

The Future of Muslim Education in the United States: An Agenda for Research

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Abstract

This paper addresses some of the Muslim community's concerns regarding its children's education and reflects upon how education has shaped the position of other communities in American history. It argues that the future of Muslim education will be influenced directly by the present realities and future trends within American education in general, and, more importantly, by the well-calculated and informed short-term and long-term decisions and future plans taken by the Muslim community. The paper identifies some areas in which a well-established knowledge base is critical to making decisions, and calls for serious research to be undertaken to furnish this base.

Introduction

During the last decade, the presence of Islam and Muslims has become a subject of discussion in the national media, a topic of research in strategic studies centers, and part of the official discourse. A few visionary individuals have influenced the development of this Muslim presence during the last few decades; however, more systematic futuristic thinking and long-term planning have become imperative for Muslim intellectuals, activists, and institutions if Muslims are to take their rightful place within the American fabric. The need for such strategic planning has become even more vital since the events of 9/11, as drastic challenges now face Muslims in all walks of life, particularly regarding their children's education.

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This paper has four goals: (1) to address some of the Muslim community's concerns regarding its children's education; (2) to reflect upon the role of education in shaping the position of other communities in American history; (3) to argue that the future of Muslim education will be influenced directly by the present realities and future trends within American education in general, and, more importantly, by the Muslim community's own well-calculated and informed short- and long-term decisions and plans; and (4) to identify some areas in which a well-established knowledge base is critical for making decisions and that serious research is urgently needed to furnish this base.

It is important to make a distinction between Islamic education as prescribed by the Qur'an and the Sunnah and understood by specialized scholars and intellectuals, and Muslim education as practiced in Muslim societies and communities. Eminent Muslim scholars who attended the First World Conference on Muslim Education, held in Makkah in 1977, realized that Muslim countries have consciously adopted the western system of education. They also realized that the corruption and backwardness of Muslim societies, although possibly due in part to external causes, are caused internally and have seriously contributed to a general disarray and inability to discern the full truth lying at the core of the current dilemma. At the heart of these internal causes lies the confusion of the concept of education.¹

The distinction between Islamic education and Muslim education on one hand, and between Islamic education and teaching traditional Islamic sciences on the other, is beyond the scope of this paper. However, such a distinction is a rich area for research. Suffice it to say that at this point, Muslim parents and educators need to realize that Islamic schools should adopt a holistic approach to their students' education, one in which Islamic values and ideals are integrated into all forms of knowledge across the school curriculum, while simultaneously cultivating Islamic attitudes, behaviors, and manners.

Another distinction is the need to develop new insights and experiences relevant to our life in the United States, where much of the traditional literature and understandings developed in Muslim societies may not be relevant. The approach of contemporary Islamic schools in a western secular environment may take a different route from the one that prevailed in earlier Muslim-majority societies, for education in American Islamic schools must relate to the non-Muslim-majority American society. At the same time, this education must relate to the current state of knowledge, issues, and understandings, for:

If Muslim children are to grow up as witnesses to the truth in a non-Muslim society, they need to understand that society and to develop an objective and critical approach so that they can appreciate whatever is good in it, avoid its evils, and reach out to the non-Muslims, presenting the truths of Islam in a way they can understand and relate to.²

Muslim communities in the United States are passing through a period of rapid and turbulent change, the hazards and complexities of which pose serious problems that may lead to despair. Therefore, it is vital to understand the sources of hope, inspiration, and optimism while remaining aware of immediate challenges and threats on a daily basis.

Future and Futuristic Thinking

When Muslims think of the future of their societies, they are often pre-occupied by past and present realities. Such thinking commonly involves criticizing current western society and its ills that were imported into Muslim societies and communities. Proposed solutions suggest Islamic alternatives and solutions; however, the general trend is not to go into the details of how to achieve them. In other words, the proposed solutions either refer to a utopia in the West's recent past or to one in the distant past and an unknown land.

Contemporary Islamic scholarship faces a real challenge when it comes to imagining an Islamic future. However, this has to be done if we are to decide on what we will or will not do. "What humans do ... depends on their images of the future."³ We must ask ourselves what kind of future we want so that we can consciously choose to do certain acts and to avoid others.

The recent dramatic changes that have taken place throughout the world were unprecedented: the cold war's end, the Soviet Union's collapse, the rise of a new world order in which the United States is the sole superpower, an aggressive American foreign policy, American vulnerability to the threat of unorganized and undefinable sources, growing anti-American sentiment in the world (especially in Europe and the Muslim world), and 9/11's consequences on civil liberties in this country. All of these changes have spread uncertainty about what will happen, even in the immediate future.

In his studies on the future of Muslim civilization, Ziauddin Sardar identifies two main alternative futures: First, current trends may determine the future and lead Muslims to a particular future, one that is not developed with purposeful actions and thus is aimless and probably dis-

astrous; or, second, a planned future. If the Muslim community plans constructively and executes its plan with foresight, it may achieve the best possible future. In order to do this, however, an appropriate research approach is required, for: “The need to rest research and study of alternative Muslim future on a strong theoretical foundation is cardinal.”⁴ Sardar views alternative futures as planning horizons from which planners may select particular horizons and then plan fruitfully. Such horizons can be broken down into five levels:

- The immediate future, which extends from the present moment to 1 year.
- The near future, a 5-year or a 7-year developmental plan designed by the government.
- One generation (25-30 years).
- Multi-generational or long-range (50-60 years).
- The far future (60 years and beyond).⁵

The Qur’an contains lessons on how to plan for the future by considering the needs of the entire society and even neighboring societies. Prophet Yusuf requested Egypt’s king to appoint him as a minister of resources to plan for 14 years on how to manage the surplus crops during the first 7 years of good harvests so that enough food would be available during the coming 7 years of drought. Neighboring societies, as the Qur’an relates, also depended on that plan.⁶

The Prophet’s Sunnah also tells us how to plan for the education of future Muslim generations. After the Battle of Badr, the Prophet required each Qurayshi prisoner to teach 10 Muslim children how to read and write as a price of his freedom.⁷ For a society that was still evolving and had just been established 2 years after the *hijrah*, the priority could have been to teach adults, especially when children were vulnerable to what a non-Muslim prisoner would teach. The prophetic vision, however, was concerned with the future.

Within the Islamic framework, Muslims are required to think of the future as a life-time frame and in accordance with this purpose. The future is too soon in terms of preparing for the Hereafter, and thus every moment has a great value. However, the future is far away in terms of planning for this life.⁸ In other words, people have the whole range of time available to them during this life, but their accountability in the Hereafter for what they have done in this world makes every Muslim stretch his or her future

to the Hereafter. Future thinking at the level of future Muslim generations and of human society as a whole is exemplified by `Umar ibn al-Khattab's decision not to divide the state land of Iraq among the soldiers, but to institute kharaj instead.⁹

Discussing the future of Muslim education may be done in a *descriptive* manner, meaning that we can describe what is going on and what directions the present situation is taking. This description may lead us to envisage the immediate future in a relatively accurate manner, provided that all factors continue to operate in the same way and that no drastic events alter the course of things and actions. Another way of discussing the future is to use a *prescriptive* approach, by emphasizing what should be done according to certain criteria.

In an Islamic framework, these two approaches should be combined, for there are always norms and values that dictate certain levels of knowledge and behaviors for Muslims. At the same time, we are concerned about human beings, not angels, and the knowledge and behavior of real people. After all, education is a process through which we try to raise people from where they are to a better level. This change usually happens gradually and at an individual pace.

Many people fear the future because it is uncertain. The dynamic processes that shape it are forces – forces that are too powerful to handle or challenge. Thus thinking about it is not easy, because it has certain difficult requirements. Those who engage in such thinking need to consider past and present realities in order to understand what has happened as well as current trends. To do just that and to document these realities requires, in terms of quality and quantity, rigorous, painful, and costly research. In addition, they must be able to imagine things that might happen. We cannot consciously build a future that we have not first imagined, for “to build a workable future, we need a quantum increase in the depth and quality of information about our common future.”¹⁰

One more reason for the difficulty of thinking about the future is that our immediate circumstances usually clamor for our attention and inhibit our ability to transform these circumstances into better situations. Due to such clamor, people do not really recognize their power over the future and their responsibility for using it wisely.¹¹

Ever since the events of 9/11, Muslim communities have been passing through a period of rapid and turbulent change. The resulting hazards and complexities pose serious problems that may lead to despair. So, it is vital to understand the sources of hope, inspiration, and optimism for a

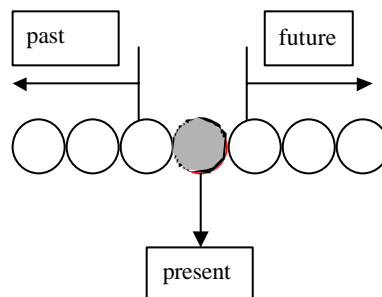
better future, while staying in the present in order to face the immediate challenges and threats on a daily basis.

Locating the Future in the Timeline

“What to do about our future is a central question of our time.”¹² History has been made by the actions of past human agents. People planned for their future and then either enjoyed their successes or suffered from their failures. Over time, their “future” becomes “history,” as do the people who planned for it. People cannot do much about the past, because it is finished. People also cannot change much about their immediate present, because it is too late to make a decision about it. Any decision made now will somehow effect only the future. The further ahead we can conceptualize our future, the more we can do about it.

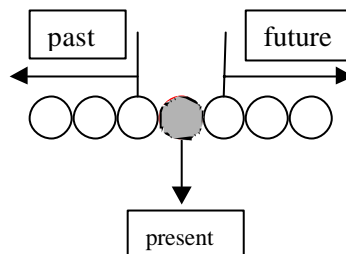
The present seems difficult to locate on a timeline. If we think of a timeline in terms of certain units, such as an hour or a minute, and represent that unit in a small circle, part of the timeline will look like figure 1:

Figure 1: Using a full unit of the timeline.



If we use half of that unit, the timeline will look like figure 2.

Figure 2: Using half of a full timeline unit.



Continuing to use smaller units of time reduces the present to a single moment of time. In terms of time, any unit of the future encompasses many micro-futures. In terms of people, any part of the future is made up of their micro-futures. The past, on the other hand, has a long history. Each of its moments used to be the present at a certain point in time. This shows how precious a moment of time, as well as its duration, is. Like the past, the future is not a single uniform state of affairs; rather, it is an ongoing process of unfolding moments reflecting the platitudes of human life. The future also does not finish; it continues to be alive.

As an open-ended system, the future is a world of constant creation, discovery, and completion, an expression of human creativity. This fact should not inhibit people from planning for a certain future, for part of the future should always be attainable by those who plan for it so that it will be easier to look forward to the next future and to redesign subsequent futures. In this way dreams become real, and new sets of dreams are envisaged when the present becomes too much like the future.¹³

The Future in Education

What is education for, if not to think and learn about the future? Families send their children to schools and universities to prepare them for their future lives. Societies spend large amounts of resources on education to develop more human and material resources in order to meet the emerging challenges of the future.

Against this obvious assumption, some hard questions may be asked: "If one of the main purposes of education is to prepare young people for the future, then where in education are they given any opportunity to explore the future?"¹⁴ This question is a result of the growing awareness that educational institutions, at every level and in every country, teach very little about the future. In addition, there is a glaring imbalance in teaching about the past and the future. All societies devote many resources to the study of history, as indeed they should, but devote relatively few resources to the study of the future.¹⁵

This awareness has been developing for the last half century. By the end of the twentieth century, future studies had become a distinct discipline with its own publications, organizations, theories, and methodologies. Many universities around the world now offer courses on future studies, but only a few universities offer formal degree programs in future studies. It will take a long time to create a movement to diffuse concepts of future in school curriculum.¹⁶

Meeting the Challenge

During the past few decades, Muslims have become visible in the American public square. Unfortunately, this happened after American interests were threatened by incidents in which Muslims were involved. Americans viewed Muslims within the context of confrontation, and Islam was seen as a foreign religion. Few Americans think of Islam as an Abrahamic religion; that Allah is not a special God of Muslims, but the same God of all people and creatures; and that Muhammad was a prophet like Moses and Jesus, the only difference being that he was the last one. “In the absence of this knowledge and awareness, Islam is often seen through explosive ‘headline events,’ and thus the hatred and violence of a minority of religious extremists obscures the faith of the mainstream majority.”¹⁷

No effort should be spared when responding to this challenge: politics, media, social activism, and so on. The long-lasting effect will be to address the young minds of future American generations through curricula and teacher education.

- In most cases, Muslim communities in the United States are not communities in the real sense of the word, for Muslim families are scattered geographically almost everywhere. This trend is expected to continue. Muslim history in this country and the Muslim psyche in the Old World did not have the ghetto mentality. Building special schools for Muslim children in such cases is not a choice in hand. The situation is the same for small communities, where, for practical reasons, regular schools with many children in each grade are not feasible alternatives. In some areas, families would choose to send their children to schools located 40 miles away from their homes every day. The resulting sacrifice – spending 2 to 4 hours a day on the bus and coming home very tired – was considered worthwhile by both the parents and the children.
- The Muslim community’s schools should be open for non-Muslim children, and their needs and requirements should be met. If a non-Muslim parent chooses to send his or her child to an Islamic school for a certain reason (e.g., a convenient location or mistrust of the local public school), the Islamic school should be able to prove that it deserves this trust. In other words, the school’s environment should not be offensive in any way. After all, more than 90 percent of Muslim children will remain in public schools, with

the majority of non-Muslim children and teachers, where they do not expect to find an offensive environment.

- The scope of Muslim identity is still developing and is a topic of hot debate and negotiation: Is it a single Muslim identity, a dual Muslim-American identity, or a multiple Egyptian-Arab-Muslim-American, identity, and so on? This issue might not be settled by this present generation of Muslim adults. However, maintaining a Muslim identity for the next generation is considered an act of jihad,¹⁸ and education is viewed as the single most important factor in ensuring the Muslim community's survival.

The fact that all Muslims belong to one ummah does not negate the fact that legitimate differences are found among them due to ethnic, geographical, and other differences among those Muslims residing in this country. Situations in Muslim countries allow Muslims to justify some level of difference (e.g., Egyptian Muslims vs. Pakistani Muslims, or even Pakistani Muslims vs. Indian Muslims). American Muslims, similarly, feel compelled to identify themselves as American Muslims in order to "make it in America." Muslim national organizations in America have taken great strides in this direction, but need to continue to move more aggressively.

- Muslim immigrants, who presently constitute the majority of this country's Muslim community, are still loyal to their native traditions, many of which are not necessarily religion-based. More important is the way in which Muslims understand religion and apply it in their particular situation in time and place. For example, until recently most Muslim communities used to bring imams and schoolteachers (and even textbooks) from Muslim countries, with no consideration for the *fiqh* of minorities, the English language, or interaction with non-Muslims. Such people are not usually sensitive to the experiences that American Muslims encounter in their local communities. During the last few years, this trend has started to change rapidly into what John Esposito calls the "Americanization of the Muslim experience."¹⁹ More involvement in local politics and integration is needed urgently. Muslim identity is undergoing a radical reformation, which means that more emphasis will be put on civic education.
- One of the major trends in the American Muslim community's life is self-reliance and the consequent need to be more aware of other

societal resources. The time of sending delegations to the Middle East to raise funds for schools and mosques has passed.

- Much of the experience related to curriculum development, teacher education, school governance, and parental involvement is available for Muslim educators, both in theory and practice. However, these experiences have negative aspects of which Muslim educators should not lose sight. One of these aspects is related to the quality of teachers and teacher education programs at a global level. For a long time, the low quality of teachers has threatened humanity's future. Within the American context, an overwhelming body of research highlights the unfortunate fact that typical American teachers and teacher candidates are not smart enough or sufficiently trained to educate American students, and that they occupy the lowest level of academia. The problem does not lie in their loyalty and dedication to their demanding profession; rather, it lies "in the fact that our society has selected the wrong people to teach in our public schools, and has trained them in a wrong-headed manner."²⁰ The United States Department of Education states that "too many teachers are being drawn from the bottom quarter and third of the graduating high schools and college students."²¹

In 1990, the Educational Testing Service checked the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores of 930,000 high school seniors and then asked each student what he or she intended to study in college. Those who intended to become teachers scored near the bottom. In 1997, another study looked at the correlation between SAT scores and the intended vocations of the 1.7 million students who took the test. Those who intended to become teachers ranked fourth from the bottom of 22 intended vocations.²² The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is offered to students who intend to enroll in a master's degree program. Students seeking to enter the field of education come in at the absolute bottom of eight specialties.²³

In general, such indicators should remind American parents of the sad reality that a typical college-bound high school senior may well score 50 points higher on the SAT than his or her teacher did at the same age. In addition, researchers have found that public confidence in public education in general has been declining rapidly. In the 1970s, 40 percent of people had a great deal of con-

fidence; by the mid-1990s, that number had declined to less than 25 percent.²⁴

- The priority of building a mosque that contains a school or building a school that contains a mosque is yet to be settled. The need for full-time schools has been in the air for some time, and several Islamic schools have been built since the 1970s. During the last 15 years or so, the urgency of establishing full-time schools has become more evident. Raising funds for building a mosque is still easier than for building a school, although the necessary prayer facilities can be met within a good school plan. This trend of making the school a focal point of the community, where even the mosque is part of it, should be encouraged for practical and financial reasons, as it is more in keeping with the Islamic tradition of mosques serving as major learning centers. This tradition has changed in most Muslim countries, for the trend is to build large and costly mosques that are closed most of the time. Even the five daily prayers are held in a small corner, and the rest of the building is open only once a week for Friday prayers.
- Public school education in the United States is undergoing a transformation similar to that of the telephone industry when it was deregulated during the 1980s and more options became available. There are now thousands of charter schools, millions of home-schooled children, and hundreds of private for-profit K-12 schools. Furthermore, funding for public schools is challenged by vouchers, property tax changes, and financial pressures on state and local governments. As a matter of fact, in 2002 many Islamic schools received a sizable number of students using the voucher alternative.

Integrating public schools, a major thrust of the last 20 years, now has been relegated to the back burner, having been replaced by security, which was not even an issue 30 years ago. This has affected both school choice and school operations. School violence has rocked American society in the last few years, where deadly shootings in and around schools have been in the news long enough to make parents worry about their children's safety. Hate incidents and harassment cases against Muslim children after 9/11 became – and remain – a major issue for most American Muslims. Muslim students were forced to be absent from their schools for a week or more, and many would not even go back to public schools.

Research on Muslim Education

When reading about issues related to Muslims in the United States, most probably you notice quite often such words as “many,” “most,” “majority,” “in a few cases,” “some families,” and “in a number of.” The writer has to resort to such expressions as an alternative to more definitive figures and percentages, because these alternatives are just not there. The field lacks the necessary empirical and field research to provide accurate data and reliable knowledge.

Although there have been some scattered articles based on the field research of some Muslim individuals during the last 40 years, the Muslims in the American Public Square Project (MAPS) may be the first serious research to provide reliable data about several aspects of the American Muslim landscape. This project, which started in 1998 and finished its first and second phases in 2001, published some findings and is still looking for funds and support to continue its work.²⁵

Very few Muslim-authored articles and publications can be found on education, which used to be the second concern of Muslim communities after mosques. In addition, it is interesting to note that the field of Muslim education does not occupy a suitable place in issues and questions on the *fiqh* of minorities in the United States or the West. In a recently published book on the *fiqh* of minorities, discussions ranging from food and drink, to marriage and divorce, houses and banks, and social relations with neighbors take up 200 pages, while schools and universities are not even mentioned.²⁶

The only published field research report available concerns a project carried out in the late 1980s by a group of professional educationists who surveyed the existing full-time schools (49) at that time and published their findings in an 80-page booklet.²⁷ Those statistics are now greatly outdated. It is more important today to determine the difference in the quality of education between then and now.

During the last 10 years, a plethora of Islamic educational organizations and associations has appeared on the scene. It was expected that they would provide basic statistical data about the schools that they are supposed to serve. While writing this paper, I consulted the available literature about Islamic educational institutions as well as the Internet, expecting the search engines to be a great help. Unfortunately, that was not the case. As Mohamed Nimer has related: “There is little publicly available information in the North American context about Muslims and

their communities.”²⁸ Even the limited databases kept on some Muslim schools by various major Muslim organizations and associations have been kept for internal and private use.²⁹ Visiting the websites of about 40 full-time Muslim schools shows that even the basic data required by researchers have not been put online.

This should be an alarming signal for all Muslim educationists who are concerned with the future of Islamic education and the course of action to be taken in the near future. The educational scene of Muslim communities is little more than a blur, which makes any serious research designed to map out the realities of its educational experiences a novel undertaking. All areas of these experiences are open for research. Talking to several Muslim educational centers and councils, as well as viewing several of their websites, reveals the fact that no one can claim any authoritative knowledge about the number of Muslim schools. Several educational bodies have been established recently to gather basic data about Muslim schools, their policies and curriculum materials, but concrete results have yet to be published. This is one of the reasons why this paper strongly advocates original and rigorous research in order to provide the knowledge base for decisions regarding the future of Muslim education in the United States.

It will be interesting to survey what has been written on Muslim education in this country and to analyze this body of literature in terms of who writes and why, and what methodology and resources are being used.³⁰ In the following paragraphs, I will give some recent examples from magazines, Internet websites, and national newspapers.

In her article in *The American Muslim* magazine, Mona Abdassalam mentions that she used to hold the opinion that an Islamic school is the only choice. In fact, she published an article to that effect 10 years ago. Now, however, she understands the issue in a different way: “Now I can say, with sincerity, that it was not a mature or realistic opinion. At that time, my son was just two months old and I was out of touch with the plurality of experience within the American Muslim community.”³¹

Such impressions, no more than opinions based on personal experiences, can be found in most Muslim magazine articles about education. In a special issue of *Islamic Horizons* on Muslim schools, the editor declared that: “The author of each article writes from a background that represents extensive practical first-hand knowledge and experience as Islamic educators.”³² This is not to belittle the deep meanings imbedded in such articles or their importance in the effort “to solve the problems Islamic schools

face by using ‘bottom up’ rather than ‘top down’ approach.” The point here is to emphasize the lack of a wide-ranging research-based literature that compiles and articulates personal experiences and individual knowledge and practice. Research-based reports and articles are also needed to envisage and plan for the future.

Similar articles based on personal observations, experiences, and ideological orientations can be found on the Internet. For example, a well-known author and educator cited various strong statements mentioned by a school principal: “Most parents send their children here (to an Islamic school) for reasons other than Islam.” The author himself commented from his own experience: “I had met the families of many of my students in the Muslim school. What I saw shocked me.” The article is full of strong generalizations about immigrant Muslim families and ends with an absolutist conclusion: “Muslim schools: the only hope for the future” and an absolutist dream: “I just hope that there will be a Muslim community twenty years from now when the old people, who grew up in Muslim countries, die off.”³³

National newspapers have had a say on the issue of Islamic schools – a say that has been on the increase since the 9/11 events. For example, two *Washington Post* staff writers visited several Islamic schools in the Washington, DC, area to interview principals, teachers, and students, and to examine curriculum materials and school environments. One of their major concerns was to determine the type of education that Muslim children were receiving, insofar as they are both American and Muslim. Although the authors documented various aspects of what they found, readers of their article would conclude that these Islamic schools are rife with anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric, that children are torn between traditional Islamic education and the dominant popular culture, and that Muslim schools face a tension of Islamic and American views.³⁴

The place of research on education and its findings in educational policies and practices is not well understood. Many professional educators in schools and, in fact, many parents assume that what needs to be done in schools is mostly a matter of common sense. Research is the business of those residing in ivory towers at universities and has very little, if anything, to do with school practices. According to this logic, if Muslim communities have resources to spend, research on education may be the least important and last item on the agenda, if time and money permit.

The history of education in most countries has witnessed a tradition of making decisions based on oral impressions and shortsighted agendas with political and ideological orientations. In the United States, a large

body of literature documents the cycles of educational reforms. In many cases, one reform may take a certain position and then, a few years later, another reform cycle may take an opposite position. These opposing positions may be due to matters of different educational theories, curriculum approaches, societal trends and policies, or just public sentiment.

Although a vast number of research reports is available, their conclusions are usually not used as a basis for making decisions on educational change and innovation. Even in cases where such evidence is consulted, it may contain enough evidence to support any claim. This phenomenon might be familiar in large democratic societies where free enterprise, a decentralized system of education, and multiculturalism are the norm.

Such vague educational research should not necessarily discourage Muslim educators from conducting research. To the contrary, it should constitute an additional rationale for research on Muslim education, for the ensuing findings may have a direct impact upon the community's future. Before a Muslim community (usually with very few professional educators) makes a decision related to educating its children, it needs to acquire sound views and reliable information about the realities of education and possible alternatives. In fact, relying only upon personal experience, belief, and intuition may lead to misleading conclusions. Even with the presence of a few individuals who may have access to the research literature on American education, the urgent need for knowledge with direct relevance to the Muslim community and its educational needs remains.

Even in a well-established educational system like that in the United States, research findings in most fields of education never become conclusive. This keeps the doors open for more and more research. Given this fact, it is logical to conclude that in a developing system of education like the one of the American Muslims, more research is always needed.

Research is a reliable source of information for understanding education and for making educational decisions. One or more sources (e.g., personal experience, expert opinion, intuition, tradition, common sense, and beliefs about what is right or wrong) can be used either as legitimate resources and/or be of practical use in some situations. In many other situations, however, each source may be inadequate as the only basis for making decisions.³⁵

Motives for Islamic Education

American Muslims have more motives to provide Islamic schooling for their children than many other communities in American society. Long

before 9/11, incidents of harassment, prejudice, stereotyping, and hostility were being perpetuated in public schools. Wormser empirically documents many of the painful incidents that Muslim boys and girls have experienced.³⁶ While Muslim immigrants face the usual negative feelings and prejudices experienced by earlier immigrants, 9/11 has just added more fuel to the flame. African-American Muslims, like other African-Americans, have their reasons for desiring special schools due to the long-standing psychological and legal (i.e., segregation and racial discrimination) barriers erected between them and mainstream white American society. Being Muslims, however, adds additional motives.

Considering such motives should not negate the fact that some Muslim students have been given opportunities to stand up and challenge the bias coming from ignorance, misinformation, and misunderstanding. Many of them, as well as their parents, remember such situations with pride, not only because they took strong positions, but because of the ensuing positive attitudes and appreciation in the school environment.

Documenting such cases through empirical and field research, and then publishing it, is a noble exercise. Muslim students need to be encouraged to take an active role and leave a legacy on their schools' records when they graduate. It would be a relief for a female Muslim public school student to see on the school's walls photos of Muslim girls with hijab among the honor students and among successful sport record-holders or distinguished individuals.

The realities of American public schools that make Muslim families uncomfortable are documented in research and media coverage. These realities represent compelling motives to look for alternatives. For example, Muslim children are exposed to classmates of other faiths, where the dominant culture is alien to Islamic beliefs and social values. The absence of school uniforms allows the use of fashionable clothes and hairstyles worn by popular television figures to be copied. The tradition of boyfriends and girlfriends is normal and encouraged behavior, and the gang mentality is practiced in schools and continued after school in various ways (e.g., home sleepovers and going to movies and other public places looking for fun). The percentages of students involved in premarital sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, drug use, school violence, and so on, are all frightening.

Added to this is the distorted image of Islam and Muslims found in many social studies textbooks and the teachers' inability to deal with such distortions appropriately due to their own ignorance. The events of 9/11

have given way to situations of hatred and threats directed even toward Muslim children.

The Curriculum

Freda Shamma, author of an excellent chapter on the curriculum challenge for Islamic schools in the United States, argues convincingly that curriculum is a central challenge to Muslim education not only in this country but also in all Muslim societies and communities. In her micro-analysis of the details and examples from various subjects of school curriculum used by Islamic schools, she concludes that it will be extremely difficult to achieve the sound goals of an Islamic education by adopting or adapting the present American curriculum, which was developed for secular purposes.

Included in her strong argument is the sad state of the religious curriculum, a direct result of the materials' insensitivity to the children's needs and the teaching methods' leading to boring classes and rebellious attitudes. "At best the classes were not committed to Islam, and [at] worst, the classes were turning the students away from Islam. This seems to be the rule, rather than the exception, in our Islamic schools."³⁷ While this statement may be too harsh and somewhat exaggerated, it nevertheless is a threatening signal that can be supported by observations and discussions relevant to the situation in many Muslim communities and countries.

She would not accept the idea that teachers who are practicing Muslims, knowledgeable about the subject and about effective teaching, could eliminate many of the problems associated with curriculum in general and in religious classes in particular. However, the reality is that many teachers in American Muslim schools are unqualified and underpaid. This reality should bring up the immensely important issue of teachers' employment and training, but should not underestimate the urgency of developing curriculum and materials that will help less-qualified teachers.³⁸

Traditionally, the intended curriculum (e.g., math, science, and language and fine arts) is what we say it is. The actual or "hidden curriculum" is what remains after everything else has been forgotten. In traditional schools, this hidden agenda has existed since the 1950s and 1960s, when educators began to realize that they were teaching more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic: They were also teaching ideals, values, citizenship, and a set of normative rules about acceptable and unacceptable social behavior. The "intended curriculum" of math, science, and language and

fine arts was, in fact, patterned after what was required to enter Yale and Harvard during the 1880s.

This intended curriculum has changed very little over the past 100 years, although teaching methodology has changed dramatically in an attempt to adapt it to an advancing society. Although we still follow a 9-month school year (to allow children to work on the farms, which are no longer productive, during the summer months) and teach the same subjects geared toward an Ivy League college education (although more and more students attend vocational schools and state universities), the “hidden curriculum” or “hidden agenda” is beginning to change drastically with the advent of the Internet and online education.

Islamic Studies in American Academia

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States started to become more involved in international affairs. American universities and academic circles witnessed a rapid expansion of university centers and programs of study about the Muslim world in the form of regional studies dealing with the Middle East and South Asia, for example. Seyyed Hossein Nasr³⁹ remarks that “in many of the major centers of Middle Eastern studies everything is taught seriously except Islam.” These centers would offer courses on history, sociology, anthropology, and languages of the Muslim world, but hardly any in-depth study of Islam as a religion.

Even with the expansion of religious studies in many American universities, Islam has not garnered the same interest as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Chinese religions. This attitude of neglect also was seen in other humanities in which Islam did not have an appropriate place. Nasr briefly traces the development of Islamic studies as a discipline in American academia, and states “that early American scholars of Islam were mostly missionaries with an often open and vocal opposition to, or even disdain for, Islam and its culture.”⁴⁰ Despite the facts that several prominent scholars made a positive contribution to the field of Islamic studies and that some of them are still active, the general tendency was an accumulation of miseducation, misunderstanding, and distortion.

The current relevance of this topic goes beyond its being an important source of knowledge and information or misinformation about Islam and Muslims for so many young non-Muslim Americans, for sometimes it is the first or only source. As these course offerings expand, they attract many Muslim students who take them out of interest or in hopes of getting an

easy “A.” But then they become trapped by waves of distortion, defamation, and slander. In many cases, they cannot respond appropriately either due to a lack of knowledge or of courage. The results sometimes are devastating to their psyches. As a result, the influence of these departments and scholarships is far more damaging than commonly believed.⁴¹

The events of 9/11 have been followed by an unprecedented period of rapid demand for more sources of knowledge and learning opportunities about Islam. Chairs and departments for Islamic studies are being established, more courses are being offered, and more students than ever are enrolling in them. This trend has opened more opportunities for young and promising Muslim scholars to enter the field. In fact, a growing number of Muslim students in Islamic studies has been recorded during the last few years. More good news also is coming from the positive attitudes of non-Muslim scholars toward Islam and from mainstream university professors opposing unfair positions and representations of issues related to Islam and Muslims. But the challenges facing Muslim communities will continue: to achieve a better representation, to channel the positive signals to serve their own concerns, and to improve the quality of interactions with other segments of American society.

To plan for a future based on sound knowledge, this area needs a program of academic research based on empirical and field studies. Following are some suggestions:

- A general survey of Islamic studies programs in American universities. This survey may be an update of the “manual of the programs of Islamic, Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies in American universities,” which was published by the cultural attaché of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington in 1989, and was updated and republished in 1993.
- Analyses of Islamic studies programs in certain universities; studying Islam as a religion in universities; Muslim community involvement in university-level Islamic studies programs; chairs in Islamic studies; approaches to university-level Islamic studies programs; the study of Sufism in American universities; the place of Islam in university-level comparative religious studies programs; and tracking the number of Muslim scholars in these programs.

These suggestions are neither exhaustive nor conclusive, for each item could be elaborated upon and turned into research proposals as a thesis or dissertation for graduate students. These studies also may be the

foci of conferences and seminars organized by Islamic research centers and associations. Seven to 11 research papers in each seminar on a certain topic could be turned into an edited book to enrich the field and make more literature available for further research. Future leaders of Muslim communities will find such literature helpful for making better decisions and accelerated progress.

Forms, Venues, and Alternatives of Muslim Education

Homes and Parental Raising

Even if we could afford full-time schools for all Muslim children in the United States and support them with community activities (e.g., scouts, camping, and weekend classes), parents would still have to be their children's best teachers, for "Parents are children's first and most important teachers."⁴² The boundaries of their education are set by their parents' expectations, efforts, and examples.

Contemporary American culture provides a "subtle alluring, but deeply damaging message"⁴³ to parents. Under the increasing pressure of work and competing interests, parents hand more and more of their educational responsibilities over to other professionals, institutions, and specialists. Performing the sacred duty of raising their children does not necessarily require parents to spend lots of money or to have a degree in education and psychology, for a major part of this activity consists of commonsense undertakings. In fact, many such traditional parental tasks as exposing children to various types of life experiences, visiting friends and places of special interest, setting certain standards (i.e., those related to attitudes, skills, and behaviors at home), and instilling a strong sense of responsibility have a great educational impact upon children.

James Hunter, writing about the death of character, traces the decline of moral discipline in American life and shows how the ethical demands of character have been replaced by a banal civility of superficial moral attachments.⁴⁴ The moral development and moral instruction needed to cultivate character and its virtues within future generations may not be a product of direct instruction in school programs of moral education, which are astonishingly ineffective. "Rather, the significance of moral education is found in its articulation of the moral culture we adults idealize. It is a mirror of the moral culture we prize and thus seek to pass to succeeding generations."⁴⁵

The ways in which parents and adults pass on moral understanding to children are the real sources of our knowledge about the kind of society

that we will pass on to future generations. So, the problem is not how to reform school programs to make them more effective in building character; rather, according to Hunter, the problem stems from the fact that,

... moral education is inextricably bound to the moral culture within which it is found ... the question is about how moral culture changes and what ... people might do to influence that change in ways that secure benevolence and justice.⁴⁶

After concluding a 15-year intergenerational study about various aspects of American family life and its impact upon children, Paul Amata and Alan Booth suggest certain policy measures that encourage marital quality and stability so that “family policy, in general, [will] be based on creating incentives for parents to act in the best interest of their children.”⁴⁷ The authors maintain that growing up in an era of family upheaval puts the emerging new generation at risk.

Islamic education is not only a major concern for Muslim intellectuals and educational practitioners at the ummatic level, but also a major concern for individual and family salvation. The Qur’an proclaims: “O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones.”⁴⁸ Muslim parents confronted with this Qur’anic verse must know what kind of education their children are receiving and do their best to prevent what passes for “education” to spoil their children’s Islamic identity.

Home Schooling

Both parents should take an active role in their children’s education. In the past, most families home-schooled their children for religious reasons; now, however, more and more families are choosing to home-school for various reasons, among them those related to academics, drugs, violence, and negative peer pressure, all of which are so common in schools today. They also want to spend more time together as a family.⁴⁹ As a result of these concerns, there are now 2 million home-schoolers in the United States, and, growing at a rate of 15 percent each year, this is the fastest growing trend in education today.⁵⁰

The Muslim Home School Network and Resource (MHSNR) Center was established 7 years ago by Cynthia Sulaiman in Attleboro, MA, to provide the Muslim home-schooling community with as many choices and resources as possible, and to create and maintain networking resources for

Muslim home-schooling families. Members organize annual conventions at which families get together to engage in serious workshops and discussions and to exchange experiences, and at which the children can participate in fun and useful activities within a recreational and Islamic environment. They maintain a rich website and active e-group network.⁵¹ In addition, they started publishing *Al-Madarasah al-Ula*, a home-schooling magazine.

Weekend Schools

American public education was a dream for most Muslim immigrants. In some cases, this dream was the major reason why they came here, and so they enthusiastically sent their children to public schools so that they could enjoy the rich resources and sophisticated facilities. Rich Muslim families in Muslim countries who wanted better opportunities and futures for their children sacrificed a lot to send their adolescent children to live with non-Muslim families just to attend American schools.⁵²

For decades, Muslims gave no priority to establishing private Islamic schools. When Muslim communities began to feel the need to pass on their identity to their children, they simply attached weekend schools to their mosques and Islamic centers in order to provide some supplementary Islamic education. Until the late 1980s, the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) education-related material was relevant mainly for weekend schools. Even when full-time schools became important during the 1980s and a must during the late 1990s, weekend schools continued to flourish and expand.

This trend most probably will continue into the foreseeable future, because the majority of Muslims will send their children to public schools. It is extremely important for Muslim communities to develop more attractive and better educational weekend school facilities so that they can provide Muslim children with opportunities to preserve their Islamic identity and to create a sense of belonging to their own community.

Quite often, untrained or unpaid volunteers run many weekend schools. Teaching is very dry, because the focus is on the Qur'an, Arabic, or another Muslim nation's language. Most teachers are not trained to deal with children in the American environment, and children will compare them with their well-trained and experienced public school teachers. As a result, because the materials are irrelevant and the schools are unattractive, the students develop negative attitudes and thereby defeat the very reason for the school's existence.

Trying to deal with such realities by simply developing a sound vision and mission and then stating it eloquently on a website is not enough. Far more important is the feeling of urgency to provide appropriate resources to create in children a willingness and an incentive to attend the Islamic school and enjoy what is being taught. However, the needed resources exceed what the local Muslim communities can provide in terms of better facilities and trained and well-paid teachers. Therefore, regional and national organizations, whether community-based, or professional centers and associations, must help develop attractive educational materials and manuals.

To succeed in this undertaking, teams of researchers should strive to develop creative ideas that are far removed from the failed traditional ones. At this point in time, the dominant approach in curriculum development is the business-oriented one of entertainment and consumerism. If children are the ultimate consumers of curriculum materials, curriculum developers should be guided by their needs. Thus, the focus should be on content, not context. If children are attracted by the context, they will enjoy it and ask for more.

Muslim communities can support the search for creative ideas, and when the ideas succeed, the business-oriented experience in mass production can make education programs a good business not just for Muslim communities in the West, but in the Muslim heartland as well.

To give weekend schools their due attention, they should be regarded as the first, instead of the second or third, line of defense in the quest to guard the future generation's Islamic identity. Full-time schools should be encouraged, of course, for those communities with enough resources and for those families who can afford to enroll their children. However, the trend among Muslim Americans and all other religious communities is to send their children to public schools and to provide supplementary education elsewhere.

Full-time Schools

The most recent report about the realities of Islamic schools can be found in Mohamed Nimer's recently published resource guide on North American Muslims.⁵³ After summarizing the available data, he points out that most schools have developed through trial and error, often work in isolation from each other, and have a curriculum that reflects their founder's commitments. Moreover, they have no quality control procedures for their curriculum or any teacher development programs.

Islamic education in the United States lacks any Islamic regional or national bodies that can bestow accreditation or enforce standards of learning. In 2001, there were more than 200 full-time Islamic schools in North America (170 were in the United States). Most of them were established during the 1990s, and their enrollment range from a few students to 627, with an average of 150 students. Only the Nation of Islam's Clara Mohammed school system, which has 22 schools, has a national system. An estimated 30,000 students attend full-time Muslim schools.

If we consider the average estimate of the Muslim population adopted by Nimer (4.5 million), the percentage of Muslim children who attend full-time Muslim schools does not exceed 2 percent. This percentage may even be inflated, for it was based on the lowest estimate of school-aged Muslim children. The report, however, documents several cases of Muslim schools establishing their own criteria of excellence and being granted several national awards.

Since establishing full-time Muslim schools is a quite recent and still-evolving development, it is safe to say that this phenomenon has yet to reach its peak. To keep track of this development, existing full-time schools should be surveyed so that certain basic data can be collected and a central database established. The survey should not just record statistical information; rather, major emphasis should be placed upon the quality of education, major achievements, problems, and anything else that can serve as useful lessons for other schools. A system of direct communication may be established to update the data annually.

Furthermore, schools should be encouraged to establish their own websites,⁵⁴ for the Internet world appeals to everybody these days. In the academy, the well-known cliché "publish or perish" used to be a major motive for university professors to publish research. The Internet world has a similar cliché: "If you don't have a website, you don't exist." This should motivate Islamic schools and educational centers to prove their presence through their Internet websites. In a few years, this fast-growing trend will provide basic entries to research on Muslim education.

An in-depth study of full-time Muslim schools should be conducted periodically (every 5 years, for example). All notable achievements and successful experiences should be cited, appreciated, and encouraged, for success usually leads to more success. At the same time, many issues related to full-time schools should be researched in order to develop a knowledge base so that informed decisions can be made. A few examples are given below, as follows:

- Survey full-time Islamic schools, their histories, curriculum guidelines, and all curriculum materials and textbooks in Muslim schools.
- Survey the teachers employed in Muslim schools, as well as their qualifications, certifications, salaries, background experiences, and all other relevant information.
- Research the special Islamic dimensions that should be included in teachers' education and staff development, for example. Some of these Islamic particulars concern all teachers and administrators in Muslim schools, while others are relevant only to teachers who teach specific subjects.

Islam and Muslims in Public Education

Muslim communities have become more aware of the role of public education in responding to the challenges facing their future in this country. A major challenge is how to deal with Americans' image of Islam and Muslims.

All that Muslims can do in their homes, weekend and full-time schools, and community activities will continue to be of vital importance in establishing and then nurturing an Islamic identity in their children. All of these efforts, however, are directed inward and only toward Muslims. But for how long will Muslims allow public school textbooks to continue to be hostile and potentially damaging to the image of Islam and Muslims among Muslim and non-Muslim children in public schools?

During 1988-94, Susan Douglass, with sponsorship from the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), undertook a pioneering educational project to produce *Supplementary Social Studies Units (K-6)* to help teachers deal with Islam and Muslims within the social studies curriculum and public school textbooks. Most history and social studies textbooks concentrate on Europe and then America, and thus do not place these two civilizations' cultural and technological development in any type of relationship with those of other civilizations. For example, the fifth-grade unit "shows how the Islamic lands formed a hinge between East and West. It goes beyond the stereotypical image of conflict between Christians and Muslims to explain the fruitful cultural exchange which occurred over the centuries. It demonstrates how the cosmopolitan character of Islamic civilization united the Old World in interdependence, contributing to Europe's later technological, scientific, cultural and economic achievements."⁵⁵

In 1990, the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) sought to remove this Eurocentric bias in textbooks. Through its activities and collaboration with textbook publishers and educational authorities, it has made a significant contribution to reviewing textbooks and providing resourceful knowledge to major American publishing houses. "In the course of the 1990s, a new generation of textbooks reveals a modified structure, one that recognizes the critical role of Muslim civilization in the Middle Ages and de-alienizes Islam. . . . Future textbooks promise to continue this work with CIE, providing research-based information to publishers and state decision-makers."⁵⁶ The California Department of Education invited CIE to review its draft History-Social Science Standards and helped California avert some of the pitfalls reflected in Virginia's original standards, and to create a more balanced document. Subsequently, California adopted Houghton Mifflin's revised *Across the Centuries* (1999), which was republished according to CIE's suggestion. The council also was heavily involved in teacher training and providing speakers to California's schools and universities.

The fact that most state curricula call for "teaching about religions" and their role in human history is challenged and compounded by other facts, such as most teachers' lack of reliable knowledge about Islam and the limited available resources for covering Islam accurately. This situation has motivated CIE to produce a handbook which "not only helps teachers understand and teach about Islam to all our students, it also helps us relate more effectively to our Muslim students and their families."⁵⁷

Such Muslim engagement proves that Muslims can be successful partners in securing a better education for their own children and for society as a whole. In addition, it shows that in many cases, educational authorities, authors, and publishing houses may make present inaccurate information about Islam and Muslims out of their own ignorance and, therefore, welcome Muslim involvement. Such activities should continue, and more Muslim professionals should become engaged at the local and national levels.

Research institutions and centers should sponsor research on the curriculum guides of various states and counties, as well as on the school textbooks being used. Although history and social studies were major concerns in the past, it is just as important to conduct research on the image of Muslims in many other areas, especially literature. The focus of such

research should not necessarily be limited to where Islam or Muslims are mentioned inappropriately; rather, it also should look for those places where Muslims should have been mentioned, but were not. As sensitivity to religious views and faith-based comments, is not unique to Muslims, Muslim activists should join forces with other religious communities throughout the entire field of education. Research-based knowledge will provide Muslim activists with strong cases for educational debates and facilitate their presence in such debates.

Learning from the Experiences of Other Communities

During the last 2 decades, the Muslim community started to become more aware of the need to have a presence in American public life. Muslim activists often refer to the Jewish community's disproportionate place and influence in academia, media, journalism, science, and politics. In addition, they also compare this place and influence with those of other and numerically larger minorities, including Muslims. In 1996, the Jewish population was estimated to be 5.9 million⁵⁸; the Muslim population was very close to this figure, and other communities were much larger.

Jewish education in the United States has witnessed many shifts in its orientation and goals, and has followed routes that are parallel and complementary to the American public education system. The purpose has always been "to create lasting institutions that preserve and sustain Jewish life as a vital force for the next generation."⁵⁹

During these years, American Jews have contributed in many ways to the field of education (e.g., by taking major educational leadership positions at the local and national levels) and are active in debates and discussions on educational reform – sometimes on opposing sides. Such involvement is still going on even now.⁶⁰

Jewish Private Schools

The earliest Sephardic Jewish settlers in mid-seventeenth century North America educated their children at home. The first official Jewish school was established in New York in 1731. Other Jewish communities established their own religious schools in order to provide religious education. When American education became more secular after the Civil War, many American Jews used the public schools and secular education as a vehicle for establishing successful careers in the larger society and

deflecting anti-Semitism. As a result, Jewish schools waned and the focus shifted toward more integration in the American mainstream. At the same time, synagogues began developing supplementary schooling for religious instruction. This trend continued through the early decades of the twentieth century.

By the beginning of World War I, the trend shifted to establishing Jewish schools attached to synagogues. This movement, which expanded quickly and became more popular after World War II, was aided by the large-scale immigration of ultra-orthodox European refugees, who encouraged separate schools for boys and girls and the provision of both secular and religious education under strict religious control. By the end of the twentieth century, the Jewish school movement had come full circle: Only 11 percent of all Jewish school-aged children now attend these schools.

Jewish Summer Camps

Summer camps are considered an integral part of promoting Jewish life and culture. After World War I, when summer camps first became an American institution, Jews created their own institutions to provide a variety of religious and ideological orientations. Summer camps were designed to create a cultural synthesis and balance between the trend to assimilate in the larger American society and the desire to strengthen Jewish identity in a pluralistic system of Jewish living and thinking. At the same time, these camps served as educational enterprises and recreational programs to provide fresh air for children.

Jewish summer camps generally featured gender-based programs on segregated campuses with regular (though limited) opportunities for social interaction. Special camps taught Hebrew and sought to modernize Hebrew through its use in everyday recreational athletics. In addition to camps founded to promote general religious principles, radical immigrants established their own summer programs to nurture a set of specific values.

It was particularly important for Jewish public school children to attend summer camps in order to bridge the gap between what they were learning at school and what they were experiencing at home, and to provide a new milieu that could act as a surrogate home. These children had the chance to combine sports and recreational activities with formal class studies, prayer services, and songs.⁶¹ Jewish camps continue to be an effective way of educating children in a Jewish cultural milieu.

School Teaching Positions

The history of American education has been a story of how religion and religious teaching relate to secular education. Schools have been entrusted with a mission to inculcate Christian values in American children. At first, it was not easy for Jews to assume teaching positions. In fact, many schools required prospective teachers to pass tests on Christian texts before teaching any subject, even mathematics or science.⁶² This was also a major motive for the growing Jewish community to build its own schools.

With the evolving secular atmosphere in education and by the beginning of the twentieth century, many religious barriers to the teaching profession were removed. Huge numbers of young Jews, especially women, became teachers. Between 1920-40, Jewish women, most of them Eastern European refugees, went from comprising 26 percent of the new teachers in the New York City public school system to 56 percent. Even today, they continue to make up a large percentage of educators in the American public school system.⁶³ It is expected, of course, that they will create an atmosphere of familiarity, respect, and appreciation of Jewish traditions in these schools.

Jewish Professors in Higher Education

As in the fields of law and medicine, Jews, more than any other ethnic minority, have used higher education as a stepping stone to professional success and upward mobility.⁶⁴ The effort to get teaching positions at universities used to be blocked by the fact that the university required its entire faculty to be professed Christians. America's first full-time instructor of Hebrew was hired by Harvard in 1722 only after he converted to Christianity.⁶⁵

Despite the deep-seated institutional anti-Semitism in many elite colleges and universities, Jewish intellectuals across numerous disciplines have gravitated to the academy and have exercised a major influence upon its development as teachers, scholars, and administrators. Their presence was due, at least in part, to the growing prosperity and financial wealth. After a long resistance by the University of Chicago to allow a Jewish presence in its administration or faculty, Temple Sinai supported the university financially. In return, it received a seat on the Board of Trustees and its rabbi was appointed to the faculty.⁶⁶ This type of influence also was responsible for the creation of special chairs for Jewish studies in many universities.

Jewish resources claim that Jewish professors who had fled Europe were instrumental in elevating American higher education to true university standards.⁶⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, most American universities had Jewish faculty members. In 1970, Jewish Americans held 12 percent of all college teaching positions in the country and more than 20 percent of those at elite private universities. At some institutions, the percentage of Jewish professors now approaches almost half of the total faculty.

Jewish Universities

Parallel to the Jewish presence in American universities, Jewish communities also have established private Jewish universities. The first Jewish institute of higher education in the United States was Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College, which was founded in 1875 to train rabbis for the new Reform Movement.⁶⁸

Yeshiva University, founded in 1886 as an elementary school, established a theological seminary in 1896. In 1915, the two institutions merged and started teaching higher education in both Talmudic and secular studies. In 1928, it began offering undergraduate degrees in liberal arts and sciences, and by 1935 was offering graduate programs. This university, currently the leading American training ground for Orthodox rabbis, still maintains a girls' and a boys' high school. In New York alone, the university has three campuses and a current enrollment of around 7,000 students.⁶⁹

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) was established in 1886 as an alternative to the increasingly radicalized American Reform Movement of Judaism. Then in 1902, it was redefined as an institute of a new religious movement: Conservative Judaism. JTS remains the American center of conservative Judaism, both academically and spiritually. It provides various undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Judaic studies and offers a basic program of rabbinic studies that lasts for 6 years. The focus is on Judaic scholarship, and students have to spend one year in Israel.⁷⁰

The University of Judaism, founded in 1947, is a liberal arts research university established in Los Angeles. In addition to various undergraduate and graduate programs in English and literature, journalism, liberal arts, politics, business, bioethics, and Jewish studies, it provides a distinguished program in its school of rabbinic studies for 4 calendar years, with one semester in Israel. Its emphasis is on community outreach in rabbinical training.⁷¹

Brandeis University, founded in 1948, is located in Waltham, just 9 miles west of Boston, Massachusetts. The first Jewish-sponsored non-sectarian liberal arts university in the country, it now has an endowment of approximately \$400 million. In 2000-01, it awarded \$23.6 million in both merit and needs-based scholarships. New York City's Touro College, founded in 1970 to enrich the Jewish heritage in this country and to reach out to the larger community, is named for Judah and Isaac Touro, leaders in the American colonies who founded Touro synagogue. The family endowed North America's first free library, several universities, community health facilities, and, later, pioneering settlements in Israel. The college has schools for liberal arts and sciences with a women's division, general studies, law, and health sciences, and a school for lifelong education. There are also sister schools in Israel and Russia.⁷²

Jewish University Students

In the past, so many Jewish students were applying to prestigious universities that Harvard found it necessary to limit their admission.⁷³

University student associations have been major avenues for extending the Jews' presence and influence on American campuses. The Hillel Foundation was America's first Jewish campus organization. Founded in 1923 at the University of Illinois to serve the enrolled Jewish students' religious and social needs,⁷⁴ today it maintains its own religious, social, and cultural service programs and often serves as a national umbrella organization for Jewish campus groups. Seeking to involve unaffiliated campus staff, Hillel created the Association of Hillel and Campus Workers. To coordinate and direct Jewish students at the national level, Hillel established a National Student Secretariat and a National Jewish Law Student Association, with offices in Israel and many other countries.

College and graduate education has been an important way for Jewish students to gain professional recognition, leadership, and a secure middle-class identity in this country. In addition, the evolution of the Jewish university and the increasing importance of Jewish studies as an academic discipline have had a major impact on American higher education. Close to 80 percent of Jews attend universities.⁷⁵

In conclusion, the Jewish community has succeeded in promoting excellence in Jewish education by focusing on six key areas: improving school quality and affordability, revitalizing congregational and communal education, engaging and empowering Jewish youth, recruiting and

developing Jewish educators, using media and technology to enhance Jewish learning and teaching, and utilizing research and evaluation to promote continuous improvement.

Although the community's wealth contributed to this success, it is also a tradition that some educational institutions encourage every Jewish individual to donate, either through their wills or while still alive, at least 5 percent of their net worth to one or more local or regional Jewish education trust funds. The presence of Jewish scholars in education is felt in many newspapers, magazines, or academic journals. Educational research studies and reports are presented in almost every regional, national, or international conference.

Conclusion

Muslims in the United States have a twofold mission: to provide their children with an education based on Islam and to educate their neighbors and fellow citizens about Islam. The bad news is that they lack the means to carry out both, and thus find themselves in a real crisis. The good news, however, is that they are now aware of this crisis and are ready to redirect their resources and build their future with insight and purpose.

Educational institutions may be the core interest of Muslim communities at the present. It may be the best factor for unifying these communities in a common cause. It is time to rethink the model of Islamic centers and mosques as places for future generations, places for educating their children, who are the only hope for sustaining the Muslim identity in this country. If Islamic centers are designed for this purpose, Muslims may think of a mosque as part of a full-time school, rather than the opposite – as a weekend school as a part of a mosque.

The challenges discussed in this article have internal and external sources and are related to the commonalities of education: students, teachers, curriculum, and the surrounding milieu. They also go beyond what is needed to establish institutions of Islamic education, because American public schools will continue to be an area of Muslim activism. Muslim communities, all of which have to respond to these challenges effectively, may benefit from the past experiences of other communities, such as the Catholics and the Jews.

Empirical and field research must be conducted if we are to provide the knowledge needed to understand the realities of Muslim communities and the trends affecting their children's education, and to plan effectively

for the future. Such research is needed in all areas of Muslim education, and will continue to be needed because research is like education itself – a process and not a product.

The ideas presented in this paper should be considered as a work in progress. Hopefully it will add to our awareness of the need to explore, argue, and elaborate upon the future of Muslim education in the United States. Nevertheless, this paper will remain incomplete, for its theme should remain open for more serious insights, research, and discussion.

Notes

1. Syed al-Naqib Al-Attas, ed., *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, Islamic Education Series: World Conference of Muslim Education (London: Hodder and Stoughton, and Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 1979), 1-15 (from the editor's introduction).
2. International Board for Educational Research and Resources (IBERR), *Handbook for Muslim Schools* (Cape Town, South Africa: IBERR Publication, 2000), 160.
3. David Hicks, *Lessons for the Future: The Missing Dimension in Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xii.
4. Ziauddin Sardar, *Islamic Futures and Policy Studies* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1987), 164.
5. *Ibid.*, 4-5
6. Qur'an, Surah Yusuf, 12:46-49.
7. Imam Ahmad narrated in his *Musnad* that Ibn `Abbas said: "Some prisoners of war on the day of Badr had no one to pay for their release. The Prophet said that he would free them if each one would teach the children of the Ansar how to write." Online at: <http://hadith.al-islam.comDisplay.asp?&ID=6974&searchTest>.
8. "Work for our life as if you will live forever, and work for your hereafter as if you will die tomorrow." This famous statement is attributed to Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib and other Companions. Ibn `Abd Rabih, in his book *Al-Iqd al-Farid*, attributes it to Amr ibn al-`As. Online at: www.al-eman.com/Islamilib/wiewchp.asp?BID=195&CID=33.
9. `Umar ibn al-Khattab wrote to Sa`d ibn Abi Waqqas: "... look at all that is accumulated in your camp, whether money, horses, or weapons, and distribute them among those Muslims with you. Leave the land and its rivers to those who work on them, as gifts from the Muslims. If we distribute the land among the Muslims now, nothing will be left to those who will come later." See Yaqt al-Hamawi's *Mu`jam al-Buldan* and al-Baladhuri's *Futuh al-Buldan*.
10. Duane Elgin, *Promise Ahead: A Vision of Hope and Action for Humanity's Future* (New York: Quill, 2001), 188.

11. Edward Cornish, ed., *Exploring Your Future: Living, Learning & Working in the Information Age* (Bethesda, MD: World Future Society, 1996), 6.
12. Virginia Postrl, *The Future and Its Enemies: The Growing Conflict over Creativity, Enterprise, and Progress* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1999), xiv.
13. Ibid., xi.
14. Hicks, *Lessons*, xv.
15. Ibid.
16. Consult www.cl.uh.edu/futureweb/resources/resources.html, which lists 22 institutes and centers for future studies, as well as www.csudh.edu/global_options/introFS.HTML#histFSField, which lists 19 different methodologies for studying change and the future (e.g., trend extrapolation, simulations and games, Delphi polls of experts, future wheels, and scenarios). The World Future Society (Bethesda, MD) and The World Future Studies Federation are just two of the international organizations working in this area. Among the journals that focus on future studies are *The International Journal of Future Studies*, published by the Institute for Advanced Interdisciplinary Research (Houston, Texas); *Foresight: The Journal of Future Studies, Strategic Thinking, and Policy*, published by Emerald (Bradford, UK); and *World Futures: Journal of General Evolution*, published by Taylor & Francis Group (London, UK). Several universities offer future studies programs, such as the University of Houston (Clear Lake, Texas), Network University of Greenworld (Japan), and Eventual Future Generations University (Australia).
17. John Esposito, *What Everyone Needs To Know about Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173.
18. Saiyad F. Ahmad and Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, "American Muslims at the Millennium and Beyond," in *Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Amber Haque (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 1999), 399-426.
19. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know*, 173.
20. Martin Gross, *The Conspiracy of Ignorance: The Failure of American Public Schools* (New York: Perennial, 1999), 41.
21. National Center for Education Statistics, *America's Teachers: Profile of a Profession: 1993-1994* (Washington, DC: NCEs, US Dept. of Education, nd).
22. Educational Testing Services. *1998 Profile of College-Bound Seniors College Plans* (Princeton, NJ: ETS, n.d.). This consists of 22 vocations correlated against SAT scores).
23. Educational Testing Services. *General Test Percentage Distribution of Scores within Intended Broad Graduate Major Field: (1997-1998), Graduate Record Exam* (Princeton, NJ: ETS, n.d.).
24. Gross, *Conspiracy*, 24-44.
25. Project MAPS (Muslims in American Public Square) was initiated in 1999 with the mission of pondering upon the Muslim community's future path by

- examining the Muslims' role in and contributions to American civic life. The project is hosted by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University (Washington, DC). Its codirectors are Professor Sulayman Nyang and Dr. Zahid Bukhari.
26. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Fi Fiqh al-' Aqaliyah al-Muslimah: Hayat al-Muslimin wasta al-Mujtama'at al-Ukhra." In *Fiqh of Minorities: Muslim Life in Other Societies* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001).
 27. The Islamic Society of North America. *In-Depth Study of Full-Time Islamic Schools in North America: Results and Data Analysis* (Plainfield, IN: Islamic Schools Dept. [ISNA], 1989).
 28. Mohamed Nimer, *The North American*, xvii.
 29. Telephone and e-mail contacts with some of these organizations revealed a clear reluctance to share their information, even for research purposes.
 30. A thorough review of literature is beyond the scope of this paper. The proposed review of relevant literature is important at this point. The author proposes compiling this review in an expanded report, entitled "Handbook of Research on Muslim Education in America" or something similar, which should be updated every 5 years. Anyone interested in this project may contact the author at malkawi@iiit.org.
 31. Mona Abdassalam, "Islamic Schools: The Only Choice?" *The American Muslim* 3, no. 3 (September 2002), 15-16
 32. Karen Keyworth and Nadia Amri, "Removing the Barriers to Excellence in Islamic Schools," *Islamic Horizons* 29, no. 3 (May/June 2000), 27.
 33. Yahia Emerick, "Muslim Schools: A View from the Inside." Online at: [www. soundvision.com/info/education/edu.inside.asp](http://www.soundvision.com/info/education/edu.inside.asp) 1/6/2003.
 34. Valerie Straus and Emily Wax, "Where Two Worlds Collide," *The Washington Post*, 25 Feb. 2003, A-1.
 35. James McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction* (Glenview, IL and London: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1989), 3-6
 36. Richard Wormser, *American Islam: Growing up Muslim in America* (New York: Walker & Co., 1994), 45-58.
 37. Freda Shamma, "The Curriculum Challenge for Islamic Schools in America," in *Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects*. Edited by Amber Haque (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 1999), 293.
 38. Ibid., 273-95.
 39. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islamic Studies in America," in *ibid.*, 257-310, 259.
 40. Ibid. 258.
 41. Ahmad Nezar Kobeisy, "Portrait of the Islamic Scholar." *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 16, no. 3 (fall 1999): 65-79
 42. William Bennett, Chester Finn, and John Cribb, *The Educated Child: A Parents' Guide from Preschool through Eighth Grade* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 7.

43. Ibid., 7.
44. James D. Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
45. Ibid., 9.
46. Ibid., 229.
47. Paul R. Amata and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1997), 239.
48. Qur'an, 66:6.
49. Rebecca Kochenderfer and Elizabeth Kanna, *Home-schooling for Success* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 12.
50. Ibid., 9.
51. www.muslimhomeschool.com/MHSNR.htm.
52. Many American government and nonprofit organizations conduct programs to facilitate opportunities for school-aged students to spend a summer, a semester, or an academic school year in this country. The author has personal knowledge of several students from his native country (Jordan) who have participated in such programs. The Partnerships for Learning Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program was approved in 2003 by the Department of State, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), to conduct youth exchange programs with predominantly Muslim countries. A consortium of partners led by AYUSA International will cooperate with ECA and American embassies to recruit students and provide full scholarships from such countries and territories as the West Bank and Gaza, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Interested readers may visit the following relevant websites: www.ayusa.org, www.thebridgeproject.org, Youth for Understanding (www.yfu-usa.org), American Field Service (www.afs.org), and the Academic Year in America (www.academicyear.org).
53. Mohamed Nimer, *The North American Muslim Resource Guide: Muslim Community Life in the United States and Canada* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 53-62.
54. It is worth mentioning the efforts of the Islamic Schools' League of America, which has established a website that can help each school link its own website to it and be responsible for it. The League also has established an e-mail network of more than 300 professional educators to communicate and consult with one another, debate, and discuss educational issues.
55. Susan Douglass, *Traders and Explorers in Wooden Ships - Grade 5* (Herndon VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1994), 1.
56. Munir Shaikh, "Partners for a Better Education," *Islamic Horizons* (May/June 2000): 64-65.
57. Council on Islamic Education, *Teaching about Islam and Muslims in Public School Classroom* (Fountain Valley: CA: CIE (6th printing), 2002), vii.

Taken from the forward by Barbara Allen, Director of Program Delivery, California School Leadership Academy (Orange County Department of Education).

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59. The American Jewish Historical Society. *American Jewish Desk Reference: The Ultimate One-Volume Reference to the Jewish Experience in America* (New York: The Philip Lief Group, Inc. 1999), 49.
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