

# *Today's School Tomorrow's Society*

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"Schooling is a way of transmitting and conserving, expanding and rectifying the knowledge, values, and skills antecedent to a life of purpose, of work, of accomplishment, of personal growth . . . Schools were invented, organized, and developed to serve as agents of society; to inculcate in the young habits of good choice which were meant to sustain visions of excellence, of greatness, and of the power of knowledge and high conduct." Geneva Gay, 1992

Schools are the most needed of all institutions as education leads us from where we are to where we need to be. The purpose of schooling is more than teaching students how to read and write. It is to educate and prepare them to mold the future according to our ideals and beliefs. Thus, the primary purpose of schooling is to teach students to become social change agents as individuals and as members of a group with common interests and causes. Schools need to model the values of freedom, equality, respect, dignity, and justice and promote intolerance to all forms of discrimination, oppression, and exploitation that Islam has forbidden.

Since schools act as an agency for the formation of a society and its civilization, education's social processes and functions have no definite meaning until the contexts in which they operate are identified and the kind of society we desire is defined. "Education is not a neutral or objective enterprise in content, form, or function. All of its dimensions are influenced by certain cultural values and convictions about what is important to know and to become, and why" and as Muslims we need to constructively analyze the educational system that provides this blue print for future society.

Education today is at a great risk with an epidemic of social ills, drugs, violence, and sexual promiscuity on the rise. This, coupled with a decrease in parental involvement and a lack of respect towards authority, has led to the tearing of the moral and ethical fabric of society. The goals of most schools have become that of fulfilling the needs of the standardized test scores rather than educating and preparing children to be productive and responsible citizens. Unfortunately, most high school students graduate with a diploma in hand but are ill prepared to read and write or to meet the demands of an ever-changing society and the work place. The United States has lost its rank among the industrialized nations of the world. A close look at the current education system gives an indication that schools need to be reformed with a hope to build a better society in the future.

"The era of the Western system has come to an end primarily because it has lost those life-giving values that enabled it to be the leader of mankind." The present education system can be very closely compared to the "jahiliyyah" society of the past with its low morals, ethnic and cultural hatred, and with faith being considered as least significant of all values. To reform such a system Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his

companions (peace be unto them all) had made a unified effort to organize a movement that was able to provide practical and meaningful solutions to the problems of the total society.

A time has come for Muslims to spread their "deen" in this land of opportunity and bring to a crippling nation, social and educational reform. If the United States considers itself as the leader in the global world, it becomes even more detrimental to ensure that such a nation is in good shape before it begins to take the responsibility of shaping the world. It certainly would be an easier task to work with young children whose personalities are like "jello" and can be easily molded in whatever form and direction is needed. The primary concern of Islamic Schools should be to prepare the grounds for establishing a successful Muslim community. For any seed to transform into sweet fruits, it is important to plant them in a fertile soil that is rich with nutrition and substance. What better example can we think of than Islamic Schools.

This can be accomplished by providing an academic environment that cultivates an Islamic personality that is not signifying any one specific country or culture, rather, one that promotes righteousness and is based on true Islamic principles. As Allah says in the Quran

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair)  
Of a male and a female,  
And made you into Nations and tribes, that  
Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise Each other).  
Verily the most honored of you  
In the sight of God  
Is (he who is) the most  
Righteous of you." Quran, 49:13

There is no other correct method to revive Islam in the west, "except to follow its natural character and to develop it into a movement and an organic system." Isn't Islam's ultimate aim to awaken the humanity of man? Islamic Schools will mark an era in the reformation of the western society and global societies as the Muslim community prepares to fulfill its divinely appointed task for mankind. Whether one is from the most religious cities of Mecca and Medinah or from the city of idol worshippers in India, does not matter to our creator, what counts the most is the righteous person in the eyes of Allah.

Prejudice and ethnicity can destroy an Islamic school as termites can destroy the very foundation of a strong building. As mentioned in the Quran: "You are the best community raised for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and you believe in Allah."

"This was the community in the first generation of which there were Abu Bakr from Arabia, Bilal from Abyssinia, Suhaib from Syria, Salman from Persia, and their other brothers in Faith. Nationalism here is belief, homeland here is Dar-al-Islam, the ruler here is Allah, and the constitution here is the Quran." (Sayyid Qutb, 1990) Thus the culture of Islamic schools should be one that can nourish and nurture children to be better Muslims, examples for the Muslim world in particular and the global world in general.

The theme of this year's ISNA Convention is Islam: Strength through Diversity and this is also the motto of the 21st century America as this has a very powerful message for all of us. The root cause of destruction for any community and more so the Muslim Ummah is the lack of unity caused by diversity. Culture plays a very dominant role -- it can either build or destroy nations. Culture is not limited to the outward dress and food; it is "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people," and these values provide the blueprint to the younger generations and to the future societies.

The United States has already come to the realization that Unity in Diversity is more a strength than a weakness. Today, the focus in the United States has been on the motto e pluribus Unum----- out of many, one. Through the efforts of the minority groups such as the African-Americans, Native-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, the "Melting pot" concept has changed to that of a "salad bowl", where diversity does not have to be "melted" rather it is preserved in the healthy "salad bowl".

Muslim Academy of Central Florida, an Islamic School located in the heart of Central Florida is being presented as a Case Study. It is a school that caters to the needs of children from more than thirty-five countries, no one being dominant over the other. A look at the diversity of students at the Academy is a reminder of the Quranic verses:

" And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those who know." (30:22)

Muslim Academy of Central Florida is a learning community in which students and adults have a shared vision of designing a future community, based solely on the principles of Islam. This learning is based on a doctoral study entitled : Cross-Cultural Experiential Learning Practices For Training Teachers in Multicultural Education which is based on the ISLAM model of Multicultural Education: (Qadri, 1994)

**I**mmersion  
**S**urvival  
**L**earning  
**A**cceptance  
**M**odification

The above model is applied to the students and parents of the Academy. At the entry stage, as each student or adult enters the Muslim Academy, they are **immersed** in an Islamic culture different than their own (American, Arabic, Asian etc.) This is the initial stage towards the hope of breaking down the barriers of cultural differences and prejudice.

The second stage, which is **the survival** stage, could be challenging and stressful. Individuals may resist the immersion in the Islamic culture and experience the pressure of adapting to a new culture. Older

students can feel out of place and may want to return to their non-Islamic schools. Some may transfer out of the school while others may survive.

**Learning** takes place, where students and adults begin to see the Islamic school from a positive and constructive lens. Teachings of Islamic studies and the Quran will incorporate a willingness to proceed with a better understanding of the host culture. Rather than focussing negatively on the differences, individuals will focus on strength of diversity.

**Acceptance** is the fourth stage where the individual begins to accept the culture as the word of God and begins to see the benefits of Islam as a complete way of life. At this stage the individual desires to learn more about Islam with a desire to institutionalize it, to have it become an on-going and regular part of his/her life.

**Modification**, the final stage is the highest level of Multicultural Education where individuals begin to evaluate their prejudices and stereotypes presented at the Immersion stage. At this point individuals are involved in education as partners in a reform movement. Students can become change agents and work on dawah towards building a better society.

Thus, schools can be a powerful change agent that can reform the present "jahilliyyah" society towards building an Islamic society -- Islam came with this total guidance and decisive teaching. The children of Islamic Schools and the future of our Ummah should not be enslaved as their parents were, from the earthly bonds of nationality, race, language and country.

Islam knows only two kinds of societies, the Islamic and the jahili. The Islamic society is a community that follows Islam in belief and ways of worship, in law and organization, and in morals and manners. It is a community in which sovereignty belongs exclusively to Allah and finds expression in its obedience to the Divine Law. Sayyid Qutb 1990

Once the Islamic culture is established, a fertile land is prepared to plant the seeds that will eventually bear good fruits. Thus, through Islamic schools we can provide a society and culture to our children contrary to the other cultures, one that shows the true Islam as described in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Islamic Schools are the answer to reform society as Allah calls upon His Ummah to "enjoin good and forbid evil". As an educator, I remind each one of you and myself to join the mission to build an Ummah that is free from prejudice and hatred, that can one day be better prepared to bring in peace among nations and tribes of this world. Please join us at the blueprint stage and support Islamic Schools! Today's school will be Tomorrow's society! InshaAllah!

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