genuine* that child is” (I1, 4/23, 40), but she emphasized that a person’s relationship with Allah is beyond measurement: “It’s never measured. No one on earth [...] will never know the relation between you and Allah (ﷻ). [...] It is not quantitative, and you cannot measure it” (55–56). She concluded that the immeasurability of objectives makes Islamic education unique: “It’s the only subject that the report card comes after our death” (57).

Amira described a pedagogical measurement method as being a teacher “measuring the *nour* [spiritual light] of the class” (A1, 4/20, 198), by shaking each student’s hand at the beginning of the class—“because our iman [faith] is up and down, up and down” (195). Based upon the measurement of *nour*, the teacher proceeds to fine-tune the lesson plan of the day. Amira elaborated:

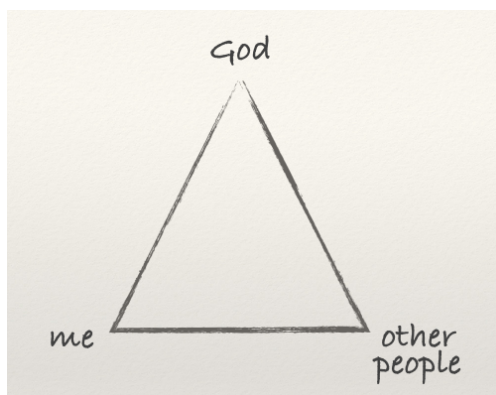
The way the girl shakes my hand, I know so far what is the dynamic in class. What is the topic and how far she may go in it. You know, a lesson plan for Islam can not to be like a mathematical lesson plan or a science lesson plan. [...] We have to change the range. Because the *spirit* here, it is one of our aims of the lesson plan. (174–184)

Echoing a point articulated by Al-Sadan (1997): “There is no doubt that religion is unlike other subjects such as mathematics or physics, as religion deals with the soul as well as the body” (p. 111), Amira’s excerpt suggests an extraordinary expression of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) whereby the parameters of teaching and learning at this farthest reach of human perception involve an educator’s discernment of levels of light, faith, and spirit in determining content and executing a lesson aimed at expanding a child’s consciousness.

Clearly, measuring a learner’s understanding of the *ghayb* is as difficult as conceiving of it in the first place. While educators had differing perspectives on measurement—and scholars too educators have diametrical perspectives on the appropriateness of instrumentally measuring exalted dimensions—discerning methods of assessing the *efficacy* of Islamic pedagogies is an area requiring further research (see section 8.3.1 Islamic Educational Research).

### 7.1.2 The Triangle of Islamic Education

This theme of Transcendent Pedagogies can be symbolized in a triangle (Figure 7.3), as a way to make pedagogical sense of this realm beyond the reach of corporeal perception and a young Muslim's connection to Allah as primary objective of Islamic education. The concept of the triangle initially came up during an interview with Amira in 2014,<sup>178</sup> as she described relating every action to God (see Figure 7.1. Initial Triangle). She recounted that when something nice happened in class—like someone dropped off a box of doughnuts for the children—she would remind her students that God works through people. She asked the students: “What did you do that day?” [laughing], implying that the box of doughnuts was God's response to someone's supplication or good deed, and one answered, “Oh, I think I did dua while I was in the washroom!” Amira described encouraging such an answer and emphasized that the children must relate everything to God, even the actions of other people. “I call it the Triangle. Triangle! And it's true!” She delineated the points: “God is there, on the top, and me I am down. The other corner is the other people who God asks them to help me” (I1, 12/14, 959–970).



**Figure 7.1 Initial Triangle**

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Amira on December 16, 2014, as part of a Master's research project. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (certificate number: H14-01892).

When Amira first conceived of the triangle, she identified it in 2-D form, with the base as comprised of oneself and other people. God was at the apex. Amira described triangulated action: actions may *appear* to happen by other people, but actually, actions originate from God.

In this current study, the concept of the triangle came up again with Nour's artifact. She described educators working with children on reflection within an Islamic framework: "Sometimes they do reflection on themselves—if they lie or do something bad. *From Islamic teachings*, they can reflect on themselves to understand themselves more. And make it real in their lives" (H2, Subha, 4/20, 87–92; italics added). Rather than reflection in the regular sense, here, Nour described reflection as *triangulated* by Islamic teachings. Once Nour brought this to my attention, I started to notice in the speech of most of the educators that reflection within an Islamic conceptual paradigm is almost always triangulated against a divine perspective.<sup>179</sup> Yassine described the progression of faith based upon an inner logic: "Once you have faith, you have aqidah, you have taqwa. Once you have taqwa, you think, you consider every aspect of your society according to Islam" (H1, 4/14, 81–83). This *considering according to Islam* is triangulated reflection. Rawan described the progression in terms of islam, iman, and ihsan—submission, faith, and excellence: "Ihsan is some level of our religion [...]: when you worship Allah *as if* you can see Him. You cannot see Him, but you know that He can see you" (H1, 4/23, 228). Rawan explained ihsan as a triangulated perspective: "When they [the learners] have this perspective in their heart and their brain, subhan Allah, this might help them to go through their life, to stay away from sins, from bad things. So, they have self-discipline, self-control, self-conscious awareness" (H1, 4/23, 228–234). Amal added, 'This is for all of us! I am reminding myself before you—it's not only for kids!' (235). Here, Rawan indicated the desirability of cultivating this triangulated perspective, related

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<sup>179</sup> Triangulated Reflection is considered an unmediated Transcendent Pedagogy and is discussed in 7.3.1.

to self-discipline and conscious awareness steering a person through life, and Amal added the concept of reciprocal development (discussed in section 5.3.5), whereby educators too aimed toward such cultivation.

These descriptions of triangulated reflection highlighted Amira's top point—Allah—but what about the base? Nour's artifact had a unity of students, parents, and teachers at its base, explaining, "Without the three together, learning Islam, it won't work" (H2, Subha, 4/20, 9; 11). Amira was present in that artifact-mediated halaqah and immediately commented on this point: "Yes, beautiful! So, the students, teachers, and parents together, this is the *triangle of education*" (259–230). Nour replied, "Triangle. Yes. It's a collaboration" (H2, Subha, 4/20, 261). Thus, rather than conceiving of Islamic education as a 'learner-centered approach' or a 'teacher-centered approach,' these educators identified it as a *collaborative-centered approach* comprised of student, teacher, and parents together.

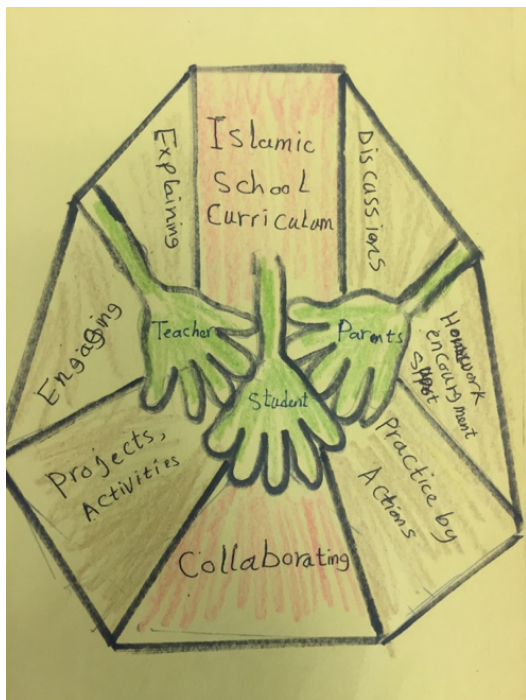


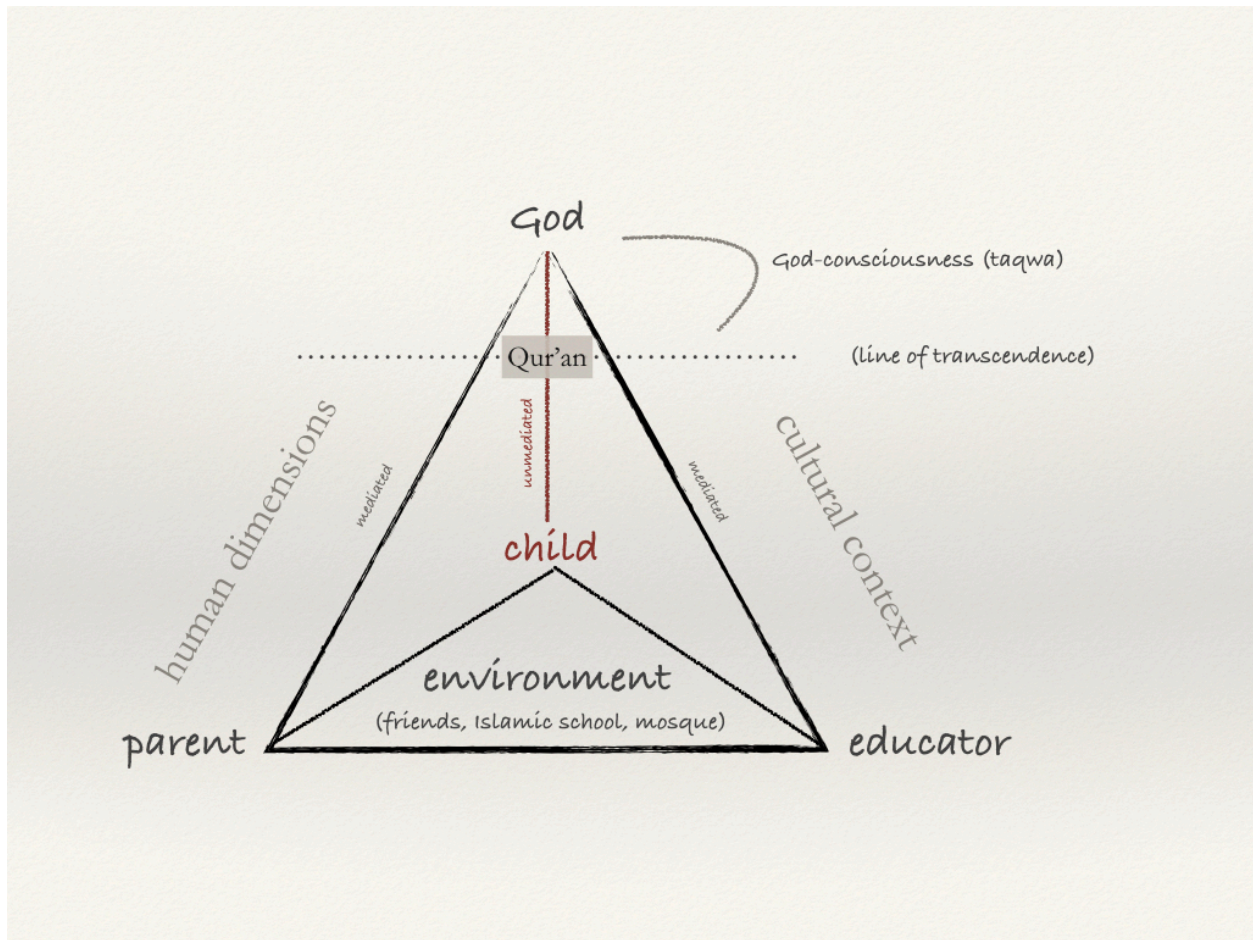
Figure 7.2 Nour's Artifact



I decided to consider more closely Amira's initial triangle. As it was originally *orally* conceived, I drew the triangle. Then, I used it to jot notes upon when I started analysis and, as analysis continued, I elaborated the triangle (see Figure 7.3. Elaborated Triangle of Islamic Education). I changed the base from a 2-D to a 3-D form, to reflect Nour's artifact and include oneself (the child) and 'other people' as educator(s) and parent(s). This mirrored educators' descriptions of a base community environment that included friends, mosques, and Islamic schools. Amira's original conception was that God works through other people. Analysis of the research encounters clarified that conception goes the other way too: we work with other people towards God, in advancing trajectories of closeness. This may amount to whether one views the triangle from the top down, or the bottom up. With Allah at the apex—considered as the supreme object and ultimate state of consciousness—the vertex angle can be considered in terms of degrees of proximity and/or degrees of consciousness. Transcendent Pedagogies work at the vertex angle. Relationships of an individual child with 'other people' can play significant roles in that child's relationship with Allah and their awareness of the *ghayb*, which has implications for educators. The *ghayb* is demarcated in the figure by the line of transcendence.

Next, Faris expanded on the triangle when he described two paths that a person takes in forging an awareness of and connection with God: mediated and unmediated. He described talking to the learners about the "Qur'an itself as a mediator. I have talked about the Prophet of Islam as a mediator. And I've also talked about desirability of eventually having at least some degree of *unmediated* relationship with the Divine" (H1, 4/15, 379–381). Thus, in moving towards the apex of the triangle, there are at least two different pedagogical paths that educators can traverse with learners: mediated and unmediated. The next section examines mediated pedagogies; the one after that, unmediated pedagogies. The final two sections detail pedagogical catalysts and future

projections of pedagogies. Based upon this Triangle of Islamic Education, the third theme of this study—Transcendent Pedagogies, as interrelated with the previous two: Dimensional Pedagogies and Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies—may represent a reclamation of ways of knowing valuable in this Muslim community.



**Figure 7.3 Elaborated Triangle of Islamic Education**

## 7.2 Mediated Pedagogies

As one of two routes to God-consciousness (taqwa), these pedagogies activate a mediated line from an individual young person to God, which runs through other people and also the Qur'an, the Prophet, the acts of worship, rituals, practices, and even the Arabic language of the Qur'an. All are mediators in an individual child's trajectory. The educators described that a large part

mediating with children and youth was constructing a lens through which they made sense of anything that happened in a given day: to embed Islamic principles into ways of thinking, acting, and reacting. This deliberate perspective-building involved reasoning Islamically together and comprised much of the pedagogical activity happening at the triangle's base, where the individual learner is embedded within a social environment, shaped by cultural and temporal contextual factors, including other people. Fatima outlined that base by referring to parents as the “*master* influence. But teachers are number two. Environment is number three” (I1, 4/19, 173). Ideally, and reiterating Nour's artifact, the three work together to foster a child's education and development. Abid described an ideal triangular base: “Imagine if the family starts to implement [Islamic education] with their kids at a young age, so that when they bring the children to [Islamic] school, the teacher takes the flame from there and builds on it. We would be in a better place [as a community]. Unfortunately, it's rare” (I1, 4/18, 515–518). Parents and educators working together would be optimal, but, Abid pointed out, parents rarely participate in this process and instead delegate the Islamic education their children to an Islamic school. Yassine extended upon Abid's point by providing a negative example: “If we teach them something here and the parents do something *contrary* at home, then it becomes clash of ideas” (H1, Ameen, 4/14, 316–318). These descriptions reflected a damaged triangular base. Abid recommended that parents should support whatever the children are learning in the Islamic schools, thus contributing to that base: “then it will build their character in a more beautiful way” (319).

Other people can play positive roles, as tools of Divine blessings, as Amira described, or they can be sources of trials and tests, keeping in mind that both blessings and tests can help or hinder one's deepening awareness and relationship with God. Layla asserted that beyond the ritual practices, relationships with people are crucially important along this mediated line to God:

Not to lie, not to cheat, not to be hypocritical. We don't emphasize on those things because we don't *see* them. We only see things like prayers, hijab for the girls, and—honestly—I really think those are things are between you and Allah (ﷻ) and still Allah (ﷻ) can forgive you. But for things that are between you and *people*, Allah (ﷻ) will only forgive you if those people forgive you. (H1, Subha, 4/19, 149–154)

Here, Layla described perfecting relations with people by enacting principles in the Qur'an as being *as important as* ritual acts of worship, like prayer. Abid described the importance of keeping good relations with God first, before people:

If you try to please people by displeasing Allah (ﷻ), Allah will not be pleased with you. And, at the end of the day, even those who you were trying to please will not be pleased with you! And vice versa: if you please Allah—even though it means displeasing some people—Allah will be pleased with you and even those who are displeased with you, one day, they will be pleased with you.<sup>180</sup> (I1, 4/18, 464–468)

While pleasing God comes first, later, people also may be pleased. But even pleasing people must be done with the intention of pleasing God. Bilal described a similar concept in a slightly different way, emphasizing the importance of living true to Islamic principles first:

If you act like everyone else—if you just follow the herd—some people will like you, and some people will hate you, because that's just the way things are. You're never going to be someone that *everyone* likes. [...] If you are true to yourself, and you are living an exemplary Islamic life, some people will like you, and some people will hate you—but everyone will *respect* you. [...] People, at the end of the day, will be like, "I don't like that guy's smug look on his face. I don't like the things that he does. And I don't like what he represents. But he's true to his word. He *is* everything that he says he is. I can't take that away from that person. (I1, 4/23, 606–617)

In sharing with children perspectives that underscored the importance of living authentically, Bilal both recognized social challenges that children would face and offered solutions. The pivotal role of *people* in one's trajectory to God is evidenced in these three data excerpts. Teaching these concepts to learners as part of constructing a particularly Islamic cognitive frame may translate to

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<sup>180</sup> Abid referenced a hadith behind this concept: Jami al-Tirmidhi, Chapters on Zuhd, Book 36, Hadith 112.

distinct approaches to social relationships in schools and society. Three particularly potent mediators that require further examination are friends, the environment itself, and the Qur'an.

### 7.2.1 Friends

As part of an Islamic environment, friends play an integral role; many educators highlighted the importance of friend group in Islamic development—with both positive and negative dimensions: “Our children *need* community around them. They need pals and buddies and friends to keep that [Islamic] connection” (Fatima, H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 252–254). Yassine, too, highlighted: “Help them get to know friends of their own age and background who are practicing Muslims” (artifact, 8/2, 31–32). Pedagogy around friendships seemed to have two parts: first, for educators to help children recognize what constitutes a *good-quality friendship*; and second, to support them in fostering such friendships in a given school. For the first part, Hamza described: “We teach students the meaning of friendship in Islam; we introduce the concept of loving for the sake of Allah, which means choosing friends that bring you closer to Allah and make you a better Muslim and a better human being” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 188–191). Here, Hamza emphasized intentionality behind friendship: to help a person refine themselves and come closer to Allah. As part of being a good friend, Hamza advised his students to “love, help, and support your friends without looking for any direct return from them” (187). In addition, friends contribute to helping us understand who we are—as individuals and as a community. Hamza recounted some of his students asking him about the permissibility of tattoos or particular hair styles. Hamza responded:

I give them the freedom to analyze and to think about it, and then I ask the following question, ‘*Why* are you doing this? Are you doing it just to be affiliated or *similar* to this group of people? Are these the people that you want to be similar to? Is this your character? Is this what you want to be when you grow up? Is this the way of life that you want to adopt? Or not?’ And then let them decide if this is right or wrong to do. So, it’s not like, “*Halal* and *haram*! [permitted and forbidden]’ It’s part of answering the question: ‘Who are we?’” (H2, 4/20, 293–303).

As a mediated pedagogy, the questions that Hamza described encouraging his students to think about seemed aimed at helping them clarify their own visions of their identities and their futures. This excerpt highlighted one role of the Muslim educator as a mediator in helping young Muslims see further.

In terms of helping children forge good friendships, Yassine and Hamza both put forth the mosque and the complimentary Islamic school as places for children to establish friendships with other Muslims. Bilal highlighted the full-time Islamic school: “The single greatest benefit of a Muslim school is building the foundations of a Muslim community. If *nothing* else—if they don’t remember any of the things I talked to them about—they recognize that they are already part of the community” (I1, 4/23, 441–444). He described that the children would then grow up having Muslim friends, neighbors, business partners: “*That* is what is invaluable. To build *friendships* with other Muslims” (448–449).

Friends can also play a challenging role in a child’s Islamic development. As one of the only educators in this study who had grown up in this particular city, and had friendships with non-Muslim youth, Bilal’s advice for his students was to set the terms of their friendships. He described this within the context of his own teenage years, when his friends moved further and further into trouble with the law, and eventually started shooting at each other, “and then when a handful of them died, I took a big step back and said, ‘You know where to find me. If you have questions, my doors are always open’” (580–584). Now, 15 years later, some remaining friends still text him—for work advice, for spiritual advice, for advice raising their children. But he emphasized the importance of setting terms and limits:

Now, when my friends are drinking, I don’t go. They know that! So, they’ll *only* invite me if they know that my terms are met. So, if they’re all meeting up to play soccer, play basketball, go swimming, go to the gym, go for a hike, they call me—I still get those phone

calls. And when they know that I'm *not* going to be okay with it, I don't get a call. And I'm okay with that. I'm setting the terms for my friendships. (591–597)

Mediating this line of reasoning with Muslim youth might be particularly helpful in negotiating peer pressure and maintaining Islamic practices while still participating in a larger cultural context, including public schools.

### **7.2.2 Environment as Educator**

Expanding outward from other people and friends, many of the educators asserted that the social environment is itself a profound source of Islamic education. “Learning from their surroundings, it's very important. Seeing people around you doing the same thing, like memorizing Qur'an [...]. And then they *feel* the value also” (Hamza, H2, Subha, 4/20, 365–369). In other words, being around other people learning Islamic material adds social value to the material itself. Fatima described educators as responsible for the learning environment: “You have to set the environment for them. If the environment is *good* and comfortable for the children, they will learn good. But if the environment is not that good, they may not get anything” (I1, 4/19, 180–181). As a source of learning, the environment has effects on our fitra, as Abid described: “You have this pure being that is born, you keep him in this pure environment, and there we teach him all these things” (I1, 3/18, 35–36). In other words, because our fitra is pure, our environment optimally should also be pure.

If the overarching environment is an educator, an Islamic school is a micro-environment for teaching and learning Islam. Ruby described two main theories amongst parents in the Muslim community in this city regarding whether to put children in a Canadian public school (with a complimentary Islamic school on the weekend) or a full-time Islamic school:

The first theory is to put the children in a public school, so they will meet all kinds of people and interact with the community and strengthen their Islamic identity through dealing with different people and different situations. I think this is good, but it won't work with younger

ages. And the second theory is to put the children in an Islamic environment, where they will learn the pure religion without confusion. (I1, 4/26, 157–161)

In sharing an educational topic of deliberation within the community that highlighted some pros and cons of each type of schooling, Ruby reflected a contemporary, Canadian iteration of challenges that originated in colonial education. While Ruby favored full-time Islamic schools for young children, characterized by “pure religion” (see section 5.1.1.1 Religification), Nour favored complimentary schools because of that engagement with “the environment outside,” meaning the non-Muslim community. Both suggested that young Muslims need to develop their Islamic identities. Nour suggested that complimentary schools provide the opportunity to do both. “And that’s why weekend schools are so important, in my thoughts, more important than the others [full-time Islamic schools], here in Canada. Even if they [the complimentary schools] don’t know too much, but it’s still enough for me” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 31–39). In other words, even if complimentary schools offer only a couple of hours of instruction per week, that is enough for establishing a child’s Islamic identity.

Asifa recalled the days of her own childhood, in another large Canadian city, when there were no full-time Islamic schools: “No Muslim school, where eight hours you’re in an Islamic environment: you pray salat, in the morning you create a climate and culture and welcome the kids by, ‘Salaam aleikum’” (H1, ME, 4/26, 233–239). She told her students, “We didn’t have Muslim schools in our time. You guys are *very* lucky” (H1, ME, 4/26, 230–231).

Along with the environment in the home and the Islamic school, educators emphasized the importance of the mosque as a method of teaching and learning Islam. Part of its pedagogical efficacy is the human-to-human connection. Yassine described the mosque as a cornerstone in Muhammad’s practical way of achieve social goodness, which starts with building relationships between people: “The best thing is the masjid itself. The masjid is a source of building



relationships. When you come to the mosque, you see people around, you say ‘Salaam’ to them, then you talk, and you become friends” (H1, 4/14, 330–333). For families new to Canada, Yassine described the mosque as a social epicenter. Hana asserted the importance of the mosque as an educative experience but lamented some restrictions to access, including people saying, when children are around, “Keep them quiet!” And Layla added, “We are here in this country; we want them [the children] to love our mosque!” (H1, Subha, 4/19 505–509). These educators suggested that the social, religious, and educative value of the mosque is especially important for minoritized communities in Canada.

Amira pointed out that one of the benefits of holding a weekend Islamic school in a mosque is “jama prayer”—participating in ritual, congregational prayer—which also constitutes a practical way to work with the children on refining their acts of worship, shaping them live, in context. She described reminding the children, before they set off to pray in the mosque: “‘Please, do dua for your parents, just a few words in *sujud* [prostration], ok?!’” (I1, 4/20, 252). Bilal articulated in detail the educative power of the mosque. He started by asserting that even though he is sending his own son to a full-time Islamic school, the child still needs to spend time at the mosque:

You *learn things* by being at the masjid. If nothing else, you learn the *adab* of the people there, you learn the manners that you’re just not going to get from a YouTube lecture [...] or the *facts* from reading a book. The camaraderie. Dealing with odd, momentary, social circumstances. Something *I* would have done at that age would be to take the bathroom sandals and walk around with them [...] then somebody will come and be like, ‘Those are *just* for the bathroom.’ You’re not going to learn that unless you experience it. The way, the respectful way, that people will speak with each other, and all of these subtle things cannot be learned without immersion in that environment. (I1, 4/23, 417; 428–437)

In providing an example from his own early life, Bilal highlighted the importance of the human connections made at the mosque as social learning in context. Parents, educators, friends, Muslim community, Islamic schools, and mosques combined to form a rich, educative learning

environment as the base of the Triangle of Education. Building and being part of this Islamic educative base was a primary occupation for many of the educators.

### **7.2.3 Pedagogies of Qur'an: 'The Big Door'**

While teachers, parents, friends, and community environment were living mediators of a young Muslim's Divine connection, the Qur'an constituted another major pathway of mediation: "Studying Qur'an is something that helps organize a lot of other things; it can be a medium for other discussions, and it's where we find the means to connect with God" (Faris, H1, 4/15, 237). He emphasized: "First and foremost, Qur'an is about inviting people to God. [...] and urging them to live ethical lives, which they can present to the Divine on the Day of Judgment" (243–244). Amongst other things, the Qur'an is a means to living an ethical life. Halima, Abid, and Amira were especially adamant regarding its value. Amira described: "The Qur'an is a way to teach them about their inner connection with Allah. [...] The Qur'an is a big door" (H1, Subha, 4/13, 147–149). When asked how she would help children explore their connection with God, Halima exclaimed: "Qur'an! Through the Qur'an! How Rasul Allah [Muhammad, as messenger of God] helped his sahabis build their tawhid!" (I1, 8/8, 458). In other words, engagement with the Qur'an was the primary pedagogy by which Muhammad inspired faith in his companions, therefore, Muslim educators must do the same with their students today.

In terms of specific pedagogies of engaging with the Qur'an, each educator had a slightly different approach. Yassine simply recommended: "Let them hear Qur'an recited in beautiful voices so that the Qur'an will be held in high esteem in their hearts" (artifact, 8/2, 39–39). Faris developed a three-year program that covered the entire Qur'an, aiming towards understanding and using various methods of engagement, including group and individual targeted reading, discussions, note-taking, and writing so that "some sort of impression is going to be left in the

mind” (289). He used memorization only occasionally: “Sometimes there are verses I would like them to memorize—because of their importance: ‘I want you to memorize these words. These are beautiful and these are important’” (H1, 4/15, 530–532). Abid employed a thematic analytic approach to engaging with the Qur’an, whereby students searched for the themes characterizing particular surahs (chapters). First, he would read over the surah with the students, highlighting the different stories within that contained themes. Using Surah Al Khaf as an example, Abid asserted that in every story in the chapter there are trials, as well as ways to overcome the trials: “Allah mentioned *zikhr* [remembrance of Allah]. He mentioned the *qalb* [purification of the heart]. He mentioned the *hawa* [purification of the ego]. He mentioned the *suhba* [be in righteous company]—being in good company”<sup>181</sup> (4/28, 241–268). Then, the children would find reiterations of the themes on their own. Abid emphasized that this type of thematic analysis is characterized by reflection (*tadabur*) and is an effective way of engaging with the Qur’an because each person comes to their own understanding: “So, when you teach the children to *interact* with the Qur’an and to look for wisdom in the Qur’an, this is the proper methodology to teach them Qur’an” (287). An additional benefit of this pedagogy of interaction is improvement in memorization, as Abid described: “This will certainly increase their ability to memorize and recite—which are just skills that we can learn—because once they become interested in the deep meaning of the Qur’an they will automatically put more efforts in memorizing and reciting” (288–291). In other words, engaged reflection of the Qur’an ultimately resulted in both increased intrinsically-motivated memorizing and reciting and conscious understanding of the material itself. Then, even if children lose the memorization as they grow up, *understanding* remains, “especially

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<sup>181</sup> While Abid offered this example to explain how he guided children in thematic analysis of the Qur’an, contained within are aspects of the distinctly Islamic paradigm framing this study, including remembrance of Allah, self-purification, and good company as intentional methods of expanding consciousness.

if you use techniques just like the Qur'an uses, such as stories, examples, dialogues, proofs ... the information stays! If you use abstract wisdom, you might forget it (I1, 4/18, 87–92). Fatima used a similar type of pedagogy as a form of esoteric inquiry in searching for answers to questions children might have within an Islamic, not only Qur'anic, framework: "In the Qur'an and the Sunnah together, any question that you have in mind, there is an answer for" (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 77–82).

A common sentiment amongst these educators was that understanding meaning is more important than memorization. Halima emphasized: "It's not about how many juz'a' [sections of the Qur'an] they have memorized; it's about what they're *doing* with this memorization. It's about the heart. It is about *giving*; it is about *loving*; it is about the *relationship*" (I1, 8/8, 126–130). In pointing out that "the way they [teachers] proceed in many schools is to focus on memorization only" (I1, 4/19, 86–87), Abid asserted that many teachers have "got it backwards," in focusing on memorization rather than understanding.

### 7.3 Unmediated Pedagogies

The second major pedagogic trajectory of connection to God is an unmediated one, as Faris described, and part of the reason for establishing an unmediated relationship with the Divine is that mediators themselves are not solid:

If you were to bank on a mediated relationship all the way, then it might fall apart at some point. If you were to think that your relationship with the Prophet is a rock-solid foundation that will not fail you, maybe you're mistaken! If you think that your relationship with Qur'an is that foundation that will last you forever, the moment it shakes, you lose your connection with God. So, the importance is realizing that these are just *means*. And that the end is a relationship with God" (H1, 4/15, 391–397).

Thus, the heart of unmediated pedagogies involves a young Muslim's direct relationship with God; an educator's role is to help a child develop this relationship. An example of an unmediated pedagogy is Hamza's description of helping children learn how to interact *privately* with God: "the

idea that you can worship Allah in private: you should be having something that you do in private *for the sake of Allah* (ﷻ), in a way that no one knows about it” (314–315). He emphasized: “Doing things in private—giving donations, for example, praying at night, night prayers—if they do these types of things and no one else is there, that will actually encourage or enhance their relationship with Allah” (H2, Subha, 4/20, 318–332). In this section, pedagogies as processes of unmediation are explored.

### 7.3.1 Triangulated Reflection

Many of the educators asserted that reflection has been a critically important pedagogy historically, but that it is diminished in contemporary expressions of Islamic education. Halima referred to reflection an act of worship in and of itself: “It’s about the *inside* connecting to the *outside* and the outside connecting to the inside” (I1, 8/8, 216). She pointed out that the Ibrahim’s type of reflection, including asking the fundamental and challenging questions, is “one of the types of worship that is missing from our life now: time to reflect. People, they do not reflect” (219–221). Abid, too, described that many people have this idea that: “*I shouldn’t reflect. Maybe only the sheikh has the ability—No!*” (I1, 4/18, 559). He asserted that the Qur’an is for everyone, “because Allah [ﷻ] speaks to the insan [human being] in general [...] In the Qur’an, we don’t have special knowledge that is for specific people! Imagine a Muslim is in the desert with a Qur’an, he can still reflect on it” (560; 261–263).

While the pedagogic importance of reflection, in general, and reflecting together was emphasized across the data corpus, a particular and primary type of reflection can be considered as an *exemplary* unmediated pedagogy—triangulated reflection—in that it involves an individual’s private consideration and evaluation of their own actions in light of a divine perspective. The inklings of a triangulated perspective appeared with Nour’s *reflection in light of Islamic teachings*,

Rawan’s description of *ihsan* as worshipping Allah *as if* we can see Him but knowing that He can see us, and Rasha’s awareness of ultimate divine accountability. At its most instrumental, triangulated reflection is the idea that God is always watching, as Abid described: “Allah is Qarib [near] and He is Raqeeb [Observer].<sup>182</sup> He is watching over all of creation. He is there. Allah sees you—wherever you are” (H1, 4/18, 477–478). Huda exemplified triangulated reflection by considering with the children: “In each moment, I always think about Allah. Whether He will be pleased with me in this action or not! Be satisfied with whatever I did or not!” (H1, 4/21, 147–148). More sophisticated conceptions of triangulated reflection were articulated as a type of metacognition for self-refinement and purification. Hamza described guiding students in such a process: “As a way of purifying ourselves, we have to self-evaluate: ‘What is the meaning of being good in this life, in the hereafter, and in Islam, in general?’ We encourage students to self-reflect on their ideas and actions” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 203–205). The next part of Hamza’s description moves reflection into the unmediated realm; he described telling his students that each person will one day be asked about his or her actions, but what is between a person and Allah, only Allah knows about:

We don’t ask the students to verbalize a response. We encourage them to be honest with themselves and keep always asking themselves the following question: ‘What do I need to do to fix or correct my shortcomings and how can I be better?’ We can come closer to Allah if we keep constantly reflecting on our own actions. (H1, Subha, 4/13, 205–210)

Here, Hamza’s description illustrates that triangulated reflection may drive a positive feedback loop of self-refinement (*ihsan*) as reciprocally related to consciousness of God (*taqwa*).<sup>183</sup> He worked with children to develop ways of activating this feedback loop. Abid also referred to this

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<sup>182</sup> Qur’an, 4:1, “...Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.”

<sup>183</sup> This is referred to in the literature as “belief and moral behavior *nourish each other* in *Ihsan*” (Polat, 2017, p. 811; italics added) and “integrative moral action” (Rahman, 1980, p. 19).

loop: “Basically, when you when you make a choice, or you make sure that what you are going to do is something that is going to please Allah, that’s called *ihsan*” (I1, 4/18, 468–473). Self-evaluation (*muraqabah*) is for self-development or *ihsan*, and “The ultimate aim behind self-development is to become God-conscious, which is expressed by the concept of *taqwa*” (Sahin, 2013, p. 201; 2:203). Thus, the purpose of triangulated reflection was developing this reciprocal process of self-refinement and God-consciousness.

### 7.3.2 Imagination

Given the concealed nature of the *ghayb*, imagination was bound to surface as a pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam, in helping children forge a connection with God. Educators used imagination in a variety of ways. Abid’s use of imagination to help children visualize their hearts—white by *fitra*, blacken by mistakes—was one example (see section 4.4.1). Amal also used imagination when engaging children with the Qur’an:

I always remind them to listen and recite the Qur’an *attentively*, because whenever people sit to recite Qur’an, angels are there surrounding them. Allah by His Majesty will listen to them. Tranquility will be sent down to them, so I tell them, ‘Please respect the presence of angels. They are listening to Qur’an, and Allah by His Majesty. [...] And you will be granted—and also your parents will be honored—with a crown, each light in it better than the sun and the moon.’ So, Qur’an recital is not for the public. (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 337–341)

Here, Amal used images of angels, crowns, and lights as reminders for children to attend to the Qur’an, which is not, at its deepest level, a public recital but an intimate, spiritual one. Nour, in describing her artifact, mentioned four types of imagining: First, imagining with children their engagement in a given action—“they try to go beyond something real” (H2, Subha, 4/20, 22)—and what results of that action might be. Second, the children imagine aspects of the lives of past prophets, when learning about their stories, filling in vivid details. Third: “Sometimes they ask about the *ghayb*, but I can’t answer, of course. I let them stop right away” (49). Here, Nour

described children starting to imagine the *ghayb*, but she would stop them because it is unknown. And, fourth, children ask why good things happen and why bad things happen—“why something happened, or why something I want doesn’t happen” (55)—and they imagine reasons. Given the prevalence of the *ghayb* within Islamic education, imagination necessarily plays a role. How educators capitalized on or directed imagination was a pedagogy they described.

### 7.3.3 Children’s Dua: Talking with God

Teaching children to engage in private dialogue with God was another pedagogy aimed at unmediated relationship building. Amal defined *dua* (supplication) as “a kind of private conversation between you and Allah. *Allah will answer*” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 182). An important aspect of engaging in *dua* is that, Amal described, there is no room for doubt: “We cannot *try* with Allah. We cannot *try* *dua*. No, we take it as fact. I told the kids, ‘Allah is able to do anything—just immediately—if Allah wants something to happen between Kaf and Nun, it will happen.’” (253–255). Thus, given its inherent interactional nature—between the one who asks and the one who answers—“*Dua can change fate*” (Fatima, I1, 4/19, 596).

Educators engaged children in *dua* in various ways. Ruby described reminding the students to make *dua* before a test: “‘May Allah make it easy for us!’ [...] I want them, when they grow up, when they may not be in an Islamic environment, to remember the *dua* before taking a test or when facing difficulty or before eating [...] it will *continue* with them, *inshallah* [God willing]” (I1, 4/26, 191–197). Jina also spoke of *dua* as shaping children’s thinking in a way that would, hopefully, last them their lives:

Teaching them that before going to a test, for example, say *bismillah*, say the *dua* of Prophet Musa, alayhi salaam,<sup>184</sup> Allah (ﷻ) will help you, and you will do well in the test! And they

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<sup>184</sup> This is the same *dua* that Amira mentioned teachers using when starting a class. “*Rabbi ishrah lī ṣadrī* [O my Sustainer! Open up my heart (to Your light)]. *Wa-yassir lī amrī* [and make my task easy for me]. *Wa-ḥlul ‘uqdatan*



get that. Before going to bed, if you read certain duas and surahs, Allah (ﷻ) will protect you. So, this identity, when it starts from this age, they will keep it for the rest of their lives” (II, 4/13, 185–192).

Thus, both Ruby and Jina emphasized the importance of articulating dua with children from a young age. Huda described weaving dua into children’s lives to shape their thinking of themselves, in relation to Allah and to all the people around them, as members of a Muslim nation. She described:

I was finishing Surah Nuh with the students and in the last ayah<sup>185</sup> Prophet Nuh asked forgiveness for himself, and after that his parents, and after that the people in his time, and after that even *us!* *Al mu’mineena wal mu’minaat*. All over the times! This is the way that we are supposed to make dua. (H1, 4/21, 130–137).

Exemplary in form, Huda used Noah’s dua to illustrate to the children how they should speak to God.

Some educators’ described evidence of children’s learning as application in daily life. For example, Yusr described that she spent many lessons on the dua offered when visiting a sick person with her Grade 1 class:

One day, one of my students, she tells me, “My mom last night, she was sick. And then I put my hand on her stomach and I said, ‘*As’alullaahal-’Adheema Rabbal-’Arshil-’Adheemi ‘an yashfiyaka’* [the dua for the sick person]. She said that, and I was so happy! She practiced the dua!” (H1A, Hikmah, 4/23, 141–144)

Yusr’s proof that the children were learning the duas she taught them came when they used them appropriately in their daily lives.

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*min lisānī* [and loosen the knot from my tongue]. *Yafqahū qawlī* [so that they might fully understand my speech” (Qur’an, 20:25-28)

<sup>185</sup> “O my Sustainer! Grant Thy forgiveness unto me and unto my parents, and unto everyone who enters my house as a believer, and unto all believing men and believing women [of later times]; and grant Thou that the doers of evil shall increasingly meet with destruction!” (Qur’an 71:28). ‘*Rabbigh fir lee wa liwaa lidaiya wa liman dakhala baitiya mu’minanw wa lil mu’mineena wal mu’minaati wa laa tazidiz zaalimeena illaa tabaaraa’*

Amira identified a primary reason behind teaching children how to articulate dua in context: to give them the tools to practically construct their own divine triangle—their unmediated connection with Allah and their relationships with other people—within in the context of their acts of worship. “And then when they get used to it, they can go far. Far with these duas” (257). In other words, mastering the practice of dua serves their larger social and spiritual lives.

Many pedagogies, thus far, have been described as aiming to forge children’s awareness of, and connection to, God, including through supplication. A question arises: What about a response? God, in the perspectives of these educators, was not inert but responsive. Rawan described an example of dua and a response:

When my son was in elementary school, and we were fasting, I was teaching him that when you make dua before you break your fast, Allah will answer your prayers, inshallah. So, he fasted the whole day and he said, ‘Okay, I made my wish to Allah (ﷻ).’ I asked him, ‘What did you ask for?’ He said, ‘X-box.’ And I was like, ‘What? It’s \$700’ [laughing] And I felt: ‘*La ilaha illa Allah!* What did I teach this boy? Allah might not reply!’ So, I told him, ‘You know, maybe Allah will prevent you from something bad.’ But that month, a Saudi family came, and I taught their two kids. She gave me \$1,000 per month—wallahi [by God], I will never forget this—I was running a daycare. I don’t know, how did I get the money? And then I told my husband, ‘I want to buy an X-box for my son.’ The way my son did his dua, he was 100% sure that it was going to happen. Subhan Allah, it happened; Allah made it easy. (H1, 4/23, 212–226)

In Rawan’s description of her son’s sincere supplication, after which money came from a surprising source, both were convinced that God had answered the boy’s supplication. Amira outlined another type of response, *feeling*. She described that everything unseen is sensitive to feeling, and emotions themselves are indications of connection with Divinity. Amira said: “Allah has descended many things: rain, *rizq* [sustenance], messages, and *sakinah* in the heart—contentment” (I2, 8/23). In other words, when one’s dua has been accepted—when Allah hears you—a feeling of tranquility descends upon the heart. She added, “And people around you love

you and help you” (I2, 8/23). Educators aimed to make visible for the children responses to dua in building unmediated connections with God.

#### **7.4 Pedagogical Catalysts**

A subtheme of Transcendent Pedagogies was educators’ descriptions of particular things that adults do with young people that have catalytic effects on their learning and developing, possibly including that of taqwa, made visible in the ways in which they participate in Islamic practices, reason through an Islamic lens, refine their social and spiritual actions, and/or embrace an Islamic identity. A few educators were aware that some of the practices in which they engaged children might have catalytic effects, but it was a tentative awareness: “Does Arabic, as a language, *affect* the character? Or not? Is the Arabic language a catalyst to get an outstanding character or not? *I don’t know* [whispering]” (Amira, I1, 4/20, 294–296). Here, Amira was speculating on a correlation between Arabic and Islamic character, likely in terms Qur’anic literacy and the ability to recite with meaning and feeling; “the *topic* should appear in my *way* of reciting” (481). Three particular possible pedagogical catalysts are discussed here: love, dua *for* students, and an educator’s taqwa.

##### **7.4.1 Love**

Layla recounted that her small daughter, only 20 months old, loved praying with the family so much that when prayer time came and she heard the call to prayer, she went to get the prayer rugs and scarves:

Layla: She hears the athan; she brings the stuff. She brings the hijab, just for me and for her, and she wants to pray together. *Every single prayer*. [...] So she is actually forcing us [the family] to pray together!

Hana: That’s because you make her love praying all together” (H1, Subha, 4/19, 499–504).

Love as a pedagogical catalyst appeared across the data corpus: love of God, of the Prophet, of teachers, of other Muslims, of all human beings, of even ants (Fatima, I1, 4/19). From a purely

pedagogical perspective, Halima emphasized: “Right now, all the research, all the studies say that a child who *feels* better will *do* better. So how can we create the environment in the Muslim schools where children feel better?” (I1, 8/8, 565–569). Mona described that the first thing she aims to cultivate with learners is for them to love her. It is a *prerequisite* for learning: “They need to love me. *Then* they will learn” (I1, 4/14, 25). Thus, Mona described joking, playing, and pretending with her very young students; moreover, she located the origin of this pedagogy within Islam itself: “It’s in our religion—first, you need to be nice; to use nice words, to make the people *close* to you, to make people *love* to sit with you. It’s from Islam—but it’s for all subjects.” (I1, 4/14, 39–43). Mina located a particular expression of love within Prophetic pedagogy:

The Prophet (ﷺ) treated every one of his companions very specially; he treated *everyone* in a special way. Everyone felt him or herself special with Rasul Allah (ﷺ). That’s the way you should treat the kids, also. Show them that each one is special to you (H1B, 4/23, Hikmah, 510–512).

As an exalted human dimension, this love may be related to both *fitra* and *taqwa*, which educators aim to honor and expand respectively. Recognizing the uniqueness of each child and loving them for their uniqueness makes each one feel special. Dalia described offering love and care to her young students as an important part of her pedagogy: “You have to take care of them. Some of them feel alone. Or they have a lot of problems at home. ‘How are you? How was your weekend? Are you happy today?’—like this [...] it’s very healthy for them” (H1, Ameen, 467–470). She also asserted that if the teachers at the weekend school were not loving and caring, the children might not even attend: “If you don’t do that [be affectionate] they will not come. They will say, ‘It is like that in public school. Why did we come here?’” (471–473). In other words, love in pedagogy may be something that sets Islamic education apart from other types of education. Educators aimed to foster love *between* students, too. For example, Mona described working with her students on empathy within an Islamic frame: “What you love for yourself, you must also love for your

brother.<sup>186</sup> We are here all brother and sisters. If someone hurt someone, I say, ‘If someone did this to you, what you will feel?’ He will say, ‘It hurts me!’—‘So why you do it to your friend?’ (61–64).

In terms of children reciprocating love, two educators mentioned that children told their parents that they *enjoyed* their instruction with effects on their participation. Abid recounted that the children liked the way he taught them Qur’an; he provided an example of teaching them about a particular type of patience (*sabr*).<sup>187</sup> So, they went home and practiced that type of patience “because they liked the way I taught it” (4/18, 362). In other words, *because* they liked his pedagogical approach, the children were motivated to continue learning at home. Halima, too, described children enjoying her pedagogy:

I worked seven years in a Sunday school. And within these seven years, all the children I worked with, *we* put the curriculum together [children and teacher together]. We put the guidelines together. And 90 percent of the parents came to me and they said: ‘Halima, now our children, they love Sunday school, they want to come to Sunday school. Why is that?’ ‘Because I trusted the child! I knew what they needed. I listened. I worked *with* them.’ I worked with them, rather than: ‘I am the teacher and you are the students.’ (8/8, 112–115)

Halima listened to and trusted the children, honoring their *fitra*, and worked with them to actualize what they needed and design a curriculum in which *they* were invested.

Some educators suggested that part of cultivating love was cultivating knowledge: Ruby said: “So, first, love. The children have to *love* Allah (ﷻ), they have to *know* Allah (ﷻ): Who is God? The Books of God. The names of God. The characteristics of God, which leads to loving

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<sup>186</sup> Mona’s teaching here is based upon a hadith, reported by Anas Ibn Malik, that Muhammad said, “No one of you becomes a true believer until they love for their brothers and sisters what they love for themselves” (Al Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Nawawi, 2010).

<sup>187</sup> Abid described different types and levels of patience, as referenced in the Qur’an: to be patient if you lose something or face calamity; patience in engaging in Islamic rituals like praying, fasting, studying the Qur’an, while others are having fun; patience in not committing a sin; and patience in the face of negativity. Patience, he said, “is a type of how to deal with the nafs; it’s part of self-control—*taqwa*” (II, 4/18, 369–370).

Him more” (I1, 98–103). In addition, love was not limited to enjoyment and efficacy in learning, it was rooted in sincerity. Layla described that, “Prayer has to come from the heart. Why do we always say, ‘Please Allah *accept* our prayers!’? Because we know that they are not necessarily accepted! If a prayer is not from the heart, it’s not fully accepted.” (H1, Subha, 4/19, 133–135). Love and the heart were central to teaching–learning relationships and Halima suggested that they must be centered for whole-school enhancement:

I really hope that the Sunday schools, they will stop and say, ‘What are our objectives? What do we need to achieve within one year?’ And if they can achieve *only* to put the *love of the Islam* in these children, I think it will be beautiful. Because then these children will search for themselves. But if they focus on the *curriculum*, rather than the *relationship* with children, they will push them away. And this is what’s happening right now. (I1, 8/8, 116–120)

Importantly, Halima pointed out that instilling love was more important than curricular content in complimentary weekend schools. If interest in the topic was kindled in young learners, they could go deeper in the topic as they matured. Re-centering whole school objectives to focus on children’s love of Islam was Halima’s primary recommendation for the weekend schools.

#### **7.4.2 An Educator’s Dua *for* Students**

A pedagogical catalyst unique to Islam is the educator’s dua *for* the student, which may be particularly important because it is rooted in the practice of Muhammad, who did dua for his child companions. I first came across it when Abid was describing Ibn Abbas, a member of Muhammad’s close community who was still a child, yet the Prophet spoke to him as if he was an adult. I asked Abid where the child’s knowledge came from: “Was it his *own* insight or was it something that he was taught directly by the Prophet (ﷺ)?” (I1, 4/18, 145). Abid’s answer was surprising—neither and both. Abid said:

Nabi (ﷺ) used to make dua *for him*: that God would give Ibn Abbas this *ability* to understand. [...] Ibn ‘Abbas said: ‘The Messenger of Allah embraced me and said: “O Allah, teach him wisdom and the (correct) interpretation of the Book.”’<sup>188</sup> (4/18, 146–148)

In other words, Abid attributed Ibn Abbas’ wisdom to *Muhammad’s dua for him*. This concept—of a teacher engaging in supplication *for* a student; and the student’s subsequent attainment of knowledge—is a uniquely Islamic pedagogical catalyst that echoed across the data corpus. Amira described it as important pedagogic practice for contemporary educators: “It is very important for a teacher to do dua for the students *every morning* before stepping into the classroom!” (4/20, 227–230). She added, “This is the spiritual layer that we utilize for education” (236–237). Hana distinguished between teaching children how to do their own dua—“‘Please Allah help me, help my family, help all the Muslims, and all the humans.’ You ask for guidance for everyone”—and doing her own personal dua, as a teacher: “But when I am doing my own personal dua, I do dua *for them*: ‘May Allah guide you. May Allah help you. Inshallah, if you make dua to Allah, Allah will give it to you’” (I1, 4/20, 78–83). And, finally, Huda actually did dua for her students within a halaqah in this study: after describing the searching questions that students asked of the Ihsan School teachers, Huda suddenly exclaimed: “I ask Allah (ﷻ) to protect all of them and to give us the help to help them!” (H1, Ihsan, 4/21, 199–200). Thus, Huda illustrated, live, the importance of an educator’s dua for her students. Taken together with the concepts of knowledge as “a light which floods the heart” (Al-Ghazali, in Günther, 2006, p. 382) and dua as able to “change *fate*” (Fatima, I1, 4/19, 596), these educators described supplication for children as contributing to transforming consciousness.

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<sup>188</sup> Sahih Ibn Majah, 1, Hadith 171.

### 7.4.3 A Teacher's Own Taqwa

A learner's relationship with a more-evolved educator cannot be underestimated as a pedagogical catalyst. There may actually be at least three levels to this transcendent subtheme, which build upon each other. At its most superficial, it is about role modeling *ihsan*, or refined actions, keeping in mind that an educator cannot give what she does not have. We can only work with children at the level we ourselves are at. Saba asserted that while we can and should share with learners stories from our own lives and experiences, we are limited at the level of the heart: "We cannot share or teach something that did not *touch* us! Teaching Islam depends on reaching the heart" (H1, Subha, 4/13, 217–219). Fatima echoed this sentiment:

I cannot give something that I don't have. You cannot pour from an empty jar, so I cannot teach something, or plant something, that I don't have myself. Even if I tried to, children are *so* smart. They know; and they will know that you don't have it. Even if you try to convince them, they won't be convinced. (I1, 4/19, 625–628)

In other words, educators cannot fake their own depths of consciousness. Also, at this basic level, Yassine described the interaction between child learners and adult spiritual leaders within the social environment of the mosque school: "There are many good brothers who have very good knowledge about Islam. They can interact with the children [...] because it gives them a different *motivation*. If he [a good brother] has the beard, he has the cap, then the child sees him like a different person" (H2, Ameen, 592–597). Here, Yassine suggested that the artifacts of Islamic identity contributed to a role model's impact with children.

A second level of teacher-taqwa-as-pedagogical-catalyst is the idea of the teacher as a guide, who is further along the road and who may have a more expansive vision. To that end, Amira described the role of the teacher as a bridge, literally moving a child from one place—emotionally, spiritually, physically—to another place: "Sometimes, a child doesn't know what to do. We need



to help them bridge” (231). Amira then offered a practical example of some students who came to the mosque-school teachers for advice on the issue of praying during the public-school day:

We suggested that they could ask the principal of their public school if they could pray in school. So, they did. Now they are allowed to pray at school. We just suggested to them a first step; they did the rest. We try to give practical steps and movements to take feelings into action. (H1, Subha, 4/13, 232–234)

Amira described this bridging function as requiring expanded vision, but it also involved an important transformation of emotion into exalted action. Amira described:

When there is a social problem between two children, we teach them, especially the one who perpetrated, to do two rakat for forgiveness. So, we are connecting the feeling, even if it was negative, and transforming it into *ibadah* [an act of worship]. Feelings into action. Sometimes words and discussion don’t work. We need action.” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 225–228)

In helping the child move “feelings into action,” a transformation takes place: emotions, even negative ones, are channeled into an act of worship, transforming the person’s emotional orientation in the process. This was not just a pedagogy intended for children; it was part of the educators’ own repertoire of intentional spiritual practices aimed at self-refinement.

The third and deepest level of the catalytic effect of an educator’s *taqwa* may be the principle of transference. Recalling Keshavarzi and Haque’s (2013) point from the literature on transference, whereby one’s “level of proximity to God” (p. 244) may uplift another’s, the idea here is that an educator’s own spiritual state may have an effect upon the students. Faris described this concept in terms of *mizaj*, a word relating to mood or temperament, but he elaborated it as a particular type of *spirit*: “the spirit of Qur’an or Islam that we cultivate and imbibe as we go on in our life” (H1, 4/15, 637). He started to elucidate this concept by first describing universals, or timeless and enduring Islamic principles (described in section 7.5.3 below):

In cultivating that spirit, that *mizaj*, I think the [Islamic] universals play a very, very important role. And the better equipped the parents are, in those universals—or the better equipped the teachers who are, in those universals—the student has a better chance of imbuing or imbibing that Islamic spirit (654–657)

In this excerpt, first, Faris identified the importance of educators (and parents) being equipped with the universals in order to foster an Islamic spirit in children. He then gave the example of taqwa as a universal that plays a role in that spirit, or mizaj: “Taqwa is a *very* important aspect of [...] that Islamic spirit. A very *core* aspect of the Islamic spirit. And it is universal in all times and places” (661–664). Thus, it may be that more-conscious educators are able to more effectively evolve consciousness in learners.

## **7.5 Future-Forward Pedagogies**

The third research question of this study was: How do educators imagine, design, and/or implement new or contextually-relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam? While educators shared pedagogical aspirations throughout all three themes, some educators had distinct opinions on best pedagogical practices for Muslim Canadian communities moving forward. It is also important to note that others were unsure and tentative in the face of swiftly evolving cultural and technological change, as revealed in Nadia’s observation: “I would be surprised if there’s a Muslim kid today who isn’t thinking about questions around sexual orientation, or atheism, or all of these conversations” (H1, 4/15, 958–961). While some educators were clearly prepared and willing to engage these concerns, others less so. In this section, I detail educators’ distinct perspectives on futures of Islamic pedagogy.

### **7.5.1 Technology**

Technology, as an obvious starting point and inevitable feature of Islamic classrooms of the future, raised mixed feelings amongst the educators, exemplified by Rasha’s statement: “We are very lucky (and unlucky) now with the YouTube” (H1, HES, 4/23, 243). The use of inspirational and instructional YouTube videos seemed widespread, as well as Qur’an apps in Arabic and English (Marya, I1, 4/14). Yassine was strident on this point: “We *have* to move with the technology. Islam

is not against science or against technology. Islam goes side-by side with technology and science” (H2, Ameen, 51–52), a point which Marya echoed: “everything in Islam supports science” (I1, 4/14, 80–81). Huda, however, warned: “The internet has a lot of information, but not all of it is *right*. So how to know a good source, to take knowledge from it?” (I1, 4/14, 101–102). Huda emphasized working with students on critical discernment, “To not be lost” (108). She explained, ‘Because you can find something that says, ‘Yes, it’s okay to do that.’ And another one says, ‘No, you can’t do that.’ So, who will we trust to take information from? (108–110).

Rawan lauded YouTube videos for providing access to Muslim celebrity figures: “Like Nouman Ali Khan, Kamal Saleh, so many...Mash Allah” (H1, HES, 4/23, 249). In another halaqah at the Subha School, Amira also asserted that the children need celebrities: “Muslim celebrities, like Nouman Ali Khan, *The Deen Show*, different sheikhs, stories about how people have been guided to Islam by just the Qur’an” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 150–151). Nour added that getting children interested in specifically Islamic media is one way to provide them with inspirational role models (H1, 4/13, 152). Jina identified an underlying reason why Islamic media is so important, here and now, in a visual age, where images are primary cultural currency: “It helps them *better* see the picture and understand the story. Visualizing is very important for kids, because that’s what they are used to in their daily life with other subjects” (I1, 4/13, 223–225). She offered an example: “To teach them how to pray, there is a video with all the steps, clear steps, with the duas it in, at the beginning and at the end” (228–229). Living in a visual age requires teaching Islam in visual ways.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> A challenge is how to do so in light of traditional restrictions on depicting historical prophetic figures and aspects of the *ghayb*, including God, angels, jinn, heaven, hell etc.

But some educators emphasized that visuals do not only come through technology. Yassine described exploring hadith with children materially, on paper; including by creating pictures together: “Their minds are very fertile. [...] Pictorial representation of different hadith about moral education, ethics, and how to have good manners, this education gets inside their minds, as well as their hearts” (I1, Ameen, 325–329). Here, Yassine described making meaning of material through visually representing its main messages.

### **7.5.2 The Human Teacher**

The increased importance of human relationships was emphasized across the data corpus: “From the internet, you can get cold information, but not warm. You can’t make a dialogue. You will not be able to make a relationship with the internet. But you can make a relationship with a human being. It is a direct relationship” (Huda, I1, 4/14, 118–120). This chapter aimed to make clear the role of human educators. But, here, educators emphasized the specific importance of adults mediating technology and media with children. Yassine suggested encouraging children watch “Islamic cartoons and movies” in order to compare what they see and hear with other movies and emphasized: “Here, you have an important role to play in explaining the differences between the two, and highlight how Islam encourages people to do good” (artifact, 8/2, 38–42). Saba described a similar responsibility of an adult mediator in highlighting Islamic significance in media and helping children critically discern. Talking with children and youth about things that happen in a given day, anything they experience or see, must be mediated: “You have to always connect it to Islam. You have to filter it in a way” (H1, 4/13, 90–91). She gave an example of Muslim children going to see a movie with non-Muslim friends, and later analyzing the movie through an Islamic filter, which could be done in a classroom or at home:

You’re still going to let them watch because other kids are watching. But you’re going to give them the *principles* of Islam through this movie: how they should be doing things, how

they should be careful, how they should react to it, how *good* it is—in some parts—and how close it is to Islam in those parts. Always connect things to Islam. (92–95)

In this case, while encouraging Muslim children to integrate with peers in the larger community, Saba highlighted mediational details, including appreciating good media in general, cultivating discernment through an Islamic lens, and analyzing any media with children to find Islamic principles.

Faris described using clips from YouTube to amplify messages in the Qur'an, for example, video clips of animals doing amazing things—"a dog intervening when a robber tries to rob someone on the street" (H1, 4/15, 402). Faris's strategic rationale was to illustrate to the children that "creation is endowed with this awareness of what is right and what is wrong. [...] and the Qur'an is leading us in that direction, too" (403–407). One of the primary benefits of a human teacher is this mediational role they play in helping children make sense of Islamic principles and practices in ways relevant to culture and technology—and vice versa.

Given the pedagogical challenges of negativity in teaching and learning Islam, and the human potential for love, community, and God-consciousness (taqwa), Halima was emphatic about focusing on *tawhid*, as the realization of God's unity, as comprising the entire Islamic Studies curriculum in any given Islamic school for the first several years. She took her inspiration from a Prophetic pedagogic approach: "For 13 years, the Prophet (ﷺ) worked on tawhid only! And when the tawhid became *so strong*, then the commands came down. 13 years—just tawhid. Just tawhid. Subhan Allah. And this is where we need to look into our curriculum" (I1, 8/8, 440–443). She described the cultivation of tawhid as a strong foundation and recommended starting at three years old, continuing until 12 years old: "Tawhid, tawhid, tawhid! Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! Then you feel all your soul is *connected* to its source. That's it. And then, whatever command

comes, you say, *sami'naa wa ata'naa*<sup>190</sup>” (445). A traditional saying goes: First the heart falls in love, then the mind becomes interested in the details. A human teacher is pivotal in this process.

### 7.5.3 ‘Doing Islam Right’: Going Further

Educators had distinct visions of directions towards which Islamic education and pedagogy need to evolve. Nadia suggested collective meaning-making, especially of challenging questions, in shared spaces: “We don’t have spaces where we can actually sit together. [...] and have those conversations around the things that don’t make sense in Islam and how we can make sense of them together” (H1, 4/1, 588–590). Nadia’s suggestion was set against a problematic sentiment within Muslim communities, whereby: “The moment you start to challenge anything in Islam, it is seen as, ‘You are spreading fitnah [disturbance]; you will go to hell!’ [...] That’s problematic because you have generation growing up scared to ask questions about things that make no sense to them” (594–602). Instead, she emphasized that we need to ask challenging questions as a community, bridging gaps between Islam as a religion and Islam as a way of life, including: “How does Islam relate to our day-to-day life? What does it mean for us to be immigrants in Canada? What does it mean for us to practice Islam in the political, work, school?” (593). She also emphasized that growth happens in the face of difference: “That doesn’t mean that we have to leave having the same opinion or agreeing but at least having a better understanding of different opinions. And that’s how we grow and learn as a society” (591–593).

As a substrate for such community inquiry, Faris described helping young Muslims learn to discern between the *universal* and the *temporal* in the Qur’an:

There are certain principles in Qur’an that are universal. And there are other things that are tightly coupled with their cultural and historical contexts. And that’s where they belong. So, one of the things that I try to do with students, when we are discussing any of the verses that are kind of difficult, I would get them to ask these two questions: ‘Let’s find out what this

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<sup>190</sup> [...] “We have heard, and we pay heed” [...] (Qur’an 2:285)

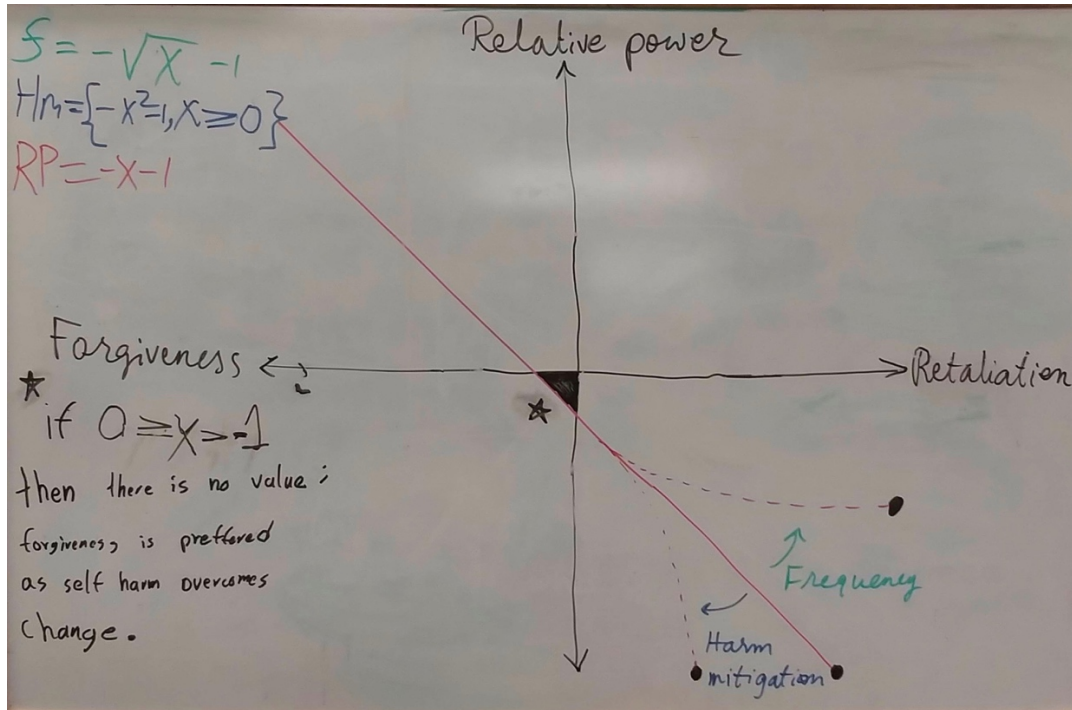
meant in its *original context*. And let's consider what it means for us today'" (H1, 4/15, 475–481).

From here, Faris asserted: "The universal is what you hold on to. The temporal is instructive, but not necessarily binding. You don't have to fashion *your world* in accordance with it" (484–486). This analytic approach, based on inquiry and giving "our students the confidence and the space to question *anything* they want" (Faris, H1, 755–756), may be crucial for young Muslims making sense of Islamic principles and practices in a complicated sociocultural world and to build a foundation for extending Islamic principles. Faris described that while the Qur'an was progressive in its own context, it contains seeds to go even *further* "in observance of the *spirit* that Qur'an is giving us: a spirit of fairness and equality of human beings" (847–850). Faris suggested that there is some "unrealized potential" in the Qur'an that we are now in a time and place to realize, but "there are also things that were not addressed in the first place," which we need to address now (860–861).<sup>191</sup> He offered the example of Omar Ibn Al Khattab, one of Muhammad's closest companions: "In his biography, there are so many instances where he is departing—*obviously departing*—from the Qur'anic text and the Prophet's practice. Because he is very clear in his mind: 'This is what needs to be done to meet the demands of justice.'" (897–899). Faris asserted that Muslims must willing to go further as a norm, not an exception. Faris' pedagogy of going further was illustrated by an artifact that he shared, which a group of youth constructed in his class, spontaneously one day, as they were making meaning together of a verse of the Qur'an (see Figure 7.4. Faris' artifact). Faris recounted how his students were inspired to draw their explorations in meaning on the whiteboard; one of them created an equation to represent the topic of forgiveness

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<sup>191</sup> Faris provided an example of the failure of various Muslim societies to legislate against rape and sexual violence (440).

in the Qur'an. Faris supported their explorations, but ultimately, they were led by the youth themselves.



**Figure 7.4 Faris' Artifact**

Faris' artifact provides a visual example of what youth might do in the supportive and challenging space an educator provides with youth to make their own meaning of Islamic principles. In an example of epistemic integration, whereby the youth merged Islamic principles with those of mathematics—presumably integrating knowledge from different educational contexts. To me, Faris' artifact seemed to bear a faint resemblance to a historical precedent, whereby early Muslim thinkers grappled with challenges posed by new cultures, geographic and epistemic frontiers, building upon early and often clumsy Greek mathematical formulas, and developing their own (Saliba, 2009).<sup>192</sup> But the artifact also points to a promising Islamic

<sup>192</sup> In addition, in encountering new intellectual ideas, Sahin (2016) described: "Early Muslims' educational openness, which was a key catalyst in the initial rapid expansion of Islam, enabled them to have the confidence to



pedagogical future, in relation to Sahin's (2018) assertion that an educational and pedagogical method of engagement—"educational hermeneutics"—is needed for "the formation of a new transformative Islamic educational philosophy capable of nurturing a pedagogic culture of meaningful integration and dialogue" (p. 22). On the cusp of a new horizon, Faris' descriptions of pedagogically *going further* appeared to be collaborations with young Muslims as age-appropriate educational hermeneutics, centered on supporting and then trusting their analyses: "Offering them what you can, but eventually allowing them, empowering them, and encouraging them to decide for themselves. And respecting *genuinely*—not just pretending—but actually respecting the conclusion that they have arrived at" (945–953). Without this freedom, Faris emphasized, we are restricting the responsibility that God has given to the individual, whereby "the *merit* of our belief comes with that freedom. The more the freedom, the more worthy our decisions or choices are for reward" (951–953). In not working with youth on the real issues of our time and place, and what Islam *means* in these new times and places, "then we are doing Islam in a very restricted sense. And we're also doing Islam a disservice. Because then it is not something that is for everyone. It is only for people who are willing to live in the past, like a dream" (995–997).

Bilal, too, illuminated a pedagogy important in preparing young Muslims to engage in epistemic exploration within an Islamic paradigm: embarking upon elaborate "thought experiments" whereby they analyzed information, research, and empirical arguments for contradiction and/or contention of Islamic principles. Bilal described how they constructed narratives that both maintained empirical facts and worked within the confines of Islamic *aqidah* (creed). Bilal described the last part of the thought experiment as: "'Or not.' I could be wrong

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accommodate the creativity of the new Muslims who brought with them diverse sets of cultural and intellectual insights which enriched Muslim civilization" (p. 2).

about the narrative I put forward: ‘Nope. Empirically that didn’t happen and there is no good reason to believe it’—great. But I did not leave the fold of Islam by proposing this narrative” (II, 4/23, 264–271). Such *thought experiments* might be important pedagogies for young Muslims caught between the epistemic hegemony of secular ways of knowing and the epistemic rigidity of extremist Muslim interpretations. By the accounts of some of these Muslim educators, including Bilal, Faris, and Nadia, they are preparing students—cognitively, emotionally, culturally, and spiritually—to be able to step forward and re-center Islamic epistemologies in contributing to secular societies. Bilal concluded: “And, go on, become a scientist, become a philosopher, do what you want, and figure out a narrative that works. One that works. And you don’t need to feel that you have contradicted your faith because there is *room* for these two things to work” (271–274).

## **7.6 Chapter 7 Summary: From Reason to Liberation**

While the first two themes—detailing dimensions of learners and pedagogies in engaging learners towards learning objectives in culturally-relevant ways—are each unique to an Islamic paradigm, the third theme might be considered their deepest echo. Educators described that forging a young Muslim’s awareness of, and connection to, Allah is the prime purpose of an Islamic education. While this objective lies beyond corporeal sense perception, key pedagogies work towards its aim, some of which are also beyond direct perception. Educators’ recounted engaging learners in secret acts of worship, like anonymous charity and prayer in the dark of the night; reasoning Islamically together in divine-perspective-taking for self-refinement; and etiquettes in communicating with God. Working with young Muslims in attaining proficiency in the esoteric arts of Islam, educators wielded these pedagogies towards God-consciousness (*taqwa*), as an ultimate aim of Islamic self-development (Sahin, 2013). This theme, Transcendent Pedagogies, built upon the sensitizing concept of *transcendent pedagogies* described in section 2.3.3.2 as ways of engaging learners with

an intangible, transcendent, and divine Educator. While the sensitizing concepts primarily delineated memorization and imagination, the research participants in this study significantly widened that initial conception by describing various rich pedagogies of engagement with learners at the very limits of perception. Educators described Transcendent Pedagogies as enigmatic, subtle, and transformative—dealing in topics like *fitra* (pure human nature), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *mizaj* (spirit), and *ghayb* (the realm beyond the reach of perception)—as pedagogical functioning at the esoteric core of an Islamic paradigm. Here, educators and learners—independently, in dyads, and collectively—engaged in these Transcendent Pedagogies that took *mediated* forms, including interaction with peers, the Prophet, and the Qur'an, and *unmediated* forms, whereby educators role-modeled and catalyzed learning. A distinguishing feature of Transcendent Pedagogies is a functional aim: to awaken God-consciousness within young Muslims learners. Yet educators were cognizant of their human limits. Rasha explained:

There is a verse in the Qur'an that says, all we can do is teach them, but we cannot get *iman* [faith] to enter their hearts. That is a gift from Allah (ﷻ). You cannot guide people you like but Allah (ﷻ) will guide who He wills.<sup>193</sup> So our job is to teach them. We give them everything, we nurture them, we make dua for them that Allah (ﷻ) will make them pious. That is all we can do. But the end result... (I1, 4/23, 65–74).

Rasha's explanation of an educator's limits itself contains some Transcendent Pedagogies, which honor a child's *fitra*, like giving, nurturing, and making dua. But she also identified a key epistemological principle foundational to Islamic education—Allah is the ultimate educator who bestows the gifts of faith, consciousness, and knowledge—and it echoes other voices in the literature, including Vicini's (2016), who articulated: "only God can eventually endow the gift of 'true' faith" (p. 395). Other educators in this study reflected this epistemological principle as

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<sup>193</sup> "Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love: but it is God who guides him that wills [to be guided]; and He is fully aware of all who would let themselves be guided" (Qur'an 28:56).

related to themselves. Abid, who was a popular teacher for Muslim youth in the city, attributed his cognitive and pedagogical abilities to God, saying: “Allah has *opened for me* a way to understand the Qur’an and reflect on many things, so I try to communicate that and benefit others” (I1, 4/18, 547–548; italics added). He attributed not just knowledge and faith but also pedagogical ability to God. Amira echoed Abid’s sentiment in describing effective Islamic educators: “Allah (ﷻ) is giving you knowledge—*natural knowledge*—to get connected with others and share what you have. And *this* sometimes you cannot find with people that have [formal teacher] education. *Not*. [taps the table]” (I1, 4/20, 354–356). Here, Amira attributed talent in teaching as a divine gift enabling an educator to, first, get knowledge and, second, share it with others. “See, you have a natural connection to the others [pointing between me and her], when you have *this* connection [points from herself up to the sky]” (358–9). Both Abid and Amira’s descriptions illustrate an aspect of Islamic epistemology: God is a source of human knowledge; knowledge is a divine gift. And, obviously, it is not only educators who benefit from a cognitive–Divine connection: Marya described studying an ayah of the Qur’an with her students to give them hope for their own learning, which she translated as: “Whoever tries their best to learn, and know Allah, Allah will guide them [Qur’an 29:69<sup>194</sup>]” (H1, 4/21, 64–66). Similarly, Amira referred to the top three best students in the Qur’an competition as “the people Allah *gave* them the ability of it” (449). In other words, within this key epistemological principle is another principle: divine knowledge may be open and available to be given to anyone who seeks with sincerity. Considered in terms of the Triangle of Islamic Education (Figure 7.3), these principles may illustrate the unmediated connection between an individual young person and God.

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<sup>194</sup> “But as for those who strive hard in Our cause—We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us. For, behold, God is indeed with the doers of good” (Qur’an 29:69).

## **Chapter 8: Re-Centering Islamic Pedagogies: Visible Data as Tools for Transformation**

A primary purpose of this study was to invite and explore educators' perspectives on pedagogies, many of which are tacit. Educators were not easily able to isolate and identify their pedagogical practices; in particular, the more esoterically-oriented ones. Instead, they described large-picture functioning, momentary actions, random insights, and pedagogical dialogues with learners, leaving me to search deeper for "features of pedagogical reasoning that lead to or can be invoked to explain pedagogical actions" (Shulman, 1987, p. 13). In their descriptions, educators made visible features of pedagogical reasoning by accounting for learners' psychological and cultural dimensions, offering insightful interpretations of learning objectives, and responding to challenges of time and place—all triangulated by their own Islamic spiritual practices. Considering these distinct expressions of pedagogy, I engaged in pedagogical reasoning to weave the three themes of this study together. In this final chapter, I reconsider the research questions driving this study whose very foundations were shaken by the data collected, which illustrated the empirical impossibility of isolating pedagogies from the larger conceptual system of Islam (section 8.1). I overview the three themes that contribute to reconstructing and answering those research questions, and I discuss the data–paradigm engagement (Zine, 2008) that enabled both theme construction and discernment of implications. I also outline limitations of the study. In section 8.2, I overview the implications of the themes and their convergence into four meta-implications. Initially, in designing this study, I was cognizant that ignoring aspects of an Islamic conceptual system that lie outside a narrower, secular one would likely disable construction of a research design relevant to the researcher, community, and participants involved; cut off significant sources of knowledge in the form of reflective, ritual, and contemplative insight; diminish depth of

interpretation and complexity of analysis of data generated; and, ultimately, serve to depreciate the sociocultural, intellectual, and historical perspectives of a third of humanity. Yet grounding this research in an Islamic paradigm led to significant methodological and analytic implications that came to bear on the research topic. It made data visible in dimensions of pedagogies as tools for transformation. In section 8.3, I offer some tentative suggestions for future research and Islamic teacher education. In section 8.4, I conclude the dissertation suggesting that pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam—intimately personal, culturally contextual, and deeply spiritual—are integral parts of a much larger conceptual/educational/developmental system within which faith-centered Muslims situate themselves, and which has contributions to make towards individual and social development in Canadian communities.

### **8.1 Research Questions Reconsidered, and Adornments**

The first research question of this study was: What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners specifically in teaching and learning Islam? Educators described using varied pedagogies in engaging young Muslims, which are considered in three overarching themes, each illustrating a modality of Islamic pedagogy. Pedagogies by which Islam is taught and learned are articulated through educators making sense of Islamic primary sources with learners. They are governed by educational and developmental objectives; by conceptions of the human being, both learner and educator; by the cultural and temporal contexts in which learners, educators, and their educational environments are embedded; and by evocations of transcendence. Pedagogies are holistically linked to human origins, to educational destinations, to cultural context, and to each other.

The second research question was: How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives? While this question had solid theoretical intentions, and it directed the analytic gaze

towards a fertile horizon, that horizon extended beyond educational objectives to the human natures of the learners themselves, to the cultural context in which they participate in developing, as individuals and as a community, and to the vision of a transcendent reality that is very much alive in the hearts, minds, and souls of each voluntary participant in Islamic education. Each educator related his or her pedagogies to the service of teaching Islam as *a way of life*: “It’s the air that exists that you breathe; it’s water that you drink to keep you alive!” (Fatima, I1, 4/19, 482). The educators’ expressed passions and convictions animating their uses of pedagogies, describing even the most instrumental ones as playing an illuminated role in awakening taqwa (consciousness) and linking person to person in an intentional community rooted in the community of Muhammad. The pedagogies of each theme had clear connections to objectives in that each interacted with an extant need: the needs of the dimensions of ourselves; the needs of a community making sense of itself in the light of cultural and physical mortality in the face of change; and the needs of an individual soul separated from its source. Running throughout the interviews was an urgency in preparing young Muslims to face the Islamophobic and secular challenges of the wider society while simultaneously deepening their mastery of Islamic practices, their senses of identity as Muslims, and their awareness of God. Educators’ pedagogies were their tools in this preparation, in this deepening.

The third research question was: How do educators imagine, design, and/or implement new or contextually-relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam? The evidence towards answering this question was surprisingly varied; it began with each educator articulating a particular intention in teaching Islam. Some saw their role as facilitators of a divine connection (Amira, for example, who referred to a bridge); others saw their work as continuing a spiritual tradition in a secular-dominated world (Huda and Sara); as a charitable activity extending beyond

the lifespan (*sadaqah jariyah*; Amal). Others felt the weight of responsibility—"I do have 'a people' that I am responsible for" (Bilal), with those people being Muslim–Canadian elementary-school children, each with a dignified soul. Educators identified different needs that they were personally addressing: "Kids end up being just lost, depressed. The suicide rate is so high, depression, anxiety, mental health [problems] in general are so high" (Nadia). Faris described an urgency in equipping young Muslims to apply Islamic principles in addressing social justice issues within and outside of their community: "In not being able to address, for example, the issue of sexual violence, [...] it is like *failing* at doing Islam in a very *fundamental* way. And it is *not* going to be an excuse in the court of God." Faris' focus on social justice connected him back to the majlis of Muhammad. Others also referred to ultimately being answerable to God in terms of the education in which they engaged children (Rasha), including pedagogies: "Allah will ask us one day" (Sara). Each had a particular gift to offer the community: "I want to bring good Muslims in the community that serve the community, help the community, be good citizens" (Fatima). "I want to be the kind of teacher *I* wanted to have as a child" (Sideen). In short, each educator envisioned a slightly different educational vista in which they played a vital role in nurturing, challenging, guiding, and inspiring the youngest members of the community. Most of the educators seemed to be highly aware that in engaging Canadian Muslim children and youth in Islamic education, in ways meaningful to them, success lay in the pedagogies they employed. Failure lurked in irrelevant pedagogies, pedagogies that ignored fundamental dimensions of learners, and those that missed facilitating engagement with transcendence.

The three research questions driving this study were accessorized by three other questions. At the outset of this inquiry, I hoped to contribute to answering Memon's (2011) to-date, insufficiently-answered questions: "What is an Islamic pedagogy? Should we speak of an Islamic



pedagogy or pedagogies? Who defines an Islamic pedagogy(ies)?” Starting with Memon’s second question—Should we speak of an Islamic pedagogy or pedagogies?—the data gathered in this study suggests that the answer is not singular; rather, it plural and multidimensional. Across 35 Sunni Muslim educators in the same city, clustered into some of the same schools, broadly sharing ontological, epistemological, and orientational harmony and a primary educational objective in forging awareness of, and a relationship to, God, the educators expressed a myriad, multicolored, profusion of variegated pedagogies. As such, Memon’s (2011) two suggested methods of retaining fluidity and multiplicity in pedagogy—focusing on principles and relying on a diversity of pedagogical approaches, including those not considered intrinsic to Islamic traditions—were evidenced throughout the data corpus. Educators both expressed the same principles differently and they drew pedagogies they deemed effective from outside Islamic traditions. As such, Islamic pedagogy is intimately tied to Islam itself when understood as a “multi-faceted, multi-coloured display of human ingenuity in creating meanings in light of the Qur’an” (Kazmi, 2003, p. 283).

Memon’s third question—Who defines an Islamic pedagogy(ies)?—may be answered in the literature on Islamic education in terms of Islam’s organizational decentralization (Sanneh, 2004, p. 695) and the fact that pedagogy is not *aqidah*-related (Rufai, 2012, p. 58), each of which point suggests wide latitude in authority and practice. This study affirms the literature in finding that each educator defined for him or herself personal pedagogical parameters, which is not to say they did not draw widely and deeply from primary sources, each other’s ideas, cultural currents, Muslim celebrities, and their students. They did. And, in doing so, they assembled their own unique pedagogical repertoires. In answering these two questions, another arises: With all of this colorful diversity, does the concept of *Islamic pedagogy* itself fall apart? Memon’s first question, together with other unanswered questions raised by this study and in the literature on pedagogy, coalesced

to form a fundamental question, deeper and broader than the research questions, springing from the study's paradigmatic foundations: What *is* an Islamic pedagogy? I cannot claim to have an answer to this question because an answer, in its fullest sense—like the deepest dimensions of the human self and the farthest reaches of the educational objectives that Islamic pedagogies aim to serve—lies beyond our sense perceptions, within the *ghayb*. If Islamic pedagogies function in an emotionally and cognitively integrated transcendent space within human consciousness, as this study suggests, much further interdisciplinary research is required. Instead, the three themes constructed here serve to offer some tentative approaches as minimal starting points in considering Islamic pedagogy. An Islamic pedagogy recognizes and engages holistic dimensions of human beings. An Islamic pedagogy responds to cultural imperatives of time and place, approaching them critically and creatively, discerning between aspects of culture that *contribute* to individual and social development in light of Islam, and those that *corrode*. An Islamic pedagogy centers the transcendent aspects of educational and developmental objectives, to evoke transformation in the learner and educator—individually and reciprocally. An empirical hope undergirding this study, as an Islamic Interpretive Bricolage, was that the educators would illuminate the question: “What do our pedagogies look like if not observed through a secular gaze?”<sup>195</sup> Each of the three themes contribute dimensions to this question in suggesting that contextually-relevant Islamic pedagogies link unique dimensions of learners to unique objectives of Islamic education.

### **8.1.1 Summaries of Themes**

The first theme, Dimensional Pedagogies, features pedagogical imperatives based upon Islamic conceptions of the human being in light of educational and developmental objectives. As such an

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<sup>195</sup> This question is an adaptation of a question posed by Paris and Alim (2014): “What would our pedagogies look like if this [white] gaze weren’t the dominant one?” (p. 86).

objective, Rasha succinctly described: “The only thing that distinguishes teaching Islam from teaching anything else is that everything has *one* purpose: to gain the *rida* [satisfaction] of Allah (ﷻ), that Allah (ﷻ) will be happy with us” (I1, 4/23, 13–15). This simply-stated objective, however, is fraught with pedagogical challenges, especially in an age privileging tangibility and measurability, where spiritual ways of knowing in general have been marginalized, and Islamic ways in particular. While there may be no clear solutions to these challenges, there are indications of ways forward. Understanding the human being is a starting point, in all its dimensional fullness and complexity—including a pure nature, a soul able to attain consciousness of God, a demanding self to be purified, and a heart/mind unity—rather than reduction to corporeal aspects only. “When you *understand* something, you’re in better position to deal with it,” Abid asserted (I1, 4/18, 213), and Dimensional Pedagogies engage these dimensions of the human being by honoring a child’s inherent dignity, trustworthiness, leadership, intelligence, and role in reciprocal self-development with educators.

Although conceptions of human beings and objectives of Islamic education may be considered intrinsic to Islam, the ways in which these conceptions and objectives are expressed, and the pedagogical approaches towards their realization, are contextually specific. The conceptual landscape of contemporary Canada posed particular affordances, as well as constraints, for the educators of this study. Their pedagogical actions and reactions comprise the second theme: Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies. Educators reported that there are pedagogical approaches currently manifest in Canadian public schools that Muslim educators must apply in their own classrooms. Examples include: an emphasis on learning through play (Fatima; Mona), discovery (Faris; Jina; Sideen), reflection (Abid, Halima) and independent research (Huda; Marya). Some of these pedagogies may be new and endemic to Canadian schools; others have existed in past

expressions of Islamic education but have been lost over time and colonial expansion (Bilal, Nadia). Educators were inspired by prosocial impulses in Canadian society, like volunteerism (Halima) and social justice discourses (Faris). Yet, at the same time, persistent Islamophobia (Amora, Asifa), misunderstandings about Islam (Fatima), and epistemic marginalization (Nadia, Jina) are tangible constraints that Muslim educators described facing on a daily basis. Some of their pedagogies—Context-Response Pedagogies—are in direct reaction to these constraints. This theme makes clear, then, that educators’ pedagogies were directly related to the context in which they were teaching and learning Islam.

If the first two themes outline some fundamentals of the pedagogic *who*, *what*, and *where*, the third theme offers glimmers of *why*. Transcendent Pedagogies, premised on the primacy of deepening one’s awareness of, and connection to, God, are pedagogic interactions between a human soul and divinity itself. Pedagogical functioning at the esoteric core of Islamic education animates the connection between an individual and divinity—aiming to awaken God-consciousness within young Muslims learners—and is considered the primary purpose not just of education but of human life. Transcendent Pedagogies included, first and foremost, recognition of an educator’s role in catalyzing a young Muslim’s consciousness of God, operationalized with love, supplication, and the depth of an educator’s own consciousness. Within this relationship, Transcendent Pedagogies included reasoning Islamically with children in building particular perspectival frames; practicing seeing Allah reflected in everything around, which sometimes meant dealing in analogies, like air—although we cannot see it, air is essential for human life; recognizing blessings all around in an Islamic iteration of gratitude practices; asking existential questions; reflective engagement with the Qur’an; and private acts of worship aimed at developing a young Muslim’s unmediated connection to God. Considered as the esoteric arts of Islam,

Transcendent Pedagogies aimed to equip learners with the means to develop themselves, across the lifespan, towards the ultimate objective of Islamic education: consciousness of God.

### **8.1.2 Data–Paradigm Engagement**

A methodological problem that inspired the design of this study was the marginalization of Islamic frames of reference as relevant tools for research (Zine, 2008), as part of a larger problem of epistemic hegemony (Grosfoguel, 2010; Sayyid, 2006). In response, an Islamic interpretive bricolage was constructed as the research design, whereby the “foundational principles and epistemic boundaries” (Zine, 2008, p. 47) drawn from the critical faith-centered epistemological framework, in combination with Ahmed’s (2014) Islamic research principles, contributed to a conceptual imbrication of both Islamic and interpretivist concepts, ethical imperatives, and methods centering an Islamic paradigm. This Islamic interpretive bricolage enabled the capture of data that would have otherwise been rendered invisible, beyond the scope of the analytic gaze, if the study had been framed in a secular, corporeal, Western research paradigm only. This data loss would have been so significant that the first and the third themes of this study—almost exclusively premised on a faith-centered paradigm—would have never been constructed, leaving only the second theme, characterized by mis-pedagogies and those of engaging Muslim Canadian children in excursions into nature and arts-and-crafts. Instead, in acknowledging that religion and spirituality frame the ways in which faith-centered people experience the world, whole new perspectives on pedagogies and ways of knowing opened up. Exciting data and new knowledge were constructed in joint research encounters in the expansive space beyond the constricted boundary of secular, rational thought. On this liberating epistemic ground, as a “dialogical

interface between the data and the framework”<sup>196</sup> (Zine, 2008, p. 48), I embarked on the process of *data–paradigm engagement* (which is, of course, a *researcher–data–paradigm engagement*), whereby: “particular knowledge gained in the field is related back to the discursive frame” (p. 48). From the outset of this study, Zine’s (2008) and Ahmed’s (2014) principles were both encouraging and grounding: they enticed me to dare go further, ontologically and epistemically, and they provided me the peer-reviewed foundation to stand upon. This enticement can be expressed in three steps: first, elaborating initial principles with Islamic conceptual details, drawn from the literature on Islamic Education and Islamic Psychology, into an Islamic paradigm; second, centering this paradigm in designing a study driven by research questions, sensitizing concepts, and methods meaningful to a particular community of Muslim educators; and, third, referring back to this paradigm through the empirical process of data collection and analysis, contributing depth to interpretation and empiricism to theory. Table 8.1 provides some examples of data–paradigm engagement, whereby a concept reflected in the data and expressed the form of pedagogy is traced back to the paradigm at a particular level and expressed in an exemplary (sensitizing) concept. In this section, I examine some specific data–paradigm engagements and encounters.

**Table 8.1 Examples of Data–Paradigm Engagement**

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<sup>196</sup> At times, the terms that I use diverge from Zine’s (2008) terms, due to terminology differences reflecting different emphases in different academic disciplines. While I am located in Educational Psychology, and drew from the emerging field of Islamic Psychology, Jasmin Zine is in Sociology and Muslim Studies. We overlap in the field of Islamic Education and the specialization of Cultural Analysis. So, in this research, I rendered Zine’s precise term “dialogical interface between the data and the framework” (2008, p. 48) as *data–paradigm engagement* because I attempted to expand her framework into a paradigm.

Paradigm Level	Exemplary Concept	Illustrative Data Excerpts	Islamic Pedagogies
Ontology	Transcendent holism and the human ability to interact. (Zine, 2008, principle 1)	“Your relationship with the Prophet [...] your relationship with Qur’an [...] the these are just <i>means</i> . [...] The end is a relationship with God.” (Faris)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflecting upon and interacting with the Qur’an (Abid, Amira, Faris, Halima)</li> <li>Triangulated reflection (Nour, Rawan, <i>Rasha</i>)</li> <li>Secret acts of worship (“enhance their relationship with Allah”—Hamza)</li> </ul>
	Muhammad as example (sunnah)	The Prophet (ﷺ) used to make <i>dua for the child</i> : that God would give him the <i>ability</i> to understand (Abid) “I ask Allah (ﷻ) to protect all of them and to give us the help to help them!” (Huda, in <i>halaqah</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher’s supplication as pedagogical tool for/with learners (Amira, Fatima, Hana, Huda)</li> <li>Supplication as changing fate (Fatima)</li> </ul>
Epistemology	Knowledge has a divine origin (Al Attas, 1980; Nast, 2012; Zine, 2008, principle 7)	“When you talk to kids, don’t underestimate their intelligence. Because they are able to understand!” (Abid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing depth of potential for children’s intelligence (sunnah)</li> <li>Educators learning from/with learners</li> </ul>
Methodology	All human faculties are employed in teaching, learning, and researching—cognitive, emotional, intuitive, spiritual (Ahmed, 2014, principle 3)	“We don’t want to teach Islam as any other subject in school. Islam is not a <i>set of information</i> [...] like math and history.” (Hamza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Starting a lesson with imploring God to open up our hearts to Divine light is a Muslim educators’ pedagogical secret that illuminates spiritual sources of knowledge and human faculties (Amira)</li> <li>A teacher “measuring the <i>nour</i> [spiritual light] of the class” by shaking each student’s hand at the beginning (Amira)</li> </ul>
	“There is no doubt that religion is unlike other subjects such as mathematics or physics, as religion deals with the soul” (Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 111)	“They don’t say to the kids, ‘We are going to study math <i>for the sake of Allah</i> [...] But we do it.’ (Amira)	
Psychology	The <i>fitra</i> , as human disposition, is characterized by purity, goodness, and “instinctive cognition of God” (Asad, 1980, p. 847)	“By <i>fitra</i> , a human being has dignity and honor. <i>Don’t break that!</i> ” (Abid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Honoring child’s dignity (sunnah)</li> <li>“You have to respect his opinion, answer his questions, give him the ability to ask—there is no silly question.” (Abid)</li> </ul>

Employment of Ahmed’s (2014) research principles was described in Chapter 3 (section 3.1.4). Ahmed’s (2014) first principle highlighted the primacy of the Qur’an and the Sunnah; an initial sensitizing concept was whether or not these primary sources would constitute inspirations for the educators’ pedagogical expressions. While each of the educators centered the Qur’an in their approaches to teaching, some referenced pedagogies drawn directly from the Qur’an—for example, Abid’s “stories, examples, dialogues, proofs” (II, 4/18, 88). Other educators designed programs around Qur’anic study with particular pedagogic emphasis, like Faris’ specialized program that included discerning between “universals” and “temporals” and Abid’s Qur’anic thematic analysis (discussed in section 7.2.3). In addition, some of the most consequential pedagogies were those drawn from hadith, including the importance of love as educational substrate (Mina, Mona, Ruby); articulating supplication (dua) for learners’ educational and developmental outcomes (Abid, Amira, Huda); and honoring children’s inherent dignity and potential for deep intelligence, understanding, and ethical functioning (Abid; Fatima). The

eminence of primary Islamic sources on pedagogy evokes Zine's (2008) seventh principle regarding *sources of knowledge*—"knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin" (p. 65). This principle opened up so much epistemic space that it undergirded the entire first and third themes and brought to life aspects of the second theme as well. This principle related to Ahmed's (2014) third principle of using all human faculties as tools of research, analysis, and interpretation—cognitive, emotional, intuitive, and spiritual—which was not only an empirical, analytic approach that I drew from, it was illustrated in the pedagogical approaches described by the educators, starting with expanded conceptions of the human being, identification of the *fitra* as necessitating certain pedagogical approaches, and references across the data corpus of engaging in pedagogies approaching the limits of corporeal perception. Starting a lesson with imploring God to open up our hearts to Divine light is, as Amira described, a Muslim educators' pedagogical secret that illuminates spiritual sources of knowledge and human faculties (I1, 4/20, 426).

Two more of Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological principles involved particular engagement, without which data would have been lost simply because it existed epistemically beyond a secular boundary. Starting with Zine's (2008, p. 54) second principle, which described the role of religion and spirituality in human personal and sociocultural development, this study's data emphasized that Islam as a conceptual system plays a significant role in personal and social development, for better or for worse. Despite voices in the literature,<sup>197</sup> and anecdotally in Canadian schools and society, who have heralded aspects of Islamic education as being for the worse—including indoctrination and irrationality—the educators in this study were committed to the role that Islam can play in individual and social development, captured in

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<sup>197</sup> For example, Boyle, 2006; Burde et al., 2015; Cook, 1999; Halstead, 2004.



Amira's identification of the primary collective benefit of a complimentary Islamic school: "It's a great opportunity to *improve—all of us*, hand-in-hand—masha Allah, to excellence" (H1, Subha, 4/13, 65–67, italics added). The educators in this study both defined esoteric and behavioral parameters of excellence and detailed methods of its attainment. They echoed al-Attas' (1980, p. 15) link between individual and social development via education, whereby the very purpose of seeking knowledge is the development of a good person and society is composed of people. The three themes of this study aim towards understanding the role of an Islamic conceptual system of principles, practices, and pedagogies in human development, as ultimately contributing to social development in terms of a Muslim community, in particular, and the development of Canada, in general.

Zine's (2008) positioning of pedagogy within normalizing discourses in mosques and sites of Islamic education—whereby, "the discursive practices in Islamic schools produce specific types of subjects. Muslim children and youth begin to frame their identities and subjectivities through the discourses and narratives made available to them" (p. 314–315)—was clearly at play in educators' descriptions of their pedagogies in this study. It was particularly apparent in the ways in which educators *reasoned Islamically* with learners. Yet, these discourses were not singular. Within the confines of a given mosque school, educators held widely divergent perspectives on Islam and Islamic education, which may have provided young Muslims equally wide conceptual material with which to construct identities and future subjectivities. For example, Reem yearned for the type of pedagogical pushing or stuffing of information—"sometimes, you have to give them [the children] orders; they must do this by *mandatory*" (89–90)—which Faris outright rejected: "[I]t is not getting us anywhere. And when I have an opportunity, I take exception to it" (I1, 4/15, 205–206). Instead, Faris proposed a directly opposite approach: "[F]reedom is *absolutely*

*essential*. And it's in the air; it's the Zeitgeist of our time. [...] I'm convinced that there is absolutely nothing that we are going to push" (759; 765). Both educators taught Islam within the same mosque school but held diametrically divergent views on pedagogy. Thus, beyond exposure to narratives with latitude for diversity of understanding and expression, some educators described deliberately creating epistemic space for children to assemble their own *repertoires of Islam*<sup>198</sup> (including Bilal, Faris, Fatima, Marya, and Sideen).

In summary, the foundational principles that formed the basis of the Islamic conceptual paradigm within which this research was conducted enabled the construction of themes outside a normative secular boundary and offered expansive implications.

### **8.1.3 Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of this study may primarily revolve around methods, data-collection process, participants, and my own interpretative ability as the researcher. The emerging field of Islamic Education contains significant gaps to be explored—pedagogy is but one—and empirical research on pedagogies in sites of Islamic education is, to date, still in an early phase. Thus, this study was exploratory and, as such, conducting interviews and halaqat was perhaps an appropriate first step. It enabled participants freedom in describing their pedagogic practices, as well as hopes and intentions. The data collected by these methods was rich and nuanced, possibly due, in part, to the diversity of backgrounds and experiences across the pool of research participants. Yet, in starting to explore gaps in Islamic pedagogy through interviews with Muslim educators, dimensions of praxis remained unobserved: employing the method of *observation* of the participants' pedagogies in action with learners would have added valuable dimensions to the data and served to triangulate

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<sup>198</sup> "They [the young Muslims] have to put together their own set of beliefs and practices; their *own* repertoire of Islam" (Faris, H1, 4/15, 371).

their words. Conducting observations within this research design would be one avenue for further research.

Limitations of the data-collection process were primarily based on the constraints of time—the participants’ and my own—given our diasporic realities. While I had hoped to conduct three research encounters with each person, this was well beyond the limits of the participants’ time in the period that I had allotted for the research to take place (April to August), taking into account many participants’ summer travels ‘back home.’ The limited research period was due to my own time restrictions and my own travels ‘back home.’ If I had conducted the study over the duration of a year, maybe I would have been able to meet with each participant three times. On the other hand, with some participants, one meeting was sufficient and additional meetings might have been redundant. This may be due to the fact that educators were more or less reflexive on their pedagogies, processes, and objectives—as expected from the outset. Time limitations could possibly have been ameliorated if I had had additional researchers as a team, although that would have introduced other limitations, particularly in terms of interpretation and analysis.

Limitations around participants include the fact that I focused on only *educators’* perspectives, not learners, parents, social or spiritual leaders, or other community stakeholders. This was an intuitive choice based on the exploratory nature of the study. I chose to focus on educators because they are the ones actually engaging learners with pedagogies. Yet many stakeholders involved in Islamic education have insights on pedagogical approaches, and interviewing mosque leaders, community leaders, and parents might have generated additional perspectives on the research questions. Interviewing children and youth learners would likely have yielded insights into their own contributions to pedagogical engagement—how pedagogy feels, what works well, and what does not—and it may constitute an important next step in this research

trajectory into pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam. In addition, the data may have been enriched if I had managed to include educators from the Shia' and the Sufi schools, as initially attempted.

Another caveat in terms of the participants is that they were intentionally and often passionately dedicated to teaching Islam, thus, their perspectives were positively oriented toward the purposes and objectives of Islamic education. While they succeeded in answering my research questions thoroughly, those questions themselves were not designed to tap critiques of pedagogies, which should constitute the focus of another study. Instead, critiques that did appear in the data corpus—which were useful, especially in discerning the importance of Canadian cultural relevance—were most often contextualized as obstacles in a path towards an 'optimal' Islamic education, rather than questioning the philosophical foundations of Islamic education. This study was not able to objectively assess positive or negative impacts of pedagogies apart from the educators' descriptions. In summary, a spectrum of ethnographic methods, including both interviews and observations with various stakeholders beyond educators, would have yielded more diverse data.

Finally, limitations of my own interpretative ability as researcher mean that there are myriad other relevant, and maybe better, interpretations to be possibly made of the same data corpus. Taking seriously the Islamic paradigm that I assembled for this research—from my own limited knowledge, and primarily from the field of Islamic Education in English, which critics will say is already degrees removed from the original Arabic—a question must be asked: How bright was the light that “shines in our minds” (Nasr, 2012, p. 15)? As a person's vision is always partial—and as any piece of culturally- and historically-situated research is always limited—surely meanings were missed in my interpretation and analysis. Given these limitations, my interpretations of these

educators' words may at best be considered ephemeral impressions of a passing moment in the fluid, colorful, ongoing pedagogical history of Islam, open to revision and transformation with new research.

## **8.2 Implications of the Themes; Meta-Implications of the Typology**

This research does not intend to speak for all people who identify as Sunni Muslim educators; it featured only 35 of the world's almost 2 billion Muslims, focusing on a small group of faith-centered educators teaching Islam to children and youth in one city in British Columbia, in a particular prevailing dominant-culture, public-school context. Thus, implications of the themes, like the themes themselves, are optimally valid at this time, in this place, with these educators. Nevertheless, given the shared paradigmatic foundations of Islamic Education, as an emerging field—as well as enduring pedagogies over time—educators in other times and places may draw insights from the implications and meta-implications of the pedagogical typology that was the fruit of this study. Each theme raises implications; each implication refers back to the Islamic paradigm grounding this research—constituting a primary implication in itself; and implications coalesce into meta-implications.

The first theme, Dimensional Pedagogies, asserts that particular Islamic conceptions of the human being are crucial in considering pedagogies in Islamic education. Just as Muslim psychologists found themselves unable to treat Muslim patients when they limited themselves to a secular frame, without taking into account the critical dimensions of the human being that characterize an Islamic perspective (Badri, 1979; Haque, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018), Muslim educators cannot limit themselves to secular conceptions of the human being. To do so would be to miss or to deny fundamental dimensions of ourselves that require education and development across the lifespan, and the pedagogical processes requisite to that education and development.

One example is self-purification. Both the *human dimensions* that require purifying and the *processes that purify* are unique to Islamic perspectives on development: “[T]he heart by fitra is white! Whenever somebody starts to commit sins, there is a black spot that is marked on it. [...] The heart becomes *dark*, doesn’t make right decisions. But to the heart that is *sound*, Allah gives insight” (II, 4/18, 450–455). A vital purpose of Islamic pedagogy, then, would be to prepare young Muslims for self-purification, -refinement, and -development. Part of this preparation must be detailed exploration of the foundational dimensions of human beings from Islamic perspectives to illuminate Muslim learners’ understandings of their own processes of learning and developing. There is little point of educating children *Islamically* without recognizing the unique elements of human beings and trajectories of development: without a fitra to be awakened, a self to be refined, a heart to be purified, a cognition to be stimulated, a soul to be enlightened, and a God-consciousness to be expanded. Whole, human, self-awareness is the basis for reflection and practice, and a key cognitive process, in self-purification. We cannot advance as an educational community if we do not take back our holistic conceptions of ourselves, our unique objectives as the very basis for human development through Islamic education, and pedagogies in realizing the two.

The second theme, Contemporary Contextual Pedagogies, emphasizes that culture necessarily changes pedagogy in teaching and learning Islam. Despite some shared pedagogies, Islam is not taught in the same ways in different times and places; pedagogy must respond to contemporary cultural context. Examples drawn from the data corpus reflect historical examples, dating back to Muhammad’s pedagogies, in suggesting that learner characteristics also change pedagogical approaches. As a primary step, educators need to consider which pedagogies they are using and why, where their pedagogies originated, what ends they serve, and whether or not they

are relevant to Muslim children and youth in contemporary context. In collaborative and situated cultural analysis, educators and learners together might examine the prevailing cultures within they are situated, move through, and draw from. Part of this process is identifying both affordances as assets and constraints as challenges to educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education and pedagogy. Questions to ask, for example, are: which aspects of the prevailing culture are young Muslims identifying with and internalizing? Which aspects move us toward our goals? Which move us backwards? Which could be utilized more effectively? In analyzing dominant cultures, we also need to analyze our own minoritized subcultures—including the smallest iterations of Islamic communities—in being aware, for example, of the pitfall that Niyozov (2010) identified: “In the context of pluralist education, it is important that the racism of minority as well as of majority groups is addressed fair-mindedly. Otherwise, the fight against racism may only reproduce and perpetuate new forms of racism” (p. 28). While Faris articulated his criticality of negative forces in Canadian society, he was similarly critical of those in Muslim societies, including in other parts of the world, within which he identified “institutionalized racism and institutionalized stratification. They are very unapologetic about it” (H1, 4/15, 164).

Implications of the third theme—Transcendent Pedagogies, as pedagogical functioning at the esoteric core of an Islamic paradigm towards a primary functional aim of fostering *taqwa* (God-consciousness)—bring together implications of the previous two. Reclaiming ontologies, epistemologies, and developmental psychologies at the heart of an Islamic paradigm and expressing them pedagogically, in relevant cultural context, aim for education and development at the deepest core of the human being and at the farthest reaches of perception. Acknowledgment of the importance of this education and development may constitute an important step in a Canadian educational system that claims multiculturalism. More significantly, reclaiming its importance and

embracing the uniquely- and distinctly-Islamic pedagogies that lead to its operationalization may constitute a crucial step forward for Muslim educators in realizing the potential of Islamic learning and development in the transformation and self-development of young Muslim Canadians.

In summary, in suggesting that these themes and their implications make visible dimensions of Islamic pedagogy, I refuse to be nudged from senses of ontological holism and unity into politically correct pluralisms and plural Islams—for example, resisting defining *Islamic pedagogy* because it might exclude some ways of teaching and learning Islam and/or being Muslim. I resist caving to what Sayyid (2006) identified as an anti-Orientalist sentiment that “denies any essentialism to Islamic or Islamicate phenomena” but is only accomplished by “the implicit and disavowed acceptance of Western exceptionalism as constructed through the disciplines associated with the social sciences” (p. 178). I also concur with Sayyid’s (2006) point that claiming an Islamic epistemology—and in this case, ontology, psychology, and pedagogy, too—requires “a deep decolonization that resutures Muslim narratives of historical continuity with the past” without necessarily adopting 19<sup>th</sup> century narratives, retreating into an sanitized past, or aiming to recreate a “pristine Islam” (p. 178). Instead, centering an Islamic paradigm made visible four overlapping meta-implications of this study—the need for Islamically-coherent research approaches; retaining pedagogical holism, recognizing cultural relevance as double, and thinking across paradigms as inter-epistemic interaction toward community contribution.

### **8.2.1 Islamically-Coherent Research Approaches to Render Data Visible**

A deeper and possibly more devastating epistemic marginalization than denouncing Islamic education as indoctrination (Halstead, 2004), Islamic pedagogies as antiquated (Boyle, 2006; Burde et al., 2015), and Muslim ways of knowing as quaint folk knowledge (Zine, 2008) may be denying researchers the academic credibility to situate their work within paradigms ultimately



meaningful to them and their communities, which are ontologically and epistemically situated outside a secular Western frame. If I had situated this work solely within a secular frame, two of the three themes of this study would have been rendered invisible: Dimensional Pedagogies, recognizing and engaging unique conceptions of human beings and linking them with unique objectives of Islamic education, and Transcendent Pedagogies, which function at the very edges of corporeal perception. Both would have been nullified and erased, new knowledge never constructed. Most pedagogies in Islamic education seem to support a specific interplay between the human and the transcendent, between *al-insan* and *Allah*. Without an Islamic paradigm, both the *insan* and *Allah* disappear, leaving only instrumental pedagogies behind, bereft of reason or intention.<sup>199</sup> Just as dominant educational discourses in secular Canadian communities emphasizing discernable evidence meant that, for these Muslim educators, the *ghayb* beyond corporeal sense perception poses an ongoing conceptual and existential problem, normative secular academic discourses pose a challenge for a Muslim academic working at the limits of such perception. Ontological, epistemological, and methodological expansion was required to capture data celestially located beyond a narrower secular epistemic frame that is highly relevant to the educational community within which the research took place.

Justification for grounding this study in an Islamic paradigm came from within the data itself. The educators described in their own words—and as related to their own pedagogies—ontological, epistemological, and psychological aspects of an Islamic paradigmatic framework. Given this empirical reality, legitimacy in this research may be entered through one of two doors: first,

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<sup>199</sup> Beyond the scope of this study, a question arises as to whether this may be precisely the problem with Islamic educational systems whereby colonial forces uprooted and denigrated paradigmatic frames relevant beyond secular ones.

legitimacy is situated in the paradigm itself; second, legitimacy is situated within the data corpus. Each reflects the other. Justification also appeared indirectly and directly in the literature. Memon (2011), for example, argued: “Essential to an Islamic pedagogy *is reframing the purpose of learning* from an Islamic perspective” (p. 292; italics added). As the purpose of learning from an Islamic perspective is necessarily rooted within a larger paradigm, Memon indirectly identified the imperative of examining pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam with that paradigm. Zine (2008) and Ahmed (2014) were more direct. Zine’s (2008) seventh principle of *sources of knowledge*—“knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual or incorporeal origin” (p. 65)—and Ahmed’s (2014) third principle, referencing a wide spectrum of human faculties including cognition, emotion, intuition, and spiritual, complement each other and both contributed to rendering my data visible. Simultaneously, my data empirically contributed back to highlighting the contours of those discursive frameworks, maybe even contributing in a small way to building upon them for others to use in future research.

Rendering data visible was only the first step. The second step involved analyzing it into themes relevant to the paradigmatic framing itself, which was described as data–paradigm engagement. The third step asked: *What do we do with the now-visible data?* While discerning implications, meta-implications, and new directions for research and Islamic teacher education (see Tables 8.2 and 8.3), this question remains extant for Muslim educational communities, Canadian communities, and larger academic communities characterized by epistemic hegemony. Hopefully, this study, along with those that came before and those to come later, will empirically contribute to bringing Islamic education, pedagogies, and ways of knowing from the epistemic hinterlands into the center. Ultimately, internal consistency in research design means inclusion of epistemic diversity. Scholars must be supported in situating research within paradigms relevant to

their own interpretative contexts, regardless of how marginal to the epistemic mainstream. To assert otherwise, for Muslim scholars, is marginalize Islamic epistemologies, render data invisible, deny holism, and stifle human creativity. In addition, educational, pedagogic, and developmental holism, rather than compartmentalization, must be recognized as an important aspect of both Islamic education and research. Yet, academic rigor must be emphasized. While any scholar should be invited to comment on the consistency and clarity of research designs, Muslim scholars must rigorously critique each other's research designs, analyses, interpretations, themes, and implications. As Ahmed (2014) asserted as part of her third research principle on the importance of using all faculties in knowledge generation: "Research must be rigorous and peer reviewed to ensure validity and authenticity" (p. 570). Exploring beyond the confines of a secular frame can never mean conceptual or empirical laxity.

### **8.2.2 Pedagogical Holism**

While Zine's (2008) first principle—highlighting holism inherent in physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification—was empirically useful in this study in providing a perspective on pedagogies as integral to a larger Islamic conceptual system, another manifestation of holism came at the study's end, in taking a wide angle on the three pedagogic themes. Each theme makes visible a particular angle on pedagogical practices, yet each theme is also present, in shadow-form, in the other themes. In integrating aspects of each other, the themes are holistically related. For example, fundamental conceptions of the human being are important in each of the three themes, although they take center stage in the first theme: Dimensional Pedagogies. The second theme makes visible particular pedagogical affordances and constraints of the here and now, yet, contemporary cultural context is important in each theme because no educator pedagogically engages learners in a cultural vacuum. A pure Islamic environment exists only in

human imagination and, while elaborating an imaginary Islamic environment may constitute an important pedagogy in itself, ultimately, educators need to express Islam to learners via pedagogies relevant to a contemporary sociocultural moment. Finally, Transcendent Pedagogies are always at play not just because, from an Islamic *psychological* perspective, human beings have a soul that interacts within a Divine reality, but because, from an Islamic *educational* perspective, constant triangulation of ourselves, our thoughts, intentions, actions, and reactions in light of this Divine reality is central to self-development.

There is a final aspect of holism that speaks back to the literature. Although pedagogy itself may not be aqidah-related (Rufai, 2012) in terms of being included in core Islamic creed, aqidah runs through Islamic pedagogy like blood. In this study, aqidah featured in each of the themes, anchoring conceptions of the human being in relation to God; standing in juxtaposition to a secular cultural context; and animating Transcendent Pedagogies. Aqidah was central to descriptions of learning objectives, of content, and of educators' daily activities. Aqidah was embodied within educators themselves and in the typology presented here. An exemplar is Fatima's description of teaching her students: "If you look behind *anything* around you—it's Allah. It's related to Allah. Nothing is *not* related to Allah." But she would not initially name aqidah as such, with children, thus contributing to its ubiquitous but tacit nature. She emphasized teaching children aqidah through play and singing: "So teach them everything that you want. Plant the seeds first. And then when they are ready, by the age of 11 or 12, 'Yes, this is Islam. This is aqidah'" (117). Thus, aqidah internally links pedagogies back to the larger Islamic conceptual system and contributes to pedagogical holism, raising some complex questions for Muslim educators and administrators (see section 8.3.2). The three themes can be considered separately—each shedding their own particular

lights on Islamic pedagogy—but, optimally, the three themes should be taken as a whole, together highlighting the unity in diversity characteristic of Islam itself.

A practical example of pedagogical holism might be glimpsed in a social issue that many of the educators in this study discussed: how educators’ handle altercations between children in a school—arguments, fights, or even bullying. Their discussions collectively made visible a unique Islamic picture of restorative action evoking the pedagogical typology in three phases. First, these altercations are *already* situated within an Islamic social–ethical framework with distinct perspectives on dealing with other people, which many of the educators described as seizing daily chances to discuss. For example, Ruby reminded the children of various hadith, over the course of a school day, including: “The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand [other] Muslims are safe.”<sup>200</sup> [...] I always connect these Islamic techniques and principles to everything we face” (4/23, 176–180). Similarly, Rasha described:

The basic thing that we talk to them about bullying is Muslim brotherhood and sisterhood, that this is your community. The Prophet (ﷺ) said that the people closest to him on the Day of Judgment are the ones who are best in behavior.<sup>201</sup> *Khuluq*. The best of you has the best *khuluq*. So that is basically the message we give them. (I1, 4/23, 228–31)

These two excerpts reveal distinct Islamic principles of character development, and the teachers’ pedagogical actions towards developing this character might be considered within the realm of Dimensional Pedagogies, with glimmers of Transcendent Pedagogies in reference to being close to the Prophet on the Day of Judgment. Abid offered an example that moves character development squarely into the realm of Transcendent Pedagogies. Abid described patience in the face of negativity, emphasizing: “Not to reply to the bad with the bad is another level of patience” (I1,

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<sup>200</sup> Asifa described integrating the same hadith—“the Prophet (ﷺ) said, meaning, “A good Muslim is the one who doesn’t hurt another Muslim with his tongue or his hand”—as a consistent way of identity building.

<sup>201</sup> Sunan al-Tirmidhī

4/18, 373). Next, he illustrated this concept with a story from the life of Muhammad, when he was in Medina with his companion Abu Bakr. A man started hurling insults at the two of them and swearing. Muhammad just smiled without replying. Finally, after a while, Abu Bakr could not take the insults anymore, and he replied to the man. When Abu Bakr replied, Muhammad left. Abu Bakr ran after him and inquired as to why he had left. Muhammad said,

When the man was slandering us, there was an angel present. And the angel was replying for us: whatever the man said went back to him. But when *you* replied, the angel left and Shaytan came. And I don't want to be in a place where Shaytan is. That's why I left.<sup>202</sup>

Abid's take-home message to the children in light of meanness, bullying, or negativity was: "You just leave, and that's it" (378–391). But being patient in the face of injustice is only one part of the story—the visible part; the other, invisible, part is that angels help the *recipients* not the perpetrators. As such, Abid aimed to build with the children a cognitive frame from which to stand strong when confronted with meanness or bullying, triangulated by transcendence and illustrated by Muhammad.

A second phase of Islamic restorative action is when an altercation actually happens. Some educators described immediate and practical ways of supporting children in make holistic sense of the situation, using physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Asifa described the steps that come *after* a child transgresses against another child. After apologizing to the other child:

Purify yourself, say, "*Astaghfiruallah* [may Allah forgive me]. *Astaghfiruallah*. *Astaghfiruallah*." Please say *astaghfiruallah*. Clean your mouth—not by rinsing or by gargling—but by saying *astaghfiruallah*, purifying yourself. So, don't say this to her or him again. If they did that to you, how would *you* feel? Put yourself in those shoes! (H1, ME, 4/26)

Thus, along with the regular retributive actions—apologizing and making things better with the other child—Asifa taught the child to conduct verbal actions to make it better with God and with

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<sup>202</sup> This story is from a hadith: Musnad Ahmed, 9624, & Sunan Abu Dawood, 4879

him/herself. She asked the child to emotionally connect to the other child by considering: how would *you* feel?

Ruby also worked with physical actions: the ritual cleansing practice of wudu. She reminded her students of “the Islamic techniques to calm ourselves down: ‘Go make wudu and then come back and let’s discuss the issue’” (I1, 4/23, 174–176). The timeless physical act of splashing water on oneself is intended to put out the fire of anger. Then, discussion could happen in the context of here and now. Amira described helping children move the emotion into the physical: “We teach them, especially the one who perpetrated, to do two rakat [cycles of prayer] for *forgiveness*. So, we are connecting the feeling, even if it was negative, and transforming it into *ibadah* (act of worship). Feelings into action” (H1, Subha, 4/13, 225–228). This is an example of a dimensional pedagogy as a pivot, whereby the teacher works with the nature of the child, which includes making mistakes, to reorient the child to the higher, transcendent, objectives: together, they transform negative emotions into acts of worship. In a more instrumental articulation of the same concept, Asifa instructed her students to do prayers: “*Salat al tawbah* (prayer of forgiveness), right away: two rakat, go, go go go! [...] You’re going to ask Allah for forgiveness. This was not right, what you did” (H1, ME, 4/26, 321–344).

Jina described how these Islamic restorative actions, in words and actions, may have lifetime consequences: “Asking children to do the astagfar [asking forgiveness]—*astaghfirullah al azim*—and asking them to pray to two rakat, *it goes with them for a lifetime*. And it’s very important to feel this purification, to feel that you’re good with Allah” (I2, 183–187). In other words, an Islamic iteration of restorative action in responding to social altercations included making amends with other people, with God, and with one’s own soul. This theme of self-purification and self-discipline is illustrated in moments of tension between children. Ruby

described it in a hadith identifying a strong person as someone who can control his or her anger, not someone who can physically overpower others. Moreover, preventing oneself from *becoming* a bully is just as important as protecting oneself from being a victim of bullies, as Jina described while studying a particular Qur’anic verse<sup>203</sup> with the children: “We talked about the differences between humazah and lumazah—*humaza* is a bully and *lumazah* is a backbiter—and how these two people are *dangerous*! *We* should be careful not to *be* a humaza or a lumaza. And how can we protect ourselves from these people?” (211–216). Thus, Jina described bullying from the perspective of being both a victim *and* a bully; strengthening oneself from both people who could hurt you, as well as from your own lower self, who could hurt others. Using Islamic practices and verses of the Qur’an to understand human functioning, to transcend lower impulses, and to transform mistakes into acts of worship exemplify Dimensional and Transcendent Pedagogies in contemporary cultural context.

A third phase of Islamic restorative action is reflecting together, later, upon what happened.

Rasha described:

The very first thing we ask them is: ‘What do you think your situation is with Allah (ﷻ) is right now? Is He happy with you? Is He sad?’ So, we always make them reflect on their behavior in terms of halal and haram. (I1, 4/23, 228–245)

Along with reflecting on how the situation impacted oneself and others, here, reflection was again triangulated, adding a different (divine) dimension for clarity and accountability. Rasha added: “It is a matter of perspective; how do you look at things? If I know that I will be accountable for everything I do and everything I say, I will *think*!” (212–215). As aspects of all interpersonal interactions involve imagination—“If they did that to you, how would *you* feel?” (Asifa)—Islamic

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<sup>203</sup> Qur’an, 104: Surah al Humazah.



interpersonal interactions also involve imagining angels, who defend the righteous, and God, to whom every person is accountable.

This Islamic iteration of restorative action is unique in that it is initially embedded within a conceptual framework of distinct ethical principles, techniques, and practices that educators employ to support the children in taking action to calm themselves down, extinguish the fire of anger, make amends with the others involved, reflect upon their own behavior in light of a divine perspective, and move the feelings into acts of worship, which may have lasting effects on how they deal with conflict in other areas of their lives. The three themes are distinctly visible in holistic interaction: conceptions of the human, with tendencies for negative emotions and mistake making, are situated in social and spiritual contexts and learning environments characterized by timeless principles of character development, expressed in contemporary time and place. Educators and learners work together with Islamic techniques and ritual practices in processes of triangulated reflection for self- and social-purification.

Throughout the data corpus, and in this illustration, pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam are tightly interwoven into an entire conceptual system that begins with conceptions of human beings, arcs through Islamic principles and practices set in cultural and temporal context, towards unified worldly and transcendent objectives of education and development. Pedagogies cannot be artificially separated, yet they can be highlighted as engines driving an interconnected whole. Ruby was not able to isolate pedagogies; Faris was unable to name them. Yet, each educator had distinct pedagogical approaches towards the objectives of Islamic education. As such, each of the three themes might be required to render a pedagogy Islamic: in other words, each theme constitutes an integral component of Islamic pedagogy as a whole.

### 8.2.3 Double Cultural Relevance

The term *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), and its iterations (e.g. Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012), often refers to making minority cultures relevant in pedagogy in dominant-culture classrooms. Indeed, literature<sup>204</sup> on Muslim students in North American public schools has suggested a need for Islamic iterations of culturally relevant pedagogy (see section 2.1.2), which culminate in the idea that young Muslims should not have to lose their Islamic practices, principles, perspectives, and/or identities with participation in Canadian public schooling. This is a first facet of cultural relevance in considering pedagogies in teaching and learning with Muslim children and youth, and the first and third themes of Dimensional and Transcendent Pedagogies may offer insights towards Islamic iterations of relevance. But, in addition, over the course of this study, a picture became clear of Muslim children and youth as themselves culturally Canadian. Bilal observed: “The dominant culture that they live in seems to be dictating their *real* responses to these things that are happening” (I1, 4/23, 57–58). Fatima articulated a sentiment amongst Muslim Canadian children as being: “I’m in Canada. I want to play! I want to draw! I want to listen to music! I want to have fun!” (I1, 4/19, 114–115). Most of the educators described fine-tuning pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam to be culturally relevant to Canadian Muslim children, revealing the importance of a particular *Canadian cultural relevance*. This is a second facet of cultural relevance important in educating Muslim children and youth. The two facets cohere in a double cultural relevance expressed across the data corpus: Bilal pointed out that Muslim students do not wear only one hat: “they *know* the hat to wear at a certain time and the hat that they need to

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<sup>204</sup> Some literature described the need for options for inclusion of Islamic practices in public schools, others described enduring white, Eurocentric cultures in schools and other contextual challenges Muslim students face. See, for example, Goforth and Hassan (2016); Guo (2015); McCreery, Jones & Holmes (2007); Santoro & Forghani-Arani (2015); Schlein & Chan (2010); Seward & Khan, 2016; Woodley (2015).

wear in another context. And they switch it constantly”; Nadia described Muslim youth as “stuck between two worlds; and Fatima identified children feeling like they inhabit multiple “different countries in one day!” These data excerpts underline the fact that Muslim children and youth are participating in mercurial configurations of dominant, secular, Canadian cultures and minoritized Islamic (educational) cultures simultaneously, and educators’ pedagogies must respond. Canadian cultural relevance, as a pedagogical imperative of teaching Islam to young Muslims whose culture is itself Canadian, is not about reinforcing epistemic hegemony or enduring Eurocentrism. It is about recognizing that the dominant culture in which young Muslim Canadians are growing up in, and contributing to, is shaping their learning and development. It is about Muslim educators analyzing ways of working with aspects of Canadian schooling to discern which are generative and which are not, while simultaneously critiquing their own pedagogies in light of both. Recall Faris’ primary objective of Islamic education in Canada:

It is about forging a fresh Islamic reality that belongs here and now [...] that will, of course, borrow from the past and from other times and places, but will at the same time *critique* them. And that is how growth happens. [...] I am also willing to borrow from and acknowledge the contributions that others can make to our growth moving forward. I am totally open to hybridizing what we have learned from our own traditions and borrowing from what we learn here. (H1, 4/15, 195–201)

This potent combination of borrowing, critiquing, and hybridizing is not only a quality of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014), it featured in historical descriptions of Islamic scholars engaging with non-Islamic paradigms of thought—whereby “a dialectical engagement enriched classical Muslim thought as it enabled a synthetic and integrated Muslim educational self-understanding to flourish” (Sahin, 2018, p. 15)—and it may constitute an pedagogical future of contemporary Islamic education. While this point requires further research, a Canadian iteration of cultural relevance, constituting half of a double cultural relevance in educating Muslim children

and youth, asserts that while Islamic content will persist, along with some methods, pedagogies in teaching Islam can—and must—change.

#### **8.2.4 Thinking Across Paradigms as Community Development**

Along with Canadian cultural relevance, another concern characterizing the data of this study involved Canadian community contribution. Together, the two concerns offer different angles on the need for *thinking across paradigms* in teaching and learning with Islamic pedagogy—across paradigms of home culture and destination culture, across Islamic paradigms and secular paradigms, each with their own ontological features, expressions, and practices. These two concerns are described here as rooted in an Islamic paradigm and reflecting efficacy in Islamic education. They motivate thinking across paradigms as inter-epistemic interaction towards community development and comprise a final meta-implication of the pedagogical typology.

The theme of Canadian cultural relevance made visible the need for educators to be able to speak the ‘language’ of their students, which included both vernacular *and* culture. Canadian Muslim children and youth are attaining cognitive fluency across paradigmatic contexts, as referenced by Bilal’s description of children switching hats and Fatima’s description of children inhabiting various different countries on one day. Ideally, these children’s Muslim educators would role model creative cross-paradigmatic thinking. Some educators in this study did model such cognitive creativity, which is why they could express the problem in the first place, point out examples in their classrooms, and critique their colleagues who did not think across paradigms. In what appeared to be degrees of creative complexity, the educators who thought across paradigms were motivated to help children (and their families) learn to do so.<sup>205</sup> Sideen

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<sup>205</sup> Sideen, Bilal, Fatima, and Layla were particularly able and *motivated* to help children think creatively across ontologically diverse contexts; and it seemed to constitute a primary objective for teaching Islam. Faris, Jina, and Halima were also able and passionate in thinking with children across contexts but seemed less a motivation behind

described her own struggle integrating paradigms as a teenager new to Canada, which inspired her current role as an educator and her desire to help children and youth integrate in this city. Other educators seemed to understand the *value* of such thinking, but they described outsourcing it in practice. Huda, for example, solicited her Canadian-raised sons to talk to her students about Islamically navigating Canadian public school. She seemed cognizant of the importance of cross-context thinking but described how her own children were more experienced than she was at navigating the two cultures: they are “more experienced than *me* because I wasn’t raised here; I was raised back home” (I1, 4/14, 57). Importantly, thinking across paradigms did not equate to diluting or losing Islamic knowledge and identity; to the contrary: cross-paradigm thinking was a pedagogical means to an Islamic educational end. As Sharifa described: “They have to be strong Muslims! To be fair, to be right, to defend themselves, to talk about themselves *clearly*!” Cross-paradigm thinking aimed to contribute clarity to thinking about themselves.

Problems arose when an educator seemed unwilling or unable to think across contexts. An example is the disagreement that broke out in a halaqah at the Subha Mosque School (H1, 4/19), when Reem asserted that children should to be forced to obey, and punished if they did not—but that the “laws in this country” do not support such a pedagogical approach. Layla and Hana immediately disagreed, and tension arose. In this case, Reem was not thinking across contexts—she was thinking within a paradigm of ‘back home’—and she was verbally disciplined by her colleagues for this one-paradigm thinking.

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their teaching. Interestingly, this ability does not seem to be tied to cultural origins in that not all of these educators were born or raised in Canada. Only Sideen and Bilal had spent the bulk of their lives in Canada; the others arrived as young adults. How and to what degree this ability to think across contexts is teachable and learnable requires specific further research.

To be able to think creatively across paradigms is a reality that Muslim children and youth seem required to adapt for participation in Canadian cultural life, and it is also a stated educational objective in Canadian public schools.<sup>206</sup> But if we are asking children to think creatively across paradigms, and we are asking teachers to develop, model, and lead this holistic ability themselves, then we also need to interrogate scholars in the universities. Marginalizing research paradigms because they include the non-secular is no different from teaching children within a one-paradigm model, like Reem.

A second concern, developing from the first, and which amounted to an educational objective of Islamic education for some educators, was community contribution in developing Canada. It was epitomized in Jina's description of educating Muslim-Canadian children—"If they build up a Muslim identity [...] they can also contribute to the development of Canada" (I2, 4/21); it was echoed in Halima's aim to foster a sense of volunteerism and Fatima's desire to "bring good Muslims in the community that serve the community" (I1, 4/19). Importantly, these educators emphasized that Muslim contributions to developing Canada must be built upon a solid foundation of Muslim identity and Islamic education, of which pedagogies were tools. Taken together, the pedagogies of the typology, as a unique epistemic expression, might contribute to individual development and the development of both Islamic communities and secular Canadian ones.

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<sup>206</sup> British Columbia's new curriculum, for example, describes under the title of Creative Thinking (as a Core Competency): "People who think creatively are curious and open-minded, have a sense of wonder and joy in learning, demonstrate *a willingness to think divergently, and are comfortable with complexity*. A creative thinker reflects on existing ideas and concepts; uses imagination, inventiveness, resourcefulness, and flexibility; and *is willing to take risks to go beyond existing knowledge*" (<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies/thinking/creative-thinking>; italics added for emphasis on cross-paradigm thinking). One proof that Canadian public schools actually foster this complex thinking, which remains to be seen, is the degree to which they engage in Islamic cultural relevance and include alternative epistemological perspectives in schools.

Considering Muslim educators' pedagogies as "counter-creative acts" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10)—which challenge Eurocentric, secular, epistemic hegemony by their ongoing and transformative use in sites of Islamic Education—make visible particular forms of being, learning, and developing. The ability to think across paradigms and to offer one's own epistemic perspectives may be counterhegemonic ways of contributing to epistemic diversity as community development itself. Just as Canadian cultural relevance does not mean entrenching secular epistemic hegemony, thinking across paradigms does not mean thinking solely in secular terms. Instead, both are rooted in an Islamic conceptual paradigm and based upon clear iterations of Muslim identities, which engage with other paradigms and identities. Where Canadian cultural relevance aims to advance Islamic pedagogical efficacy towards objectives of Islamic education, thinking across paradigms enables possibilities of offering novel contributions to Canadian societies and social problems. Both contribute to inter-epistemic interaction in a horizontal mode (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 36), where the goal is epistemic expansion through paradigmatic integration.

### **8.3 Further Investigations**

How can educators keep Islamic pedagogies relevant in rapidly changing youth cultures? How can they avoid pedagogical slippage from Islamic education as enabling framework for holistic and transformative self-development towards rigid indoctrination? From *taqwa* as illuminated God-consciousness towards an instrumental panopticon? As little empirical research has been conducted on pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam, let alone pedagogical efficacy in learner development, and there is so much more research to be done. Each theme of the typology may have generated more questions than it answered. Starting with dimensions of the human being, educational objectives that transcend beyond corporeal sense perception, and cultural contexts that

contribute to mediating the two in time and place, these modalities of Islamic pedagogy point to new directions in Islamic educational research, as an emerging field, and new considerations for Islamic teacher-education programs beyond secular offerings. This section explores further research directions and considerations for Islamic teacher education in light of each theme and the typology as a whole.

### **8.3.1 Islamic Educational Research**

Questions arising from the first theme revolve around developmental dimensions referenced by many of the educators, including a pure nature, cognition and emotion unified in consciousness, a lower self (nafs) to be refined, and a soul (ruh) as “creative; by means of perception, imagination, and intelligence” (al-Attas, 2005, p. 14). This theme amplifies concepts in the literature on Islamic Psychology of the constituting faculties of being human, integrates them with those of Islamic Education, and may point to a disciplinary intersection between the two fields. Further exploration of these dimensions moves into the realms of Muslim developmental psychologists and neuroscientists, and this integration requires serious consideration by Muslim scholars. Just as it is impossible to imagine the field of Education without it being informed by the field of Educational Psychology, it may be important to re-envision the field of Islamic Education as informed by elements of Islamic Psychology. If human beings are indeed comprised of these dimensions, do they require particular pedagogies for development, as suggested by those of the typology? Inherent human dignity requires unfaltering respect, reciprocally across the educator/learner dyad; divine accountability requires consistent intentionality; knowledge as light in the heart requires alertness to the vicissitudes of child intelligence and openness to adults learning from children. All call for further interdisciplinary study amongst scholars in the field of Islamic Studies, Islamic Psychology, and Islamic Education.



While many participants in Islamic education consider its material content to have been revealed and, thus, relatively consistent over time, place, and interpretation (Boyle, 2006; Halstead, 2004), the imperative of culturally-relevant pedagogical approaches—differing depending on local configurations of dominant and minority cultural contexts—constituted the second theme of this study and raises significant questions: Is culture *always* such an important factor when teaching and learning Islam? How much does it change across cultures? Is cultural context particularly important for sites of Islamic education embedded in culturally-heterogeneous societies, in non-Muslim-majority contexts like, for example, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, and the UK? What about Muslim-majority societies or in societies where one culture dominates, like Saudi Arabia? How do expressions of pedagogy look in Islamic schools in Brazil or China or Fiji? Asking the same three research questions, using the same methods, in different cultural contexts could yield interesting comparative data. Hopefully, this study contributes to a base framework for considering pedagogy in other contexts.

The modality of Transcendent Pedagogies, at the farthest reaches of corporeal perception, requires interdisciplinary inquiry, including with Islamic scholars, educational psychologists, and neuroscientists. As the most difficult to research and, in secular dominant societies, the most controversial, exploring Transcendent Pedagogies may only be possible if researchers work within iterations of Islamic paradigms.

Research trajectories based upon the three themes together as sensitizing concepts include conducting ethnographical research in other sites of Islamic education, including with children and youth learners. While some scholars claim that pedagogy as a general category is not be *aqidah*-based (Rufai, 2012), the themes of this study suggest that exploring *aqidah* with young Muslims is pedagogically-based. More research is needed at this nexus of pedagogy and Islamic

creed. An important application of Zine's (2008) critical faith-centered epistemological framework, which was beyond the scope of this study, is the conceptual space the framework creates within which faith-centered people can identify, critique, and resist racism, classism, and sexism—from both *outside* and *within* their own communities—and in “the structural circumstances that sustain them” (p. 51). This topic requires further research for both community development and the roles that sites of Islamic education can play within such development.

Discerning methods of assessing the efficacy of Islamic pedagogies may be a pressing research horizon in Islamic Education, and directly related to learner development. Given significant limitations intrinsic to an Islamic paradigm itself and described in section 7.1.1 (Measuring the Unmeasurable), assessment approaches may be humble and formative, rather than summative. Assessment approaches for further research might include observing a learner's voluntary participation in Islamic practices; depths of discussion exploring emotional valence around Islamic principles and practices and reasoning together Islamically on social or ethical issues; and degrees of transference of learned concepts between school and home and vice versa. These approaches may contribute to illuminating individual learner internalization for application of Islamic principles and practices within evolving conceptions of Islamic pedagogy.

Finally, Muslim educators' pedagogies seem to play a central role in an expression of education that aims to nurture learners of unique origins, dimensions, qualities of character, and developmental destinations. Taking the three themes together, could interdisciplinary researchers discern an Islamic theory of human development? These are all questions calling for further research.

### **8.3.2 Islamic Teacher Education**

The pedagogies of the typology collectively expand beyond conventional, secular perspectives on human development and education to reveal dimensions of Islamic pedagogy indicating that secular Western teacher education programs do not sufficiently cover the range of concepts, principles, practices, and pedagogies that Muslim Educators require in order to most effectively educate Muslim children and youth in Islam. The ceasing of ITEP left a gap in Islamic teacher education programs. Within the few Muslim teacher education programs that cater to Western Muslim educators, these three themes may contribute to the generation of new frontiers in Islamic teacher education. In addition, new programs must be developed that help teachers discern particular pedagogies as related to each them in their own cultural and educational contexts.

Dimensional Pedagogies and their roles in trajectories of human development must constitute a focus in Islamic teacher education programs. In order to most effectively engage learners in both Dimensional and Transcendent Pedagogies, educators' own self, social, and spiritual development should be prioritized in Islamic Teacher Education programs. But there are additional (and possibly thorny) points to note. First, in employing a pedagogy, an educator must understand that pedagogy, and these two pedagogic modalities lie squarely within an Islamic conceptual system. What degrees of commitment and comprehension are required to teach Islam? Can a non-practicing Muslim teach Islam? What about a non-Muslim? Second, in defining and enacting their own conceptions of Islamic pedagogy, individual educators, school leaders, stakeholders, and parents—by their own conceptual system—may be accountable for their pedagogic actions.

In selecting pedagogies responsive to the human fitra, aiming for transcendent objectives, and considering ways to support both learners integrate concepts across cultures, as members of minority Muslim communities embedded in secular dominant cultures, Muslim educators need to remain attentive to double cultural relevance. To identify features of locally-relevant pedagogies, educators and researchers together should engage in collaborative and situated cultural analysis of particular Muslim communities and dominant cultures, including, in Muslim-majority countries, ‘global’ or ‘technological’ cultures children inhabit and ‘international’ school cultures. Within these communities, educators must identify both affordances as assets and constraints as challenges to educational and developmental objectives of Islamic education. Participants in this study identified pedagogic approaches currently characterizing Canadian public schools as including autonomy, choice, discovery, freedom, play, reason, and research. Yet these approaches themselves cannot not be accepted as fact: they can, and must, be analyzed, contested, altered, and transformed in the process of becoming relevant to Islamic pedagogy. In addition, Muslim students in public schools may need their non-Muslim teachers to engage in Islamically-relevant pedagogy. This relevance might, at a minimum, include recognition that Islamic practices are directly connected to students’ own self- and social-development, including, for example, the five-times daily prayer. If Canadian public-school educators are serious about engaging in culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) with their Muslim students, they might consider aspects of the Islamic paradigm presented educationally in this study—including its ontological, epistemological, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions—and note the ways in which Muslim educators describe pedagogical engagement. Even if public-school teachers do not themselves share ontological Islamic perspectives on a human soul engaging in ongoing divine communication, could they still make space for Muslim

students to participate in practices meaningful to them? Importantly, cultural relevance is a fluid and constantly-changing phenomenon. It must be critically appraised in an ongoing fashion; educators must keep up. Just as, initially, asset pedagogies grew out of an awareness that important ways of knowing, teaching, and learning were being marginalized, even these important ways needed to be critically appraised themselves (Paris & Alim, 2014). Just because a context is culturally characterized does not mean that its pedagogies should be unconditionally accepted—Islamic ones included.

In summary, this pedagogical typology is only a starting point. Tables 8.2 and 8.3 below summarize implications, meta-implications, and tentative recommendations arising from this study. Building upon extant research on Islamic education, psychology, and pedagogies, further research is needed on each modality of the typology, in different contexts. The themes and subthemes might be considered as sensitizing concepts and starting points for multidisciplinary collaborative research with researchers, teacher educators, educators themselves, and learners in embarking upon new conceptual, empirical, and pedagogic research trajectories within Islamic Education. Discerning an Islamic theory of human development and developing a pedagogical model to be used in intervention research in sites of learning are two pressing areas for further research. Each of these directions might be best served when heterogenous voices are included in the research process itself, particularly voices of learners.

**Table 8.2 Implications and Recommendations of the Pedagogic Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Implications</b> Unique to theme	<b>Recommendations</b> For Further Research	<b>For Islamic Teacher Education</b>
<b>1. Dimensional Pedagogies</b> recognize and engage unique dimensions of learners.	Educators cannot limit themselves to secular conceptions of the human being; Islamic conceptions suggest unique pedagogies for Islamic development.	Further research is needed on developmental dimensions of human beings, as described in Islamic primary sources and identified in this typology, and pedagogies in developing them.	Dimensional Pedagogies and their roles in trajectories of human development must constitute a focus in Islamic teacher education programs.
<b>2. Contemporary-Contextual Pedagogies</b> respond to cultural context in teaching and learning Islam.	Employing pedagogies relevant to the dominant culture in the process of teaching and learning a minority (Islamic) culture suggests a double cultural relevance.	This typology as whole should be examined in different sites of Islamic education, inquiring into how culturally-relevant Islamic pedagogies change with differing configurations of dominant and minority cultural contexts.	Researchers, educators, teacher-educators must engage in collaborative cultural analysis of dominant and minority community contexts to identify affordances as assets and constraints as challenges to educational objectives.
<b>3. Transcendent Pedagogies</b> aim to foster esoteric objectives.	Transcendent Pedagogies may function as catalysts in transformation of consciousness and processes of self-development.	Interdisciplinary inquiry is needed to examine Transcendent Pedagogies, including with Islamic scholars, educational psychologists, and neuroscientists.	Educators' own self, social, and spiritual development should be prioritized in Islamic Teacher Education programs.
This pedagogical typology is only a starting point. Further research is needed on each modality, in different contexts. Further research is also needed in examining applications, learning outcomes, and methods of assessment for each Islamic pedagogy.			

**Table 8.3 Meta-Implications and Recommendations of the Islamic Pedagogical Typology**

Meta-Implications	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internally-consistent research methodologies.</li> </ul> <p>Implications of each theme refer back to the primacy of an Islamic paradigm, as a meta-implication in itself.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholars must be supported in situating research within paradigms relevant to their own interpretative contexts, regardless of how marginal to the epistemic mainstream.</li> <li>Intra-community peer review is paramount.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogical holism.</li> </ul> <p>The pedagogies of this typology are characterized by a holism that of an Islamic paradigm.</p> <p>In operationalizing unique expressions of learning and development, they necessitate new directions in Islamic educational research and Islamic teacher education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholars in Islamic Studies, Education, and Psychology might work together, including in discerning an Islamic Theory of Human Development as part of a field of Islamic Educational Psychology.</li> <li>Secular Western teacher education programs may not provide the range of pedagogies Muslim educators require to effectively educate Muslim children.</li> <li>Extant Islamic teacher education programs might consider this typology. New programs be developed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Double cultural relevance.</li> </ul> <p>Muslim children and youth are participating in mercurial configurations of dominant, secular, Canadian and minoritized Islamic (educational) cultures simultaneously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslim educators' pedagogies must be relevant to the multiple social worlds that learners inhabit; so too must those of secular, public school teachers. This typology may be informative in wider community circles.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrating paradigms as social contribution.</li> </ul> <p>The typology centers a marginalized paradigm while engaging other paradigms, illustrating possibilities of inter-epistemic interaction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslim educators, thinking with learners across paradigms, is an aspect of community development that requires further examination.</li> </ul>

#### 8.4 Conclusion: Islamic Pedagogies as Pivots in Learning and Developing

In engaging Canadian–Muslim educators in discussions on pedagogies in teaching and learning Islam, joint meaning was made on culturally-relevant ways to invite young Canadian Muslim learners to join *education in a tradition* (Kazmi, 2003, p. 282), as an ongoing conversation composed of multiple interwoven storylines across time and place, for the learner to both draw from and contribute to, in assembling a sense of self. Zine's (2008) critical epistemological framework contributed to addressing the qualitative issues of how to broadly frame a critical interpretive project involving Muslim educators and Islamic pedagogies; Ahmed's (2014) principles of Islamic research highlighted the role and responsibilities of the researcher to the community in which research was conducted. Centering an Islamic paradigm as a critical framework for knowledge production—as opposed to marginalizing it as a fragment of religious

studies—contributed to resisting rather than reproducing “the hegemony imposed by the canons of Western Eurocentric knowledge” (Zine, 2008, p. 57). From a critical, faith-based center, this study’s Islamic interpretive bricolage aimed to capture pedagogical heterogeneity, complexity, and possibility in being and becoming Muslim. It was built upon the following key ideas: first, that Islamic education, as a social, spiritual, and existential phenomena, is its own academic field; second, that aspects of an Islamic conceptual paradigm shape this field and guide research within it; third, that Islamic education and pedagogy are characterized by shifting, diasporic, and culturally-relevant aspects; and, fourth, that sites of Islamic education embody remnants of colonial injustices *and* innovative ideas; stagnant pedagogies, legacies of Muslim scholastic brilliance, *and* new possibilities. Muslim educators’ pedagogies hold potential in challenging both secular, Eurocentric hegemony and intra-community lethargy and injustices in crafting creative approaches to contemporary social challenges.

The three themes constructed reveal that uniquely Islamic conceptions of learners and educators, aiming towards uniquely Islamic objectives in particular contemporary context, require uniquely Islamic pedagogies, some of which function beyond the reach of immediate, corporal perception. Throughout the diaspora of Muslim people around the world, and their organizational decentralization, there is a “relative unity of faith and practice among Muslims who are otherwise characterized by an extraordinary diversity of race, language, culture, and social status” (Sanneh, 2004, p 695). Rooted in the majlis of Muhammad, contemporary Muslim educators’ pedagogies are part of a pedagogical diaspora across time and place. Yet, while educational implications of this unity of faith and practice may be evidenced in aspects of content material and educational objectives, the educators’ descriptions of pedagogy across the data corpus revealed significant potential for change in engaging children in teaching and learning Islam. The pedagogies of the



typology appear as multifaceted and flexible; responsive to learner, educator, culture, and context; aiming to embody contextual iterations of best practices; practically utilitarian and deeply esoteric. Much more than simply methods of teaching and learning, pedagogies are simultaneously expressions and explorations of sacred content—crystalized within the Qur'an and characterized in the Sunnah—lived as participation in multigenerational ritual practices and embodied principles in the moments that comprise a lifespan. Like every other concept in an Islamic conceptual system, pedagogies can be used for individual and social transformation or regression; as intentional acts of worship or acts of mindlessness. As such, pedagogies occupy pivotal positions between an Islamic conceptual system encompassing the highest objectives of Islamic education and individual human beings in a uniquely Islamic process of human development.

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## Appendix A: Introductory Letter for Potential Research Participants

**Study Title:** Muslim Educators' Pedagogies: Tools for Teaching, Learning, and Transforming

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia in the Human Development, Learning, and Culture program of the Faculty of Education. I am preparing to conduct a research study that inquires into Muslim teachers' perspectives on ways of teaching Islam to children. I am hoping to work with teachers who teach Islamic material—in formal (K–12), in informal (weekend) Islamic schools, or even on a free-lance basis.

My main research question is: *What methods do teachers use to teach Islam to children?*

- The study will run from April 12 through August 31, 2019.
- I would like to conduct an interview with each teacher at a convenient time and place.
- I would also like to run some group interviews (like *halaqat*), of up to four teachers each.
- These halaqat would likely be conducted outside of the school-day.
- I anticipate that total participation time would be approximately 1.5 to 4 hours.

If you teach Islam to children, I invite you to participate! Also, maybe you know of another teacher who might like to participate? If so, please send them this letter. **Interested teachers are welcome to send me an email to the address below!**

The following pages describe the study in additional detail and what participation would look like. This information is necessary to help a teacher decide if they might be interested in participating in this study. If a teacher agrees now, s/he can always withdraw at any time later. Thank you so much for considering this study and passing the attached information to other teachers who might be interested in participating! If you have any questions, my contact information is below.

Sincerely and with salaams,



PhD Candidate, Human Development, Learning, and Culture  
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, UBC  
Primary Contact and Co-Investigator of the study  
Contact information

## Research Study Description

### 1. Who is conducting the study?

**Primary Contact and Co-Investigator:** Claire Alkouatli, Doctoral Candidate  
Human Development, Learning, and Culture, Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education, Faculty of Education, UBC

**Principal Investigator:** Barbara Weber, Associate Professor  
Human Development, Learning, and Culture, Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education, Faculty of Education, UBC

**Co-Investigator and Research Supervisor:** Jasmin Zine, Professor, Sociology/Religion &  
Culture/Muslim Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University

### 2. Who is funding this study?

The study is being funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) doctoral award from the Canadian government.

### 3. Why are we doing this study?

Teaching and learning Islam is important for many Muslim families in Canada, who select full-time or part-time Islamic schools as part of their children's overall education. In getting a clearer understanding of *how* teachers teach children Islam, the purpose of this study is to invite Muslim teachers to share their thoughts and experiences on their ways or methods (*pedagogies*) of teaching and learning Islam. We think that the ways teachers teach Islam are important because Islamic education is important for many Canadian Muslim families.

### 4. What happens if you say: “Yes, I want to be in the study”?

If you decide to take part in this research study, please send an email to the Primary Contact. You will be invited to participate in 1 to 3 audio-recorded halaqat (or group interviews), organized around a primary topic of relevance to ways of teaching Islam. Along with two to four other teachers, we will discuss your experiences, thoughts, and ideas on methods of teaching Islam. Each halaqat will take approximately 90 minutes—outside of your school-work time—and will be audio recorded by the Primary Contact. Then, I will transcribe the audio recordings into text and email them to you.

The halaqat are planned as follows:

Halaqah 1: We will discuss some big questions on *why* we teach Islam to Canadian children and *ways* of teaching, including challenges, exciting moments, and possible best practices.

Halaqah 2: We will discuss how methods of teaching change over time. You will be invited, in groups of two, to draw or diagram your current methods of teaching Islam, and to imagine new ways. I hope that your diagrams/drawings (artifacts) will both make visible your ideas and inspire new ones. These artifacts will be photographed because I might want to include them in my dissertation and, potentially, in future books, papers, publications, or presentations, so if you decide to participate, I will send you a consent form. If you agree now, you can always reconsider your decision later, review your consent on an on-going basis, and withdraw at any time.



Halaqah 3: In this final halaqah—a couple of months after the others—we will discuss whether or not there are methods of teaching unique to Islam; we will also discuss the transcriptions of the first two halaqat, and the artifacts of the second one. Your additions, corrections, and clarifications will be welcomed.

You will also be invited to participate in one 45-minute, audio-recorded interview about your particular experiences and opinions on ways of teaching Islam, and learning objectives. This interview could take place during school-work hours, if all relevant parties agree. After the interview, I will email you the transcribed interview for your approval and/or correction. I am hoping to conduct interviews with individual teachers at any time between mid-April and the end of August. I will also be available to talk one-on-one at any point during the study, for any reason.

### **5. How will your identity be protected and your privacy be maintained?**

We respect your privacy and confidentiality. Your identity will not be known to anyone, except the Primary Contact, conducting the interviews/halaqat, and the one to three other teachers in your particular halaqat. You will be invited to choose a pseudonym (or fake name) for yourself at the beginning of the study; a pseudonym will also be assigned to your school or place of work. All transcriptions of halaqat and interviews will be encrypted, kept on a password-protected computer, and will not include your real name. In addition, you will not be identified by real name in any reports of the completed study. While we encourage all participants to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the focus group discussion, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.

We will ensure the confidentiality of the audio recordings. No other person than investigators mentioned above will have access to the audio recordings and they will be deleted from the audio-recording device after they are digitally transcribed into text.

Physical (printed) transcriptions and your Consent Form will be stored at a UBC facility for at least five years after the completion of this study. After this period, the transcriptions will be destroyed to ensure that confidentiality will not be breached.

### **6. Study results**

The results of this study—possibly also including your artifacts—will be reported in a PhD dissertation after the study's completion, inshallah. Results may also be published in journal articles and books, presented at academic or educational conferences, presented for community development, and/or used to contribute to a model for use in Islamic schools. If you want to receive the results of this study, and/or any publications that come from it, please provide your contact information below so I can send the information to you. In addition, if you want the results to be shared with your school—other teachers, school leaders, staff, parents, children—I **would be happy to deliver a presentation, within which you would have the opportunity to collaborate and participate.**

It is possible that, in the future, a funder or a journal may require the data of this study—transcriptions of the interviews and the halaqat—to be made publicly available. If this were to happen, it might increase the chance that someone could connect your words to your identity. But because your identity will be protected by your pseudonym, it is more likely that people who read your words would not know who actually said them. Also, while you can withdraw your data at any time during the study, if the data is made publicly available, you would not be able to withdraw your data after that.

**7. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?**

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you; you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer; and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative professional consequences. One possible risk is that the study might bring to public attention methods of teaching in Islamic schools, which some people may disagree with and some people might not understand. Yet we think this risk is low; one reason being that the intentions of the study are to explore *best practices*, new ideas, good ideas, and ways of enhancing teaching and learning Islam specific to Canadian Muslim children.

**8. What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

While we will not pay you for your participation in this study, participation may help you think about your experiences and practices teaching Islam, past successes and challenges, learning objectives, and share and receive new ideas relative to your particular context. Expressing your ideas visually may help to strengthen them and/or generate new ones. In addition, your participation has benefit to the larger Muslim community: taking about your experiences and practices may help shed light on how teachers' teach Islam, and contribute to improving teaching and learning efficacy and experiences for Muslim children. Thus, your participation, and what we learn together in this study, may benefit other teachers and students, and their communities—not just in Canada but also around the world, wherever teachers teach Islam. Finally, you may meet new teachers and/or deepen relationships with teachers you already know.

**9. Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact either me (primary contact) or (the principal investigator at UBC) or (my research supervisor, based in Ontario). Our names and email addresses are listed above, on Page 2.

**10. Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**

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](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or call toll free 1-877- 822-8598.

**Date:** February 25, 2019

**Ethics ID number:** H19-00275

## Appendix B: Informed Participant Consent Form for Islamic Educators

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you! You have the right to refuse to participate. If you decide to take part now, you can still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason—just send me an email—without negative impact on yourself, your school, or your community life.

If you *do* want to participate, please sign your name below and return this form to the Primary Contact in person or by email. Your signature indicates that:

- You have received a copy of the Introductory Letter (attached) for your own records.
- You consent to participate in this study!

In addition, please indicate the ways in which you agree to participate (circle **yes** or **no**):

- You consent to participate in an interview with the Primary Contact: **yes / no**
- You consent to participate in the halaqat (group interviews): **yes / no**
- You consent to participate in visually expressing your ideas by making an artifact: **yes / no**
- You consent for the Primary Contact to include a photo of your artifact in her dissertation and future potential publications and presentations: **yes / no**

**Participant Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethics ID number:** H19-00275

## Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

*Purpose:* To gather data towards answering the research questions in the form of individual-teacher responses to interview questions.

*Description:* Teachers will be invited to participate in a single 30-45-minute, one-on-one, interview at any convenient time during the study duration (April–August, 2019). Afterwards, the participant will be sent the transcription of the interview. Member-checking will take place over the phone or in person in summer. Take care to not repeat a question if a participant attended both an interview + a halaqah.

Research Question (RQ)	Interview Questions (IQs)
1. What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners in teaching and learning Islam (and why)?	<p><b>1. Please describe some of your favorite methods of teaching Islam.</b> —What makes them favorite? Why do you use them?</p> <p><b>2. Describe a memorable teaching moment</b> —How did students respond? Did it change your ways of using pedagogy?</p> <p><b>3. What makes a method effective?</b> —Describe a classroom’s looks + sounds when children are engaged in effective pedagogy?</p> <p><b>4. What are some of the biggest challenges you face?</b> —How does the Islamic material itself present methodological challenges?</p> <p><b>5. How does the uniqueness of each child feature in your methods?</b> —Are there some pedagogies that work for <i>all</i> children? —What do you do when a pedagogy does not work for some?</p> <p><b>6. Where do your ideas come from on ways of teaching Islam?</b> —For example, teacher-education program, colleagues, mentors? —Do you draw upon how you yourself were taught? —How do you draw from Muhammad’s example in teaching Islam?</p>
2. How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives?	<p><b>7. How would you define Islamic learning objectives?</b> —Why teach children Islam? Ultimate aim? —How do you approach those objectives?</p> <p><b>8. How do you use methods of teaching to approach these objectives?</b> —What is the role of your methods in engaging learners? In forging students’ emotional and intellectual connections to Islam? —How do methods change when teaching Islam in new places + times? —How might ways of teaching equip students with resilience against Islamophobia?</p> <p><b>9. Muslims have unique perspectives on the human being: we have a nafs, qalb, ‘aql, and ruh. How do these components affect the methods you choose to teach by?</b></p>

<p>3. How might educators imagine, design, and implement new or contextually relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam?</p>	<p><b>10. Are there any unique methods that are best-suited, unique to, or required for teaching Islam?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Are there any particular pedagogies that could be considered intrinsic, endemic, or traditional to Islam?</li> <li>—Are any pedagogies derived from aqidah or from an Islamic conceptual system?</li> <li>—Is there such thing as an ‘Islamic’ pedagogy? How would you define it?</li> </ul> <p><b>11. How are teaching methods interchangeable between contexts?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Does Islam need to be taught relative to local place and time?</li> <li>—Which methods that you use to teach Islam might be new and useful in secular educational contexts?</li> <li>—Do you have any favorite methods drawn from non-Islamic contexts?</li> <li>—What about teaching Islam in a formal school, a mosque school, a summer program, at home? Is the content the same? The goals? The methods?</li> </ul> <p><b>11. Can you imagine any new or better ways of teaching Islam (to Muslim Canadian children)?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—What are your visions for the future of teaching and learning Islam?</li> </ul> <p><b>Extension or Extra Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—How might pedagogy be used to stimulate the development of consciousness (<i>taqwa</i>)? What about whole child development?</li> <li>—How much do you draw on Prophetic pedagogy (ﷺ)?</li> <li>—Who decides on pedagogy?</li> </ul>
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## Appendix D: Halaqat Protocol

*Description:* Educators were invited, in groups between two to four, to participate in one or two 90-minute audio-recorded halaqat. Each was guided by three or four guiding questions (see below).

*Purpose:* To gather data towards answering the research questions in the form of small-group discussion on how the educators understand and use pedagogies, in relation to educational objectives.

### General Halaqah Intended Sequence

- Set up refreshments: dates, nuts, cookies
- Distribute consent forms and remind participants that their consent is voluntary
- Sit in a circle with the audio recorder in the middle
- Start by saying (aloud or privately): ‘Salaam aleikum. Bismilallah al Rahman al Raheem. May our intention be accepted to share valuable knowledge on teaching and learning Islam and forgive us if we make a mistake’
- Share a bit about myself and the study
- Ask each participant to introduce him/herself with a pseudonym share an objective in teaching Islam
- Offer each guiding question, in order
- Facilitate the ensuing discussion, being mindful of the limitations of the method

### **Halaqah 1**

<b>Research Question (RQ)</b>	<b>Guiding Questions (GQs)</b>
1. What pedagogies do Muslim educators use in engaging children learners specifically in teaching and learning Islam?	<b>1. Why do we/you (plural) teach children Islam?</b> —What are the objectives of teaching children Islam? <b>2. How is Islam best taught and learned?</b> —Describe some successes and challenges in methods. —Which work best and why?
2. How do educators relate their pedagogies to educational objectives?	<b>3. How do</b> Islamic perspectives of the human being—including nafs, qalb, ‘aql, and ruh— <b>affect the methods you choose to teach by?</b> —Do these components only come into play when teaching Islam or other subjects too? <b>4. Are there any methods that are unique to Islam?</b> —Are any methods considered intrinsic to Islam? —Are any methods related to aqeeda? —Do any methods come from Islamic concepts? —Would it be possible to describe an ‘Islamic way of teaching’?

## Halaqah 2 (artifact-mediated)

Research Question (RQ)	Guiding Questions (GQs)
3. How might educators imagine, design, and implement new or contextually relevant pedagogies for enhancing teaching and learning Islam?	<p><b>1. How do methods of teaching Islam change?</b> —Over time? Over place? Over child?</p> <p><b>2. How can our teaching methods help meet the learning objectives?</b></p> <p><b>3. Imagine that you had no constraints on methods of teaching</b>—of time, money, or social pressure (from parents, students, Muslim community, dominant-culture community, religious leaders)—<b>what would be your ideal ways of teaching Islam?</b> —Use this blank paper to draw, diagram, and/or visually depict your ideas on methods of teaching Islam to Canadian Muslim children, for example, mind-map, a sketch, or any other visual representation.</p> <p><b>4. Let's share artifacts and discuss them!</b></p>

## Appendix E. Transcript Conventions

Adapted from Schiffrin (1993).

#.	Each utterance is numbered.
.	Falling intonation followed by a noticeable pause (declarative sentence).
?	Rising intonation followed by a noticeable pause (inquiring sentence).
!	Animated tone.
...	Within a sentence: noticeable pause or break in rhythm.
...	At the end of a sentence: trailing off.
—	Setting off a clause; abrupt end of sentence; speaker interrupting self or being interrupted by another speaker.
[ ]	Additional description on speech style, [whisper] [laugh], or action, or explanation.
( )	Contains English translation of Arabic words.
<i>italics</i>	Arabic words
	Emphatic stress
	Indicates words subsequently described in ( ).
CAPS	Very empathic stress
“	A quote within an utterance; participant quoting others or him/herself.