

# A SHARED VISION FOR ISLAMIC SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

LEARNERS, LEARNING AND LEADING LEARNING

STIMULUS PAPER  
VERSION 1.0

2023-2027



ISLAMIC SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA IS A FAITH-CENTRED COLLECTIVE  
COMMUNITY ASPIRING TOWARDS A DISTINCT FORM OF EDUCATION.

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Cite the document as: Chown, Dylan., Memon, A. Nadeem., Abdalla, Mohamad. (2023). A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia: Learners, Learning, and Leading Learning. Stimulus Paper, Centre for Islamic Thought and Education: University of South Australia.

ISBN 978-1-922046-30-7

*Front Cover Image:*

*The mosaic artwork pictured on the front cover: titled, "Connection to Country" was co-designed and co-developed by Ilim College (Islamic school in Victoria) learners, educators, school staff and parents in partnership with the AFP and members of the Aboriginal community. The "Connection to Country" mosaic was unveiled in 2016 as a practical way of celebrating Australia's history, religious and cultural diversity through artistic collaboration. The mosaic celebrates the positive interactions between Aboriginal people and the predominantly Muslim, Cameleers – one of the two major historical anchors of presence and contribution of Muslim people in Australia, along with the earlier interactions between the Mascassans and Aboriginal Communities in the North of Australia (see Ganter<sup>1 2 3</sup>). Kindly shared with permission of Ilim College.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The contributors and signatories of this stimulus paper: *A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia: Learners, Learning, and Leading Learning* recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had more than 60,000 years of continual connection with this nation, playing a key role in its history, its present and its future.

We acknowledge that the growing number of Islamic schools within the Australian Independent schooling sector across 5 states and 2 capital territories locate their educational settings and conduct the important work that occurs in their school communities on the land of the traditional custodians of those prospective nations and language groups.

The rich and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are valued and acknowledged by all. This stimulus paper affirms the commitment of Islamic schooling in Australia to ensure that all learners in Islamic schools learn about the diversity, richness and vibrancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and affirm a commitment to Indigenous justice and self-determination.

This stimulus paper also highlights that Islamic schools value and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families within Islamic school communities, many of whom share familial and/or faith connections. We are committed to seeing them thrive in their education and in all facets of life.

# AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As authors of this inaugural stimulus paper, first and foremost, we wish to acknowledge and thank Allah SWT who gave us, and indeed all of those involved, the tawfiq (Divine help or guidance, enabling) and the opportunity to be a part of this important milestone for Islamic schooling in Australia.

We would like to offer a heartfelt acknowledgement to the many who contributed and made this 'Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia' possible.

We acknowledge the Australian Schools Association of Australia (ISAA) for their leadership, support, representation on the National Steering Committee, and for generously funding the project. We acknowledge our fellow author, Professor Mohamad Abdalla, Director of the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education (CITE), University of South Australia. We would not have been able to invest in this project without his leadership, guidance, and support. We also acknowledge his significant thought leadership in, and contribution to, the field of Islamic education/schooling, as well his leadership and expertise in contributing and editing this stimulus paper.

We remain humbled and grateful for the support of our University, the University of South Australia (UniSA). We cannot innumerate the blessings nor the benefit we have enjoyed from working with the many great minds and hearts of our colleagues. We make special mention of the benefit and growth in our own learning and thinking gained from working collaboratively with colleagues from the Pedagogies for Justice Research Group, UniSA, formerly led at the time of this project by Emeritus Professor Rob Hattam, as well colleagues from the Research in Educational and Social Inclusion Concentration (RESI), UniSA, led at the time of this project by former Director, Professor Anna Sullivan.

We acknowledge the collective wisdom, experience and expertise of our esteemed National Steering Committee, and their sustained commitment to the vision of this project. Many



members who graciously gave their time are school leaders, with their own local community priorities and commitments.

We make special mention of Mr. Fazeel Arain, co-Founder and Principal of Al Siraat College, Australia, and Ms. Afeefa Syed, Senior Fellow for the Institute for Global Engagement, Centre for Women, Faith and Leadership, co-Director and co-Founder of Al Fatih Academy, United States, for expertly facilitating the retreats for the National Steering Committee at the 2018 and 2019 Annual Australian Schooling Conferences (Adelaide and Melbourne).

We acknowledge the contribution of our national and international reviewers. It is indeed humbling to have gathered so many esteemed colleagues willing to add value. There can be no denying the stimulus paper is stronger for their considered thoughts and invaluable contributions.

We acknowledge Ilim College, Victoria, for kindly permitting the use of the mosaic artwork pictured on the front cover titled, 'Connection to Country', co-designed and co-developed in 2016 by Ilim College learners, educators, school staff and parents in partnership with the AFP and members of the local Aboriginal community. We cannot think of a more appropriate image to capture the intent and the hope for this stimulus paper.

We further acknowledge ISAA and our National Steering Committee for their leadership in the all-important national consultation phase that will proceed the launch of 'Version 1' of this stimulus paper. Fittingly, we also acknowledge the contribution of all educators and school leaders in the consultation process. We hope that this stimulus paper both honours you and assists you in the lofty role you all play as practitioners at the 'coal face'. Significantly, we acknowledge the school leaders and governors representing Islamic schools who are signatories to this stimulus paper.

Finally, we acknowledge the children and young people - our learners, past, present, and future, who provided the inspiration for this effort.

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# STATEMENT FROM ISAA

The Islamic schooling experience in Australia is at the cusp of an exciting new chapter in its journey as a growing and formidable sector. As we near almost four decades of service, I can confidently state that we are now moving beyond our establishment phase and into a stage of refining the quality of service we provide to our school communities.

Islamic schools have been the preferred choice for many Muslim families as they provide a safe space for the physical and spiritual observance of religious rituals, practices, and celebrations. In the last few years however, there have been some exciting developments in the sector where Islamic schools have been reflecting and exploring innovative and wholesome ways of renewing their vision, curriculum, and pedagogy. ISAA finds itself at the centre of this exploration.

One of ISAA's key commitments is to '*work to promote and foster unity among Islamic schools and those interested in Islamic education*'. In this vein, since 2016 ISAA has had an active role in the consultation and formation of the Whole of Field Statement, working collaboratively with the Centre of Islamic Thought and Education and educational leaders from the Islamic schooling sector. The Whole of Field stimulus paper has to date been one of the most important contributions to the sector as it aims to serve a *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia*.

Its introduction eloquently conveys one of its central aims as a stimulus paper:

*One of the drivers in this effort to articulate an inaugural Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia in this stimulus paper is to enhance connectedness, coherence and collective consciousness without diminishing the vibrancy imbued in the unity in diversity enjoyed as a collective. (p. 15)*

It has been an absolute honour being a key partner in the facilitation of this initiative. I pray that the Whole of Field stimulus paper will only enrich and enhance the amazing work we are already committing to as a sector. I am certain that this stimulus paper will not only serve as a guide but also promote the cause of Islamic Schools in the education sector and in the general community.

**Mr. Abdullah Khan OAM**

*Chairperson,*

Islamic Schools Association of Australia

## STATEMENT FROM CITE

Over the last four decades, Islamic schools have played a momentous role in providing quality education to our growing Australian Muslim community. Responding to the needs of students and their parents, they have been able to provide schooling environments which are academically vibrant and Islamically focused. Despite the multiplicity and diversity of these Islamic schools, they have been united in their concern to provide an Islamically sound and nurturing educational experience for their learners.

The journey has been challenging but full of great opportunities and positive experiences. So much talent, energy, time, intellect, experience, and passion has been invested in Australian Islamic schools. Islamic schools have come a long way in a very short period - in ways that can make their pioneers very proud. These pioneers hoped that Islamic schools would be able to provide the best of the two worlds – academic excellence and preservation and nurturing of a unique Australian Muslim identity, shaped by strong Islamic foundations and the modern Australian context. While the former of these lofty aims has to a large extent been achieved, work continues unabated to fully achieve the latter.

The Centre for Islamic Thought and Education began to call for renewal of Islamic schools in 2016. This call was heard by many Australian Islamic schools, leading to multiple collaborative initiatives including the annual Islamic Schooling Conference, and now this significant stimulus paper to help forge a shared vision for Islamic schooling in Australia. This is meant to help stimulate reflection, cultivate reconnection, and inspire a collective renewal. A renewal that has the best interest of the learner, while being fully cognisant of the significant role of educators, and of course, parents. This shared vision can only mature and bear fruit through joint collaborations between all stakeholders. I can reassure you that many great minds from across the Australian Muslim schooling sector have played an active role in formulating this stimulus paper. This delightful collaboration satisfies my heart in that it will, *inshaAllah*, bear fruit. After all, our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) beautifully reassured us, ‘Allah’s help is with the group’ (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmithī). CITE is proud to be part of this group and prays that Allah Ta’ala bestows His divine blessings on this noble initiative.

**Mohamad Abdalla AM**

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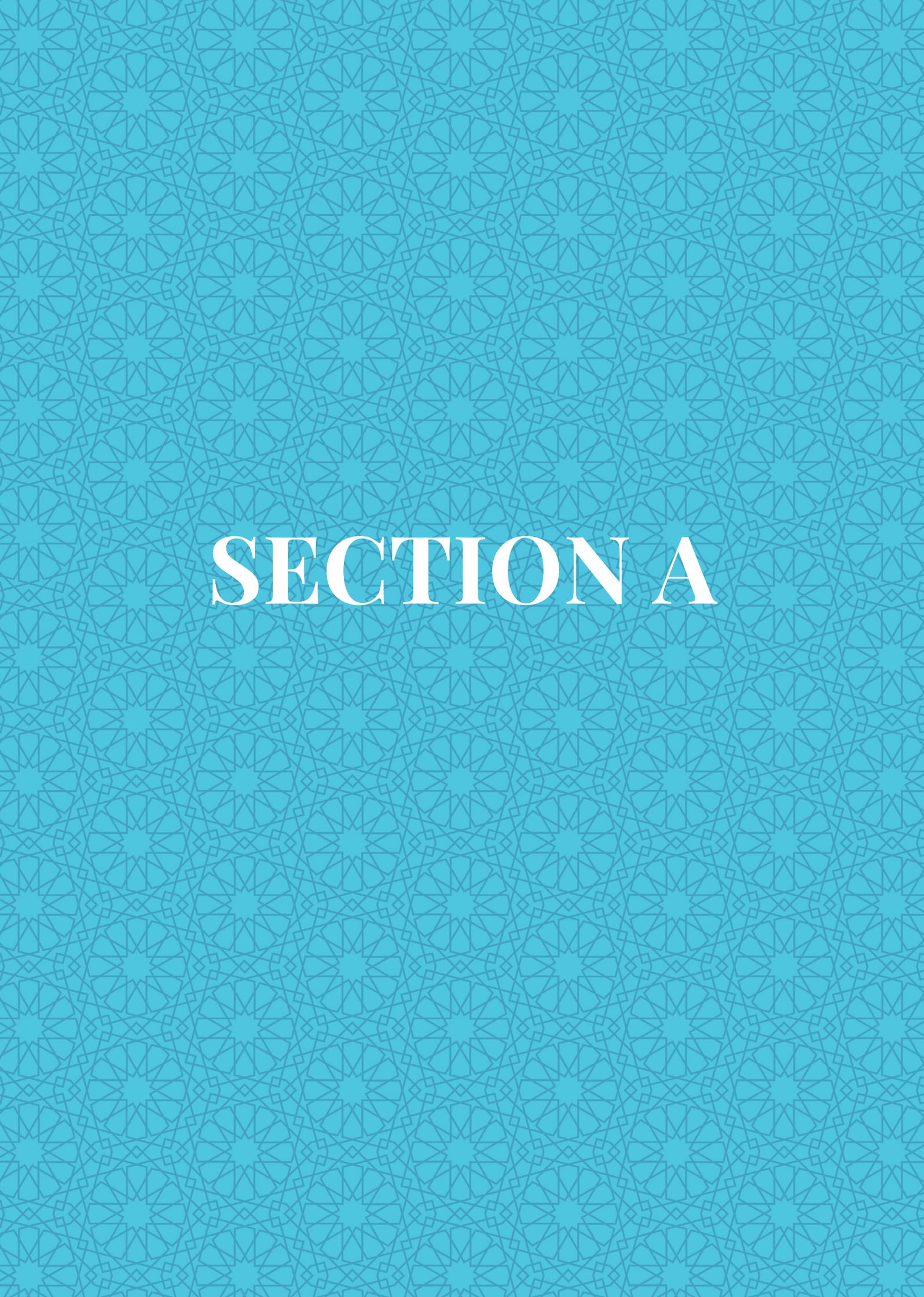
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# SECTION A

# BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

— IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL —

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This stimulus paper outlining a *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* is offered as a pedagogical resource for Islamic school communities to stimulate reflection, cultivate reconnection, and inspire renewal.**

### Context

The foresight and wisdom of the pioneers of Islamic schools in Australia paved the way for the establishment and growth of Islamic schools against all odds. In doing so, they fulfilled a significant communal obligation (*Fard kifayya*) that continues to serve local Muslim communities. The establishment and subsequent growth of our Islamic schools add to Islam's long-standing historical presence in Australia and enhances the pluralistic tapestry of Australia as a nation.

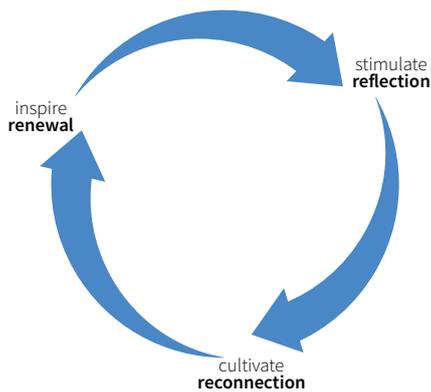
Since their inception, Islamic schools have made significant strides in a relatively short period of time in terms of infrastructure, increased student enrolment, parents' commitment, confidence in school accreditation, and notable academic achievement of graduates. Aside from individual school accolades, as a collective we have left our distinction open for interpretation and in many cases misinterpretation. Esteemed educationalist, Emeritus Professor Alan Reid, comments on current educational policy and practice in Australian schooling, identifying a 'lack of explicit attention to the purposes of education', emphasising that 'purposes are present, either by

implication or omission, but are rarely consciously articulated and pursued<sup>4</sup>. The intent of this stimulus paper is, therefore, to articulate what makes Islamic schooling distinct, enabling Islamic schools to renew purpose, and envision a renewed educational narrative. This stimulus paper is intended for us - as a faith-centered collective of Islamic schools - for all of the educators, parents, and learners who call an Australian Islamic school home.

This stimulus paper is intended to 1) stimulate reflection on current educational practice; 2) cultivate reconnection to the purpose of Islamic education; and 3) inspire renewal\* in Islamic schools' committed to distinction.

***Renewal or tajdīd is a recognition that Islam offers a robust civilisational heritage inspired and shaped within the Islamic tradition - universal, adaptable, responsive, and applicable to time and place.***

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of tajdīd is to bring existing realities and social change in line with the transcendent and universal standards of Islam in ways that are reflective of a unique Islamic worldview and responsive to prevailing socio-economic-political-educational circumstances.



**Figure 1.1 - Intention of Stimulus Paper**

Some Islamic schools have begun to embark on renewal towards ‘distinction’, while others will respond to the call for renewal in their own ways. Irrespective, any attempt at renewal towards distinction must, by necessity, be premised on educational values, immutable concepts, and perspectives rooted in the Islamic tradition. Such attempts must address the big ‘why’ questions around the purpose of education and schooling, thereby informing the way we teach in ways that reflect our educational values.<sup>5</sup>

Islamic schools aren’t simply distinct because they are schools for Muslims, or because Islam as faith formation is taught in the school, or because the school environment reinforces Islamic values and religious observances. Islamic schools are distinct because they are rooted in a pedagogical tradition (in terms of a distinct education philosophy)<sup>6</sup>. Appreciating that every approach to education is based on a worldview, a philosophy, and a distinct conception of knowledge<sup>7</sup>, Islamic schools provide the footing for every aspect that follows. For Islamic schools committed to renewal towards distinction, this implies a firm grounding in an Islamic worldview and an Islamic philosophy of education that draws upon the immutable values, concepts, and principles. This commitment is

responsive to learners and the unique contextual arrangements of local school communities, thereby being conversant with the contemporary world.

Islamic schools cannot realise their aspirations for distinct education purpose and practice without questioning and resisting de-contextualised knowledge about teaching and learning, largely informing dominant contemporary educational research policy and practice that claims ‘evidence base’ and proffers ‘what works’,<sup>8</sup> and yet does not consider the needs of Muslim learners or the contextual arrangements of Islamic schools. At the local level, and as a faith centred collective, Islamic schools aspiring for renewal towards distinction are schools which work collaboratively to problematise, redesign, and renew educators’ work and students’ learning and development, promoting renewed cultures of practice.

### **Purpose**

This stimulus paper outlines a shared vision (a road map) for Australian Islamic schooling as a pedagogical resource to stimulate reflection, cultivate reconnection, and inspire renewal, leading to distinction.

### **Process**

Discussions on the need for such a stimulus paper began during the Annual Islamic Schooling in Australia Conference held in Adelaide in July 2017. Board members of the Islamic Schools Association of Australia (ISAA), along with faculty members from the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education (CITE), identified the need for a shared vision.

Over the next three years, a steering committee was established to define the purpose, intent, and audience of such a stimulus paper, and to brainstorm collective challenges, aspirations, and motivations that define the distinction of Islamic schooling in Australia.

The working group consisted of 13 active members, including Islamic school leaders and academics from CITE. Attempts were made at successive annual Islamic schooling conferences in 2018 and 2019 to reach out to and invite educators from across the sector. Between 2018-2020, the working group convened quarterly via Zoom, and held annual retreats during conferences to push this project forward. In 2020, document drafts were written by Mr. Dylan Chown and Dr. Nadeem Memon, based on a combination of steering committee articulations of aims of objectives of Islamic schooling in Australia and a reading of contemporary Islamic educational thought. Minutes and analyses of discussions were coordinated by the project's research assistant, Dr. Huma Kanwal.

The official launch of the stimulus paper, Version 1.0, took place at CITE's annual Islamic schooling conference in August 2023.

Internal reviews of draft versions by the working group were held in May 2020 and February 2021. Dylan and Nadeem would make further iterations of the drafts throughout 2021. In December of 2021, a series of round tables was held where expert national and international academics, educationalists, and educational leaders from within the field of education, in addition to intersectional Muslim leaders and academics across disciplines, offered comments and feedback (acknowledged within). A final

internal draft was completed by Mr. Dylan Chown, Dr Nadeem Memon, and Professor Mohamad Abdalla.

The design of the document was graciously funded by Islamic Schools Association of Australia (ISAA).

## Overview

The stimulus paper is organised around three key themes: *Learners*, *Learning*, and *Leading Learning*. Together the three core themes emphasise that education in the Islamic tradition has a distinct purpose, drawing on the rich conceptual thought and practice of learning and teaching embedded in the Islamic tradition, the contemporary academic field of Islamic Education Studies<sup>9</sup>, along with national and international thought and practice in the field of Islamic education and schooling. The stimulus paper is strengthened through etymological analysis, applying understandings of foundational concepts, sometimes preserved, and preferred in Arabic, and other times translated or unpacked in English.

Together this creative integration makes for a powerful and faithful emergent common educational meta-language and discourse, centring the distinction of Islamic schooling in Australia and stimulating renewal.

*Learners* emphasises the centrality of the dignity and potentiality of the learner, through faith-informed and inspired (lens of an Islamic worldview), asset-based views and pedagogies.

*Learning* substantiates the importance of a holistic education which is balanced between education of the mind, body, and soul.

*Leading Learning* reminds leaders, educators, and learners of the

responsibility they carry with them every day.

The three key themes are then captured in an educational framework through the analogy of a tree (see Figure 1.4) illustrating the interconnections between the Islamic tradition (roots), a shared vision of Islamic education between all Islamic schools (trunk), and diverse ways a school can be 'Islamic' (branches) and realise its distinction. The analogy of the tree as an educational framework also reflects key ideas raised in the remainder of the stimulus paper related to the role of educators in Islamic schools, and in relation to state/national educational priorities.

### **The Way Forward**

The stimulus paper concludes with a proposal for every Islamic school to consider - a strategy for renewal leading to distinction. The strategy outlines a year-long action research initiative to bring about productive dialogue and focused educational renewal through the content of this stimulus paper and beyond. It is hoped that school leaders, educators, and educational teams will use the strategy provided to engage with this document. The resources recommended within it will aid educators in adding intellectual rigour, bridging gaps between theory and practice, increase agency, autonomy, and efficacy, and enhance responsiveness to our Muslim learners. The hope is that Islamic schools, locally and as a collective, will embrace becoming knowledge-producing sites - producing and advancing praxis knowledge, thereby bringing about distinction in Australian Islamic schools.

# INTRODUCTION

***This Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia is intended to enhance connectedness, coherence and collective consciousness without diminishing individual school distinction.***

Islamic schools operate within the Independent Schooling sector in the Australian schooling system. Similarly to other independent schools, Islamic schooling also has its own distinguishing features. One of these is its unique structure, fostering both connectedness to a common vision while ensuring individual schools' autonomy.

Islamic schooling in Australia is not governed or administered as a system, as is the case for some faith schools, nor is it overseen by an authoritative or central governing body. The dynamics of its non-vertical non-hierarchical structure is its agency, agility, and strength as a horizontal collective. Islamic schooling in Australia is thus characterised by both a spirit of connectedness and a beautiful notion of unity in diversity<sup>10</sup>.

Islamic schools within this collective hold common aims that produce a multitude of affiliations and educational philosophies\*. These features ensure that all Islamic schools enjoy a sense of collective consciousness on account of shared affiliation with Islamic schooling locally, nationally, and globally, as well as maintaining individual school autonomy, distinct governance and administrative structures and unique school-centred visions and educational

philosophies (responsive to local communities). One of the drivers in this effort to articulate an inaugural *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* is to enhance connectedness, coherence, and collective consciousness without diminishing the vibrancy imbued in the unity in diversity enjoyed as a collective.

This stimulus paper acknowledges the unique role, function and expectations placed upon Islamic schools, and by extension the field of Islamic schooling in Australia. Islamic schools represent lively sites of hope that positively contribute to and constitute notions of identity for Australian Muslims. Islamic schools and Islamic schooling symbolise a communal effort toward, and the celebration of, a unified Australian Muslim identity – the seeds for which



***'While uniformity denotes a state of bland sameness and oppressive homogeneity, unity points to what connects things... Just as unity does not mean uniformity, plurality does not mean division and chaos.'***

(Kalin, 2007, p. 473)<sup>30</sup>



Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah shares:

***‘For centuries, Islamic civilization harmonized indigenous forms of cultural expression with the universal norms of its sacred law.***

It struck a balance between temporal beauty and ageless truth and fanned a brilliant peacock’s tail of unity in diversity from the heart of China to the shores of the Atlantic. Islamic jurisprudence helped facilitate this creative genius. In history, Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal clear river. Its waters (Islam) are pure, sweet, and life-giving but—having no color of their own—reflect the bedrock (indigenous culture) over which they flow. In China, Islam looked Chinese; in Mali, it looked African. Sustained cultural relevance to distinct peoples, diverse places, and different times underlay Islam’s long success as a global civilization. The religion became not only functional and familiar at the local level but dynamically engaging, fostering stable indigenous Muslim identities and allowing Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions wherever they went.

(Abd-Allah, 2009; p. 1-2)<sup>31</sup>.

the emergence of a distinctive Australian Muslim identity have already begun<sup>11,12,13</sup>. Sustained and purposeful development of this emerging identity towards a successful sound and mature Australian Muslim cultural identity must be resolutely undertaken as a conscious pursuit in *our Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* as one of our community’s vital priorities<sup>14</sup>. This stimulus paper reiterates the commitment of Islamic schooling in Australia to the nurturing of positive identities of its learners, cognisant of religious, cultural, and national identities.

The following reflect essential pillars of this *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* and inform priorities for Australian Islamic schools:

### 1. Faith formation

Islamic schools acknowledge their primary *amanah* (trust), providing a faith-based holistic education, working in partnership with parents, families, and community in nurturing and supporting Muslim learners towards mature faith formation.

## 2. Islamic worldview

Islamic schooling privileges an Islamic worldview as the foundation for a distinct form of education. Islamic worldview is both a foundation for *knowing* and *doing*, and it is the lens through which all within Islamic schooling mediate understandings and practices towards a distinct form of education. The concept of *tawhid* (oneness of God, wholeness) is the overarching principle of an Islamic worldview and of education, as envisioned by Islamic schooling as a collective. It serves as both a philosophical and methodological construct that centres purpose and enables coherence and alignment with our understandings of education and schooling.

## 3. Islamic Pedagogy

Islamic schools are faith-based (i.e., Islam) schools whereby faith informs individual schools’ vision, mission, aims, and education philosophies. By extension faith manifests a distinct approach to education across all aspects of an Islamic school community, including in areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and in the broadest sense, areas contributing to a distinct school ethos. Collective commitment to Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education, assists Islamic schools in addressing the big questions about what makes education that is ‘Islamic’ distinct, meaning ‘Islamic schools will not consider Islam solely as a subject of study but rather will approach it as a pedagogy in the broader sense that provides theoretical understandings of what



***‘Islamic Pedagogy extends beyond mere instruction to an overarching conceptualisation for contemporary educational praxis in light of the Islamic tradition.’***

(Memon, Chown & Alkouatli, 2020; p. 4)

education means, for what purpose, and to what end<sup>15</sup>. A commitment to Islamic Pedagogy serves to ground Islamic schools in faith-based educational theory to inform our educational practices – *faithful praxis*<sup>16</sup>.

#### 4. Attention to the whole learner

Islamic schools value an integrated holistic form of education that manifests in a sense of wholeness in learners, such that faith shapes moral virtues and good character, embodies qualities such as empathy in addition to strong academic skills, the capacity to collaborate, innovate, create, appreciate, and think critically within an Islamic worldview. We value developmental diversity across domains, seeing our learners as physical, intellectual, and spiritual human beings necessitating attention to all domains in education<sup>17</sup>.

#### 5. Partnership with parents

Islamic schools as signatories to this *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* align with the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Declaration, viewing learning as ‘a partnership with parents, carers and others in the community, all of whom have a role to play in nurturing the love of learning needed for success at school and in life’<sup>18</sup>. This stimulus paper highlights that Islamic schooling in Australia recognises parents and the family as the child’s first and most influential educator. The nurturing role, the responsibility of faith formation

and the processes associated with learning within the Islamic tradition begin in the home. Families are thus valued, welcomed, and respected within Islamic schooling in Australia as schools seek to partner in the education of their children.

#### 6. Preparing graduates who benefit humanity (committed to change-making, transformation, justice)

This *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* affirms the shared aspiration of all Islamic schools to prepare graduates who benefit humanity<sup>19</sup>.

We envision that our schools will produce graduates who seek to make positive contributions to communities, locally and globally. Graduates with a strong sense of Australian Muslim identity, a strong grounding in faith, and a sense of belonging, such that they can be engaged, socio-critical, proactive citizens and ‘vicegerents-in-the-making’<sup>19</sup>. As we invoke a form of education that confers



Ibn Umar reported:

*The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to people.”*<sup>32</sup>



### *‘Arabic is the language of the Qur’an.*

‘In fact the Qur’an, entirely in God’s voice, clearly stipulates that “We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an so that you [people] may understand” (12:2). Naturally, Arabic is a component of various daily religious practices such as the recital of the Holy Qur’an, the five daily prayers and exaltations of Allah. Therefore, Arabic has held a sacrosanct position in the hearts of Muslims for centuries’.

(Selim, 2017; pg. 30)<sup>33</sup>

power to positively change oneself, society, and the world in which our learners live<sup>20</sup>, we value and promote citizenship characterised by justice and equity, and the practice of critical citizenship for justice - citizenship that may challenge the status quo and invoke positive change<sup>21,22</sup>.

### **7. Centrality of language**

Many learners in Australian Islamic schools hold rich linguistic assets. Arabic is for almost all learners a liturgical language as well as being some learners’ mother tongue, and for others an additional language spoken other than English<sup>23</sup>. *A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* promotes deep respect for the Arabic language, for Arabic language learning, and being inclusive of the wide range of languages spoken by learners in Islamic schooling.

### **8. Acknowledgment of the continual connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

This stimulus paper affirms the commitment of Islamic schooling in Australia to ensuring all learners in Islamic schools learn about the diversity, richness, and vibrancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. It also affirms a commitment to Indigenous justice and self-determination.

### **9. Diversity as a strength**

Diversity is another defining feature of

Islamic schooling in Australia and one of its greatest assets. Manifestations of diversity within Islamic school communities encompass, but are not limited to, ethnic, cultural, generational, linguistic, and religious markers. Diversity can be found among parents, families and carers, learners, educators, and the partners engaged by local Islamic school communities in Australia. For Islamic school communities, respecting diversity is an appreciation of the ‘Divine creativity’<sup>24</sup>.

### **10. Intercultural understanding, social cohesion, harmony, and justice**

Islamic schools seek to connect with and beyond their local communities for mutual benefit, mutual self-understanding, and the possibility of mutual transformation<sup>25</sup>. This stimulus document highlights key enablers for this pillar: promotion of mutual engagement, learning from and with one another; emphasis on God-consciousness (*taqwa*) through critical dialogue and inquiry, toward living ethical and justice-oriented lives<sup>26</sup>; and ‘critical faithfulness’, enabling learners to develop capabilities around ‘critical self-reflexivity’, ‘an important form of contextual self-understanding needed to achieve better social cohesion, harmony and justice’ in a pluralistic interconnected world<sup>27</sup>.

*“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for people of knowledge.”*

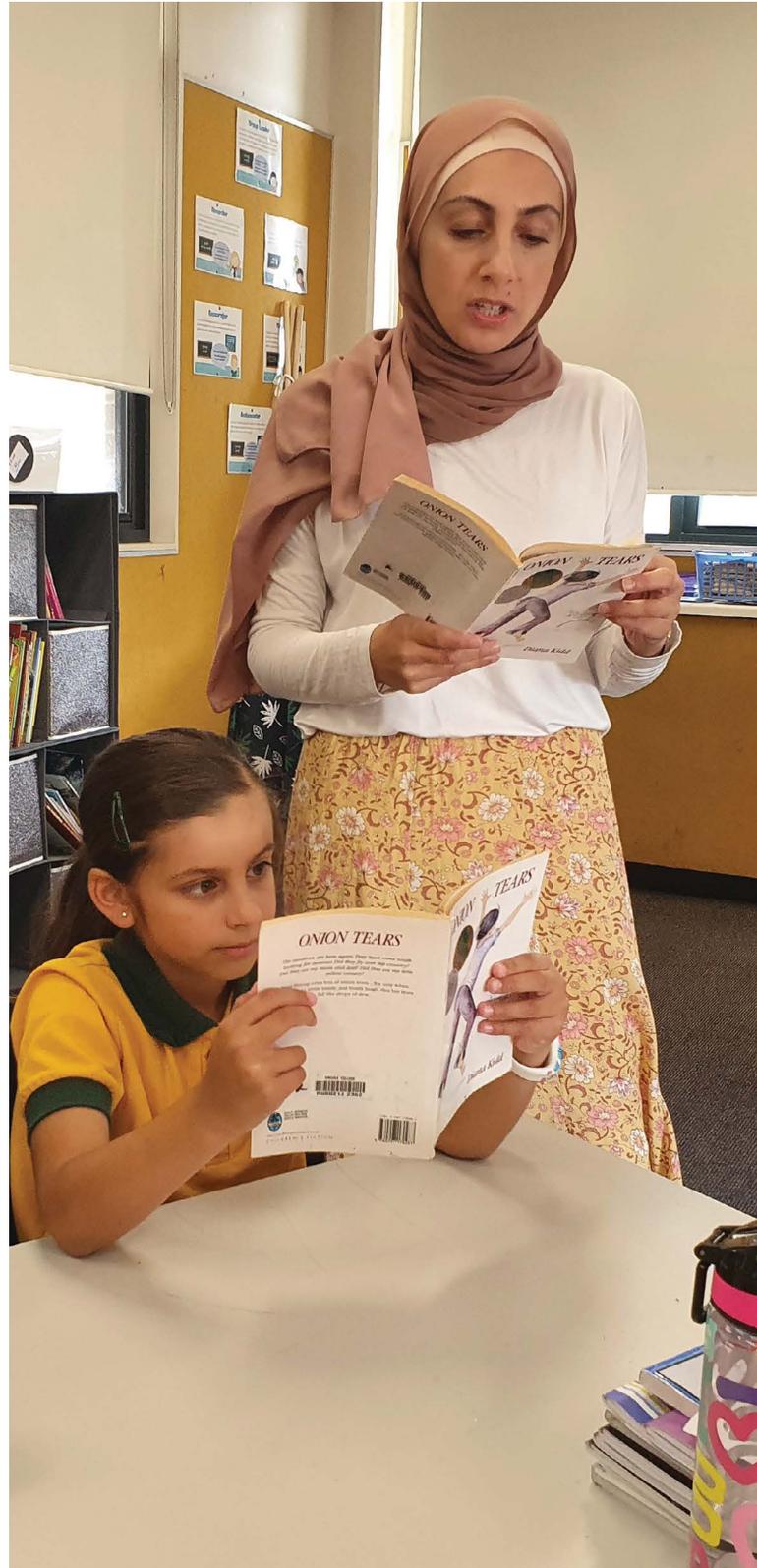
Qur’an (30:22)<sup>34</sup>

## 11. Alignment with national education priorities

This *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* aligns with The Education Goals for Young Australians outlined in the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Declaration<sup>28</sup>, in that they aspire to promote equity and excellence, with all young Australians becoming confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

## 12. Culture of cohesion

‘Culture weaves together the fabric of everything we value and need to know - beliefs, morality, expectations, skills, and knowledge - giving them functional expression by integrating them into effectual customary patterns’<sup>29</sup>. This effort is an educative imperative through its association with the divine trust embedded in our concept of education - representing a shared matter of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and moral commitment, demanding dynamic creativity.



# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: ISLAMIC SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

**Islamic schools now enter a “distinction” phase that demands pushing beyond accreditation or accountability and toward rethinking purpose and renewal of practice.**

Since their establishment in the early 1980s, Islamic schools in Australia have grown to number 47 schools with about 40,561 full-time students<sup>35</sup>. Like other Australian government and non-government schools, Islamic schools are ‘required to meet public standards of educational and financial accountability, and comply with the legislative, regulatory and reporting requirements that apply to all schools...[and] must meet the criteria established by the relevant state or territory government for registration as a school.’<sup>36</sup> Although part of the independent sector, they are not governed or administered as a total system, nor are they overseen by an authoritative or central governing body. Though not homogeneous in their approach or vision, one of their main purposes is faith formation. Islamic schools have achieved so much, not the least of which is that they are a safe zone for Muslim learners in times of immense challenges, due to domestic and international events. With the rise in Islamophobia, demand for Islamic schools has also increased. One of the challenges they are attempting to address is the permeation of the ‘Islamic’

as a whole-school effort that is beyond a single department, not limited to the teaching of ‘Islamic content’ sprinkled across an otherwise standardised approach to curriculum.

The journey of Islamic schooling in Australia can be encapsulated in three overlapping phases: Establishment, Belonging, and Distinction.

## **Establishment Phase**

The impetus for establishing Islamic schools has always been a recognition of the centrality of religious identity and to avail schools as vehicles, reinforcing religious values reflected at home. But since the times of the earliest schools which were established in the early 1980s, founding communities have realised that there are divergent perspectives on what an Islamic school entails and how schooling ought to be done. The Establishment Phase was consumed with the important work of articulating vision, ensuring competency, and gaining internal Muslim community trust. The tireless efforts of the early school founders in the 1980s and 1990s were tumultuous at times but laid the

necessary foundations for the schools we celebrate today.

### **Belonging Phase**

The second phase is defined by a combination of struggle and hope. In this phase, Australian Islamic schools endured their fair share of broader, external community attention in the form of outright Islamophobia at times, and implicit acts of denigration at others. High levels of documented cases of Islamophobia were met with resilience, patience, and perseverance, and during this time Islamic schools defined themselves with a sense of belonging. During this phase interfaith initiatives, local and global service learning, and broader community collaborations blossomed.

### **Distinction Phase**

Significant achievements have been made during the first two phases outlined above. Australian Islamic schools are an integral part of the social fabric in their respective communities. School accreditation and state accountability measures have been mastered by many and graduates are increasingly

championing both academic excellence and social and civic responsibility. Islamic schools now enter what has been termed a 'distinction' phase, that demands pushing beyond mastery of conventional practice and toward rethinking purpose and renewal of practice in light of original aspirations. In this Distinction Phase, Islamic schools are recognising the unique opportunity to share innovative educational thought and practice, offering a positive contribution to the broader field of schooling in Australia.

### **Further Reading**

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# SECTION B

# LEARNERS

**The dignity of the child and by extension, our learners, is to be honoured and preserved as the highest of priorities. Islamic schooling in Australia holds firm to asset-based views (applying the principle of *Husn-ul-than*; holding positive view and high opinion) of learners and their families – as the basis of relationships, engagement and our discursive practices.**

This stimulus paper articulates a shared view of learners, applying a consistent theoretical lens from an Islamic worldview. This view of learners is fundamental to how we understand learning and leading learning, as aims / objectives and approaches of educators will vary depending on the theoretical lens through which they view their learners<sup>37</sup>. This shared view therefore represents a key articulation as the basis for renewal of our underpinning educational philosophies and relationships, engagement, and our discursive practices in Islamic schooling.

*‘Education must begin with a spiritual understanding of who human beings are, for we are ultimately spiritual beings. We are in this world for a purpose, and we have a responsibility towards the Creator and His creation.’*

(Nasr, 2012, p. 13)<sup>52</sup>

## **1. Acknowledge that children are born on *fitrah* (the natural state of purity and innocence):**

We appreciate the innate and unique qualities, virtues, dispositions, and capabilities of our learners – recognising that every learner is unique. A foundational principle in the theorisation of the child in the Islamic tradition is that children are born on *fitrah*, sometimes referred to as the natural state or disposition – meaning

This view of learners directs us to:

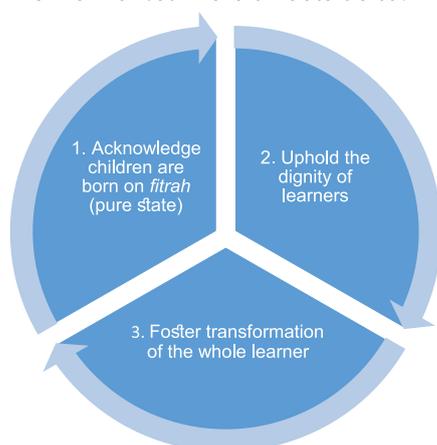


Figure 1.2 – Directives from our View of Learners

*‘So direct your face toward the religion inclining to truth. (Adhere to) the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah.’*

(Qur’an 30: 30)<sup>51</sup>

they are born pure and innocent. *Fitrah* implies an innate tendency or a natural inclination to know Allah<sup>38</sup>. The *fitrah* also means children will be highly receptive to teaching and learning<sup>39</sup>, which is important for parents and educators to understand.

People, environments, and schools represent important influences on the *fitrah* of children. The main influences are parents, the home, and the symbiotic and supportive partnership that Islamic schools and their educational practices play in concert with parents' child rearing practices<sup>40</sup>.

***'...a child is a trust in the care of the parents, for his[her] heart is a precious uncut jewel devoid of any form or carving, which will accept being cut into any shape and will be disposed according to the guidance it receives from others.'***

(Al-Ghazali, 2001, p. 78)<sup>53</sup>

The concept of *fitrah* reiterates for us that sometimes children err not because there is something inherently wrong with them, rather influences or environment may not be conducive to nurturing *fitrah* or may cause deviation from it. This holds critical significance for our view of Muslim learners in Islamic schooling. Following this view of the child and the distinct theoretical lens we hold of our learners (within an Islamic worldview), we could say – the child is without deficit – and therefore our concern must not be in locating problems inherently within our learners, or apportioning blame to the child or their parents, family, or in espousing deficit-based views or language towards either. Rather our attention and concern must be on the structures of schooling and our pedagogy in accordance and alignment with the nurturance of *fitrah*. We value the healing and transformative qualities of an education in the Islamic tradition, and by

extension, approaches of Islamic schools with their learners. We commit to working with our learners and their parents and families.

## 2. Uphold the dignity of learners

The dignity of the child is upheld unequivocally in our Islamic tradition – and therefore does not change, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The dignity of the child and by extension, our learners, is to be honoured and preserved as the highest of priorities. On account of the immense value of our children and the dignity we attach to them, Islamic schooling in Australia holds firm to asset-based views of learners and their families – as the basis of relationships, engagement and our discursive practices. We maintain a shared unwavering commitment to rejecting deficit-based views of learners in our schools, classrooms and in our relationships and engagement with learners, families, and school communities<sup>41</sup>.

***"None of you truly believes until he [she] loves for his brother [sister] what he [she] loves for himself [herself]."***

(Sahîh al-Bukhârî and Sahîh Muslim)<sup>54</sup>

We seek to uphold our shared *amanah* (trust) by meeting each and every learner where they are at, with a commitment to working collaboratively from their strengths. In a neoliberal era of schooling that routinely blames victims and marginalised peoples for their own schooling failures<sup>40</sup> which maintains a hegemony around 'perform' and 'conform' cultures in schooling<sup>41</sup>, Islamic schooling must provide a safe space that honours learners (and parents); recognising that Islamic schooling entails a requisite transformative purpose in education. This

means that mercy, empathy, and justice, as well as forgiveness and the willingness to trust and work with learners and their families, are essential ingredients in a culture of care within Islamic schooling in Australia.

*'It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle to them; had you been harsh and hardhearted, they would have surely scattered from around you. So excuse them and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him'*

(Aal-Imran: 159)<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Foster transformation of the whole learner

Islamic schools represent more than instructional sites, they represent sociocultural environments that are both a site and source of development, where our learners interact with various forms of social practices. Human development is always fluid, always happening, and can be accelerated or decelerated by the ways (pedagogy, activities, instruction, discussions) in which adults (educators) engage children (learners) within a sociocultural environment (our Islamic schools)<sup>42</sup>. This *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* and shared articulations of learners, learning and leading learning allow for coherence in our educational philosophies and practices, in the formulation of learning environments aligned to our vision for learning, and for the valued developmental diversity<sup>43</sup> that contributes to transformation of the whole learner.

This *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia*, like many Muslim educational theories, draws inspiration for growth and human development from within our education tradition. It is a source offering

parents, educators, and the field of Islamic schooling important points of reflection for nurturing children in a holistic manner, cognisant of stages of growth, the nuances of human development in our Islamic tradition and the distinctness of education in our Islamic tradition. The brief theorisation of the child in this stimulus paper emphasises the intrinsic nature of children, and the *fitrah*, already existing within the child or learner. Education in the Islamic tradition, and the form of education envisaged by Islamic schooling in Australia, assumes a process of unfolding and bringing out, more so than a process of instilling or pouring in<sup>44</sup>. This emphasises that our learners are already someone and our efforts are to nurture this process of becoming, as 'vicegerents-in-the-making'<sup>45</sup>. They also demand deeper reflection on human development and stages

*"And when the Nurturing Lord said to the Angels, Certainly I am placing in the Earth a Khalifa"*

(Qur'an 2:30)<sup>56</sup>

of development.

Importantly, educators are encouraged to prioritise mediated guidance as a pedagogical principle<sup>46</sup> to assist learners in consciousness on the path to becoming. Learners, like all people, are viewed as undergoing a journey of becoming from: (1) *Nafs Ammarah*<sup>47</sup> (a soul [*nafs*] that acts on impulse and is developing in consciousness), to (2) arriving at *Nafs Lawwamah*<sup>48</sup> (a conscious soul [*nafs*] that struggles between good and evil but feels remorse or shame when overcome with evil), to ultimately (3) becoming a *Nafs Mutam'innah*<sup>49</sup> (a conscious soul [*nafs*] that is at peace and in tune with divine will)<sup>50</sup>.

Every Islamic school constituting

the collective of Islamic schooling in Australia has a special trust in nurturing and cultivating the people our learners ought to become - graduates who benefit humanity. For Islamic schooling in Australia, our shared vision and shared understandings on learners, learning and leading learning is focused on a transformative form of education encompassing integrated human development for transformation of the whole learner.

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# LEARNING

**The purpose of learning in the Islamic tradition is to know God (*ma'rifa*) - to nurture and cultivate a virtuous life, and to benefit others. Some suggest that learning is to refine one's character (*adab*) and others define the purpose of learning as transforming the human condition (*tarbiya*) but both recognise that learning must be holistic in the sense of cultivating the mind, body, and soul.**

This stimulus paper outlines a shared vision for learning, as a faith-centred collective, to assist Islamic schools as they develop or renew their local vision for learning. Local school visions may align with:

- A local reading and prioritisation of shared aims of education in the Islamic tradition.
- The vision, aim and education philosophy of their Islamic school (informed by the former).
- The requirements and standards set by external authorities; foregrounded, complemented, or supplemented by the process of learning in the Islamic tradition (see below) and local indicators of learning<sup>57</sup>.
- Research informed accounts of 'what works' practices supported by the local, ongoing, and dialectic process of ascertaining what works for their school community context and their learners.

A shared local school vision relies on an Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education, drawing out a local overarching meta narrative on the purpose of schooling or education



(our higher purpose ‘why’) making explicit ‘what’ is to be learned and ‘why’. This is something that curriculum on its own cannot offer, given the absence of explicit attention to purpose<sup>58</sup>. A key enabler for a local shared vision for learning is sustained and broad-based negotiation, thereby providing a foundation for action, specifically a reading of and an orientation towards curriculum and a foundation for pedagogy and assessment. Pedagogy that is aligned to purpose (see section C – Logics of Pedagogy in Islamic Schooling) and assessment that assesses ‘meaningful learning’, utilising innovative ‘measures’ which are not only tied to standards but are complemented by ‘local indicators of learning’<sup>59</sup>. A shared vision for learning, as a foundation for action, supports schools in building coherence of purpose and capacity for supporting learning across the school community. Common and agreed upon aims mean that educators in Islamic schools can work collegially and collaboratively rather than in isolation, our valued parents experience a sense of being connected, and learners can experience a sense of wholeness in their learning rather than fragmentation.

Reflecting on the above considerations, we see that for Islamic schools committed to distinction, a shared vision for learning cannot be derived from a ‘fragmented view of children’, or of ‘learning’, or a ‘mechanistic approach to education’<sup>60</sup>. *Our Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* raises learning far beyond a focus on meeting narrow ‘success criteria’ or incremental improvements in decontextualised knowledge from lesson to lesson.

In realising distinct purposes for education in the Islamic tradition, *Tauhid*<sup>61</sup> emphasised, ‘this requires a comprehensive and holistic approach to learning and a unifying principle of education’ – referring to *tawhid*<sup>62</sup>.



### ***‘Education is an integral part of the belief system of any society.***

A society’s most cherished beliefs and ideals are embodied in its educational vision, objectives and practices. Islam offers man a simple yet profound view of life and the world, including man’s role in the world and his relation to its Creator. This view is based on the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (oneness, wholeness, integration, coherence, unity, universality and God-consciousness). This concept of *tawhid* is the keystone of Islam and the overarching principle of the Islamic worldview and its concomitant view of education. It serves as both a philosophical and methodological construct that brings coherence and structure to our understanding of the world and all aspects of life and society, including education. All other considerations are subordinate to it.’

(Tauhidi, 2001: pg 18)<sup>64</sup>

This principle would see a shared vision for learning as one that encompasses ‘a holistic and integrated view of knowledge, life, learning, and the learner.’<sup>62</sup>

The shared vision for learning above provides Islamic schools with broad parameters for negotiating renewed shared local visions for learning, as well as stimulus for discussion on learning and building purpose, coherence, and alignment<sup>63</sup> of this across school communities. What follows are important considerations highlighting distinctions, as well as key concepts related to learning in the Islamic tradition.

### **Learning in the Islamic Tradition**

Learning is an unequivocal directive in the Islamic tradition that has inspired Muslim societies and communities since the first word of the Qur’an ‘*iqra*’ (read/recite) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

### **Why Learning**

The purpose of learning in the Islamic tradition is to know God (*ma’rifa*), to nurture and cultivate a virtuous life, and to be of benefit to others. This entails refining one’s character (*adab*) and/or transforming the human condition (*tarbiya*). Both recognise that learning must be holistic in the sense of cultivating the mind, body, and soul.

## What Learning Entails

Muslim scholars point to two broader classifications of knowledge which are useful to consider when thinking about what learning entails. The first is the distinction between knowledge that is essential to every individual (*fard ‘ayn* or individually compulsory) and knowledge that is a communal responsibility (*fard kifayya*). Learning how to pray is a common example of the first, whereas learning medicine is an example of the latter. Further, this categorisation avoids the pitfall of categorising learning into ‘sacred’ and/or ‘secular.’ It is the intention behind learning and its application that renders it beneficial or harmful.

The distinct classification of knowledge provides parameters of what learning entails, in that a balance between individually essential and communal knowledges are important. Approaching all knowledge from within an Islamic worldview fosters alignment in thinking, and learning must be beneficial to a learner’s essential purpose.

*‘A worldview refers to a set of beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality that inform one’s perceiving, thinking, knowing and doing.’*

(Abdullah & Nadvi, 2011, p.268)

## How Learning Happens

The following diagram highlights four terms that are commonly associated with the process of learning in the Islamic tradition, and the distinctions between each.



According to the classical lexicographer al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī (d. 402 A.H. /1011 C.E.) the word *tarbiya* means

*‘to cause something to develop from stage to stage until reaching its completion [full potential].’*

This implies that something (the *fitrah*, or intrinsic nature) already exists within the child and that education is a process of unfolding and bringing out, more than a process of instilling and pouring in. This is similar to the current-day notion of developmental stages.

(Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’an, Bayrūt : al-Dār al-Shāmiyah, 1992, p.336. in Tauhidi, 2001; pg 6)<sup>65</sup>

### **Tarbiya**

(guiding, growing together, developing cognition, emotion, consciousness, nurturing wholeness)

### **Ta’dib**

(modelling, practicing, and refining character, culture, and comportment)

### **Ta’lim**

(imparting knowledge, instructing directly, and making meaning together)

### **Tazkiya**

(helping each other in reflecting, self-assessing, self-disciplining, and purifying, one’s spiritual self)



*Ta'lim* is commonly referred to when speaking of direct religious instruction, such as memorisation of the Qur'an or learning of religious beliefs and practices.

*Tarbiya* and *Ta'dib* are often used interchangeably to refer to the role of the educator in mentoring learners toward holistic growth and development and modelling moral uprightness and virtue.

*Tazkiya* is less commonly used but holds a precedent in scholarship related to spiritual purification of the soul/heart, which includes controlling one's ego, and cultivating spiritual virtues such as humility.

These processes are mutually inclusive and are important processes for our reflections on practice in the field of Islamic schooling in Australia.

## Key Concepts Related to Learning

There are many concepts related directly and indirectly to learning in the Islamic tradition. The five listed below provide key elements that serve as a foundation for the distinctive nature of learning in education in the Islamic tradition, and by extension, for Islamic schools.

### 1. *Niyyah* (Intention)

*Niyyah* or intention is an integral aspect of the life of a believer but has significant relevance in teaching and learning. Learning with the intention of other than to know Allah (e.g., learning for personal accolades) diminishes the purpose of learning.

### 2. *Ilm / Aml* (Knowledge and Action)

The interplay between knowledge and action is a common theme in the Islamic tradition. It is commonly held that putting knowledge into action reflects gratitude for Allah's bounty.

### 3. *Ihsan*

The clearest definition of *Ihsan* is that given by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in the famous Hadith of Jibreel (Gabriel), thus '...that you worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you'<sup>66</sup>. Though in this context *ihsan* can mean being fully aware of Allah, it can also mean the highest level of virtue, and excellence in all that we do.

### 4. *Muhasabah* (Self-assessment/introspection)

The term commonly refers to introspection of one's intentions and actions. It has implications for the way pedagogy and assessment in Islamic schools are informed, particularly moral and character development including engagement and student behaviour. It also holds implications for personal growth and refinement for all

Islamic school community members and for professional growth and development for educators and leaders<sup>67</sup>.

Muhasabah -

*'a socio-spiritual process for development involving continuous self-reflexivity triangulated with divinity, with potential to propel a person to their highest good.'*

(Alkouatli, forthcoming)<sup>69</sup>

### National Education Priorities

There are both significant shared aspirations and points of distinction between conceptions of learning in Islamic schooling and Australian national education priorities. In relation to shared aspirations, learning in the Islamic tradition aligns strongly with the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Declaration<sup>67</sup> commitment to holistic learning that emphasises the importance of holistic education stating, 'Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians...'

The overarching national education priorities of excellence and equity in education and their action plan that includes strong partnerships with the community, delivering world class curriculum and assessment, and meaningful measures for accountability equally resonate<sup>68</sup>. The distinctions for education in the Islamic tradition, and by extension, Islamic schooling in Australia, reside in centring particular education

priorities without losing sight of the others. For example, moral and spiritual aspects of identity and fostering a love for lifelong learning take precedence.

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# LEADING LEARNING

**The essence of learning in the Islamic tradition is to know God, meaning such a lofty aspiration places a significant responsibility on school leaders to not only embody it themselves but also influence those whom they lead toward this aspiration.**

From an Islamic perspective, teaching, and by virtue leading institutions of learning, is ‘a sacred duty of the highest order.’<sup>70</sup> Sacredness of educational endeavour cannot be underestimated in the implications for school leaders in Islamic schools. Islamic schools are not solely places that impart knowledge for the sake of market utility and personal economic stability. Rather, if the essence of learning in the Islamic tradition is to know Allah, then such a lofty aspiration places a significant responsibility on school leaders to not only embody it themselves but also influence those who they lead toward this aspiration.

Such responsibility also blurs the boundaries between school leaders, educators, parents, and learners in Islamic school settings and communities because each bears a responsibility (*amanah*) in the joint upbringing of children, and to the formation of a learning environment that enables and sustains pursuit of a shared higher purpose. A four-dimensional model for leading learning reflects these overlaps where<sup>71</sup>:

- Leaders *guide* with wisdom and values
- Educators *teach* with compassion and understanding
- Parents *care* with responsibility and commitment
- Learners *honour* responsibility for themselves and others, being a mirror  to one another.



***“The believer is the mirror of the believer.”***

As a mirror reflects what is, so too can learners be a mirror for one another, inspiring to good. The true believer is the one who most truly reflects prophetic virtue.

(al-Adab al-Mufrad, 239)<sup>91</sup>

The centrality of the educator role and its association with leading dominates formulations of leadership concepts, with knowledge and knowledge-giving as significant dimensions. Teaching, leading, and caring become intertwined activities with a wider remit<sup>72</sup>.



Qur'anic values of leadership reflect priorities for leading learning in Islamic schools. Concepts such as good counsel (*nasihat*) and sincere conduct (*ikhlas*), consultation (*shura*), dissent (*ikhtilaf*), public interest (*maslahah*), accountability (*muhasabah*), and deep contemplation and reflection (*tafakkur*) must serve as signposts for how leading happens<sup>73</sup>. How school leaders centre and enact these values will vary, but such values articulate ideal Islamic perspectives of distinction on leading.

The challenge for Islamic schools today is balancing responsibilities of educating, leading, and caring with contemporary leadership mandates that promote 'managerial' leadership. In our current education policy context where learning has become consumed with 'teaching to the test,' Islamic schools are faced with a genuine challenge in reviving learning that centres an authentically holistic education. Leading educationalists in Australia point to the significant impact of policy on the work of school leaders and principals, questioning the negative impact of policy with reference to the very purpose of education. Learning that privileges standards and accountability marginalises moral and philosophical aspects of educational leadership<sup>74</sup>. Schools where managerial leadership supersedes pedagogical leadership often create school leaders who are alienated from their educator teams<sup>75</sup>. Education policy today, which has largely limited 'core' learning to literacy and numeracy tests, and which sorts and selects students on the basis of NAPLAN scores, results in a measure of Islamic schooling that is antithetical to school missions and visions or the overarching purpose of education in the Islamic tradition.

Islamic school leaders face the challenging task of leading deliberation and consultation, asking what their measures of success are and how these measures

are generated<sup>76</sup>. Their questions ask; how do we meet the needs of super diverse Islamic school communities; foreground the vision for Islamic schooling; optimise available resources, while complying with accountability measures and making accommodations that meet the needs of all learners? What constitutes a 'good' school leader of an Islamic school? Grounded in contemporary educational leadership research, the following are seven considerations for leading learning.

### **1. Leadership theory assembled into practice**

School leaders and principals in Islamic schools must generate theories for leading their schools through a reading of their context, followed by deliberation as to how policy can be enacted (and not the reverse) – a process of practical reasoning assembling into practice both their leadership theories and their reading of context<sup>77</sup>. This, once assembled into practice, shapes responses to school planning, professional learning, performance management and development, and supports forms of distributed leadership.

### **2. Centre Leading Learning**

Centring leading learning aligns the 'message' of leading learning with real, tangible, and sustainable leadership practices that span vertically up to the school board and horizontally across



all educators and educational support members and learners. This style of leading learning facilitates purposeful, intellectual conversations with educators and educator support teams, learners, and parents about the purpose of education in Islam and how to achieve this within the current global context.

### 3. Distribute Leadership

Leadership roles and responsibilities should be distributed and dispersed across the school<sup>78</sup> so that leading learning extends to all those who engage in activities of leadership<sup>79</sup>.

### 4. Conditions for a Culture of Practice

Leadership should provide a context where educators and others can be brave, innovative, and experimental. Leaders should create the conditions for a culture of practice whereby they take calculated risks, prioritise, and promote the agency and efficacy of their educator team, balance 'evidenced based practice' with the expert local knowledge of their educators, and prioritise improving the learnings of educators as well as their learners. A culture of practice puts emphasis on transforming existing practices and creating new praxis knowledge<sup>80</sup> within their own school.

### 5. Intellectually Demanding Learning

Demanding learning creates and sustains conditions for educators and learners to engage in deep learning that engages critically and actively with their lifeworlds. Such learning draws on intellectually demanding work within a strongly supportive environment that positively engages with difference; and the need to connect with and mediate the world beyond the classroom<sup>81</sup>.

### 6. School Culture Driven by Inward *Sunnan*

Foster a school community wide culture that embodies the inner *sunnan* (e.g.,

humility) in all leadership practices rather than solely reliant on the outward *sunnan* (e.g., dress code) as the defining features of an Islamic school ethos<sup>82</sup>.

### 7. Impact Beyond the School Walls

Consider the impact of leadership outside the school walls by emphasising not only character formation inside the school but also relationships that take difference, diversity, and engaged coexistence seriously<sup>83</sup>.

### 8. Take Learners' Lifeworlds Seriously

If we are to take our learners seriously, then we must reflect on the social worlds of learners, the way they experience and act upon these, as well as the issues and concerns they hold, to then ensure we are pedagogically relevant and responsive<sup>84</sup>.



*'The Prophetic model of education drew its content from the everyday experiences and day-to-day problems of the early Muslim community.'*

In fact, the entire genre of *asbāb an-nuzūl* literature (occasions of revelation), testifies to the extreme importance early Islamic education placed on the day-to-day circumstances and concerns of students and their community.

(Tahidi, 2001; p. 13)<sup>92</sup>

### 9. Professional Learning via Action Research (and other forms of practitioner research or practitioner inquiry)

Consider collaborative and participatory action research for curricular and pedagogical renewal that builds on the lived realities, dilemmas<sup>85 86</sup>, challenges, and experiences of educators<sup>87 88 89</sup>, and which champions curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices that align with the mission and vision of the school.

Leading the learning process is arguably the most central aspect of what school leaders do. And 'pedagogical leadership'

is not limited to what happens inside classrooms<sup>90</sup>. Pedagogical leadership includes inspiring and facilitating on-going professional learning, educating the community about the school's purpose and distinction, and fostering a school ethos (in both the inward and outward *sunnan*) that is reflective of the purpose of education in Islam.



### Recommended Reading

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# FIGURE 1.3 - LEARNERS, LEARNING, AND LEADING LEARNING

## Learners

- Born on *fitrah* (centrality of *tawhid*; natural inclination to know God)
- Unique with innate & unique qualities, virtues, capabilities & dispositions
- Highly receptive to learning and teaching & through potentials for growth through God consciousness (*taqwa*)
- Viewed via an asset-based view (*husn al dhan*) honouring & preserving the dignity of the child as the highest of priorities
- Already “someone”, on the journey of becoming, as “vicegerents-in-the-making”, & engaged, socio-critical, proactive citizens



## Learning

- A sacred act
- Leading to knowledge, which leads to God
- For purpose of knowing God and to nurture and cultivate a virtuous life
- For refinement of character (*adab*) and transforming of the human condition (*tarbiya*)
- Holistic - cultivating mind, body, and soul
- Approached with excellence (*ihsan*) in mind
- A process of unfolding and drawing out, more so than a process of instilling or pouring in
- A process mediated by key concepts:
  - *ta'lim*: imparting knowledge, instructing, and making meaning together
  - *ta'dib*: modelling, practicing, and refining character, culture, and comportment
  - *tarbiya*: guiding, growing together, developing cognition, emotion, consciousness, nurturing wholeness
  - *tazkiya*: self-assessing, self-disciplining, and purifying one's spiritual self
- Focused on higher integrated objectives - development of self (*taqwa*) and social development

## Leading Learning

- Sacred duty of the highest order
- A prophetic role of guiding towards God
- Most central aspect of what school leaders do
- Entailing the emodiment of aspirations, guiding with wisdom & values
- Reflecting Qur'anic values: good counsel (*nasiha*), sincere conduct (*ikhlas*), consultation (*shura*), dissent (*ikhtilaf*), public interest (*maslaha*), accountability (*muhasabah*), and deep contemplation and reflection (*tafakkur*)
- Distributed and dispersed, so leading extends to all engaged in leadership activities
- Demands the creating and sustaining of conditions for the whole community to engage in deep learning
- Enabled by a culture of on-going professional learning and growth
- Precipitating renewed cultures of practice, whereby educators, and others can be brave, innovative, and experimental
- Entailing steadfastly inspiring and illuminating others on purpose and distinction
- Fostering a school ethos in both inward and outward *sunnan*

# Education Framework - A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia

DIVERSE WAYS A SCHOOL CAN BE 'ISLAMIC'

SHARED VISION OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLING

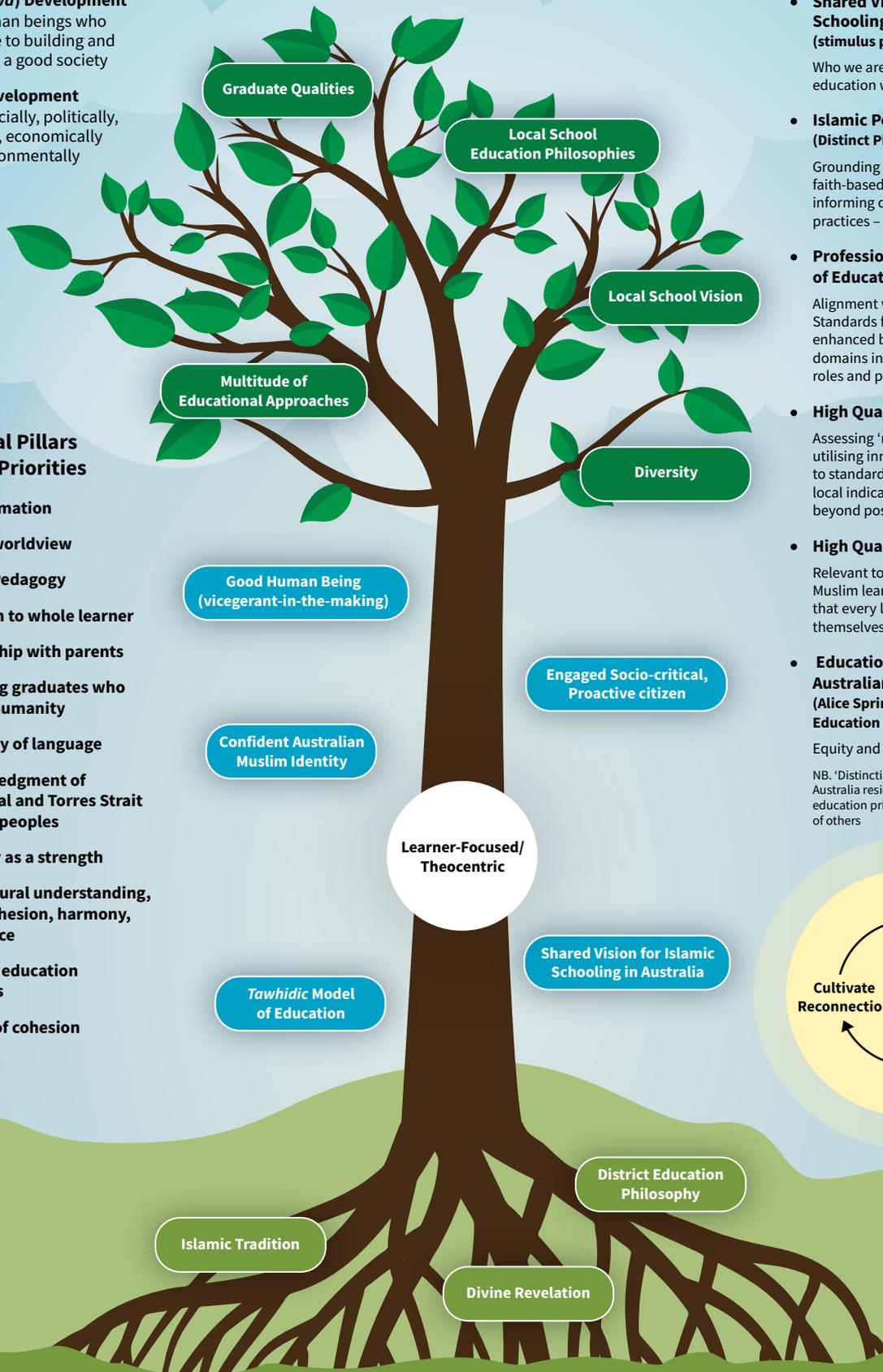
ISLAMIC TRADITION

## Integrated Objectives of Islamic Schooling

- 1. Self (Taqwa) Development**  
Good human beings who contribute to building and sustaining a good society
- 2. Social Development**  
Benefit socially, politically, spiritually, economically and environmentally

## 12 Essential Pillars informing Priorities

1. Faith formation
2. Islamic worldview
3. Islamic Pedagogy
4. Attention to whole learner
5. Partnership with parents
6. Preparing graduates who benefit humanity
7. Centrality of language
8. Acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
9. Diversity as a strength
10. Intercultural understanding, social cohesion, harmony, and justice
11. National education priorities
12. Culture of cohesion



## Policy Drivers & Priorities

- **Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling (stimulus paper)**  
Who we are and distinct form of education we aspire for
- **Islamic Pedagogy (Distinct Philosophy of Education)**  
Grounding Islamic schools in faith-based educational theory informing distinct educational practices – “faithful praxis”
- **Professional Efficacy & Agency of Educators/Leaders**  
Alignment with Professional Standards for Teachers/Principals, enhanced by a focus on faith-based domains informing educator/leader roles and praxis
- **High Quality Assessment**  
Assessing ‘meaningful learning’, utilising innovative ‘measures’, tying to standards, complemented by local indicators of learning (holistic / beyond positivist)
- **High Quality Curriculum**  
Relevant to the lives of Australian Muslim learners’ lifeworlds, such that every learner can see themselves in the curriculum
- **Education Goals for Young Australians (Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration)**  
Equity and Excellence  
NB. ‘Distinction’ for Islamic schooling in Australia resides in centering particular education priorities without losing sight of others



Tree Analogy  
(Surah Ibrahim 24 - 25)

# SECTION C

# ROLE OF EDUCATORS IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLING

**All educators in Islamic schools are called to model the Prophetic example through a commitment to faith, embodied, aspirationally and wholeheartedly and lived out in words, actions, relationships, virtues and values.**

The stimulus paper acknowledges that educators in Islamic schooling are at the heart of this effort and play a central role in bringing this *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling* to life. All in Islamic schooling acknowledge the nobility of teaching and the lofty role of teachers and educators. Inspired by the Islamic tradition, all in Islamic schools understand that an educator is more than an instructor, rather an educator is a nurturer of souls and minds.

*“The Noble Prophet had the great ability to seamlessly connect learning both to growth (tarbiyah) and God (rububiyah) at the same time. He was the quintessential spiritual educator (murabbi). He educated, inspired and empowered all within a single teachable moment.”*

(Tahidi, 2001: pg 13)<sup>103</sup>

As a collective, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) represents our exemplar, and the best of all teachers and educators. Accordingly, all educators in Islamic schools are called to model the Prophetic example through



*“Abdullah bin ‘Amr reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Verily, I have been sent as a teacher.”*

(Sunan Ibn Majah, 229)<sup>105</sup>

*“Verily in the Messenger of God there is a beautiful model”.*

(Qur’an 33:21)<sup>104</sup>

a commitment to faith, embodied aspirationally and wholeheartedly<sup>93</sup>, and lived out in words, actions, relationships, virtues, and values. The responsibility to provide faith-based education is the primary function and priority of Islamic school communities.

In highlighting the special significance as well as the distinction (below) in the central role of educators in Islamic schooling, this stimulus paper first acknowledges educators as our greatest asset for a healing and transformative faith-based education for learners across our collective. Importantly this stimulus paper also acknowledges the overwhelming impact of a dominant policy era in education on leaders and educators, the residual trauma and

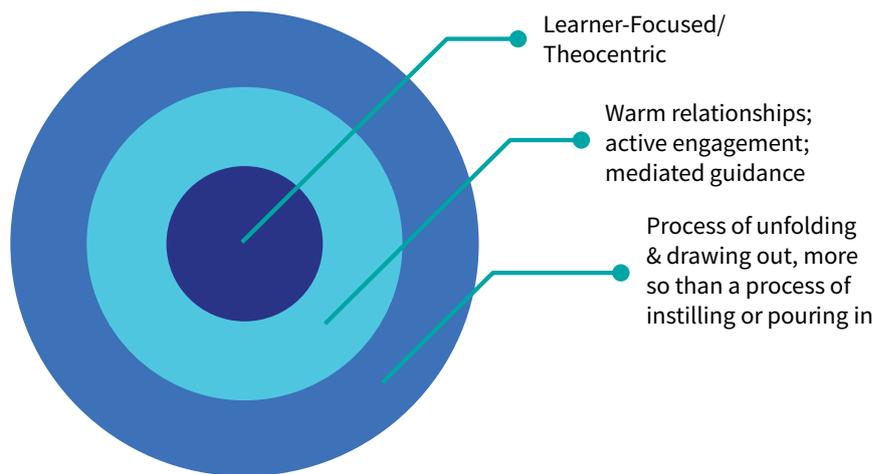


Figure 1.6 – Distinct Form of Education

fatigue which exists post-Covid, on top of rising, complex and often competing demands and pressures surrounding the professional role of our leaders and educators in the contemporary era of schooling. Appreciating the noble and central role all educators play in our Islamic school communities and in realising this *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling*, this stimulus paper attempts to signal and marshal the necessary supports and enabling conditions of leaders and educators which are required to realise expectations placed upon them, and for them to sustain the higher purpose aspirations they hold for themselves, their learners, and their communities.

This *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* clarifies Islamic Pedagogy as a distinct philosophy of education, manifesting a distinct form of education that is deeply theocentric and child or learner-focused.

Such an orientation recognises God at the core of an Islamic faith-based education for Islamic schooling, in concert with an unrelenting focus on our learners. This orientation serves to better mediate binary debates as to whether educational praxis in Islamic schooling, and by

extension educator pedagogies, should be student-centred or teacher-centred. Instead, this stimulus paper emphasises a distinct form of education that is deeply theocentric and child or learner-focused. Following the Prophet's (peace be upon him) pedagogical example, he favoured neither child/learner nor teacher/educator, rather the 'relationship between the two.'<sup>94</sup> A defining feature



Further consideration of the Prophetic pedagogical orientation and repertoire demonstrates that he (peace be upon him)

***'neither viewed learners as passive recipients of information, to be filled, nor independent explorers.'***

(Alkouatli, 2018; p. 367)<sup>106</sup>

of his pedagogical example that is of deep relevance for Islamic schools was his prioritising of 'warm relationships, active engagement and mediated guidance.'<sup>95</sup> Put simply, an Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education, encourages both, respecting educators' pedagogic decision making, both in planning and moment-by-moment to navigate a continuum of approaches. This pedagogy mediates between a more teacher centred pedagogy (e.g., principles drawn from

our tradition or explicit forms of teaching and instruction) and a learner-centred pedagogy (e.g., affording greater learner voice and agency in decisions about their learning, or forms of inquiry learning). For our valued educators throughout the country, this *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* reiterates a conceptualisation of learning as a drawing out process, recognising the innate knowledge within all learners, and their *fitrah* or natural inclination. Such a process of learning calls upon educators in Islamic schools to foster ‘heartfelt interaction’ with their learners for the achievement of spiritual aspirations<sup>96</sup>.

In response to concerted calls for Islamic education inherently being holistic, with the end goal to know God, and for learning to be focused on personal, spiritual growth deepening God consciousness (*taqwa*), it is evident that the role of the educator, and by virtue the school ethos, is critical. For *fitrah* to be drawn out, a school ethos, structure, curriculum, and educator consciousness must all align with the overarching educational aims of Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct form of education<sup>97</sup>.

The centrality of the professional role of educators demands all in Islamic schooling to have special qualities of mind and heart as well as very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and adapt practice. Our valued educators cannot expect to realise these expectations without the significant enabling conditions for growth provided by key governance and leadership stakeholders, in concert with horizontal supports across our Islamic school communities, nor can they do so without a sense of voice, agency, autonomy, and efficacy in their noble role.

*A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia* calls for all educators in Islamic schooling to demonstrate a commitment to:

- Achieving the *Shared Vision for Australian Islamic Schooling* – aligned to our shared understanding of learners, learning and leading learning.
- Achieving the vision of their Islamic school inclusive of the local faith informed vision, mission, values, and education philosophy.
- Honouring and upholding the dignity of children/learners.
- Establishing relationships with learners characterised by care, mercy, empathy, and compassion.
- Embodying the character, conduct and dispositions we collectively wish to see in our learners.
- Developing *faithful praxis* – whereby faith informed theory informs faith-based educational practice.

### **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**

This stimulus paper affirms a commitment to developing educators along the seven standards for teaching and across the four career stages (graduate teachers, proficient teachers, highly accomplished teachers, lead teachers) as outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers<sup>98</sup> (and/or state-based equivalents). Islamic schools recognise that professional standards for teachers may be necessary, but recognise equally that they are not sufficient. Islamic schools’ commitment to distinction means careful consideration of approaches that ‘normalise’ or ‘standardise’ through a deep and critical understanding of policy. It also means that Islamic schools may draw on additional or alternative frameworks or principles (see *Principles of Islamic Pedagogy: A Teacher’s Manual*<sup>99</sup>) to standards, and integrate additional focus on other dimensions and domains of teaching. Additional domains that are important for developing our valued educators in Islamic schools include, but are not limited to the following.

## Educator efficacy

Islamic schools acknowledge the direct correlation between educator efficacy and spirituality – what might be referred to as connectedness with the higher purpose of educators’ role<sup>100</sup>. Spirituality, as a component of educator beliefs, impacts multiple areas of educational practice and therefore positively impacts educators’ sense of efficacy in their educational practice<sup>101</sup>. Islamic schools strive for their educators to see and experience spiritual connectedness with their role, their work, and their educational practices. This also implies that educators in Islamic schools, as reflective and reflexive practitioners, integrate and unify religious/spiritual exercises of *muhasaba* (self-examination/introspection) and *muraqaba* (vigilance with Allah) with educative processes of reflective and reflexive practice<sup>102</sup>.

The Prophet said:

***“Verily God has not sent me as one who is strict and disparaging. Rather, He has sent me as a teacher who brings ease.”***

(Musilm)<sup>107</sup>

## Educator dispositions

In addition to standards that may make explicit aspects of ‘what’ educators in Islamic schools are to teach and ‘how’ they are to teach, important consideration is given to ‘why they teach’ and ‘who’ is the self that teaches<sup>102</sup>. Islamic schools thus encourage educators to constantly reflect on their own educational purpose and intentions. Islamic schools also recognise that educators, like all people,

are engaged in a constant process of becoming, as educators and as human beings. For this reason, Islamic schools prioritise professional dialogue and discussion around valued dispositions for embodiment and modelling, adding nuance to educational roles and practice, and contributing to unified growth and development<sup>103</sup>.

## Relationality in and through teaching



The imperative for educators to constantly reflect on themselves and their conscious process of becoming is beautifully articulated in the verse of the Qur’an which reads:

***“You command people to goodness, and you forget about yourself?”***

(Qur’an 2:44)<sup>108</sup>

A fundamental educator disposition for educators in Islamic schools is that of relationality. Educators in Islamic schools place high value on relationality in and through their professional role. Following the Prophetic example, educators value warm, nurturing relationships that are mutually transformative rather than transactional. Such relationships are mediated through a shared or triangulated relationship with Allah, facilitating mutual growth through holistic learning and expressions of consciousness. Relationships of this kind are essential to educators in Islamic schools for engaging students in faith formation by helping students relate their schooling to their own spiritual and religious lives.

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# LOGICS OF PEDAGOGY FOR ISLAMIC SCHOOLING

**Our collective commitment to Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education serves to ground Islamic schools in faith-based educational theory to inform our educational practices – *faithful praxis.***

This stimulus paper acknowledges the critical importance of pedagogy in realising the *Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia*. For, ‘it is through pedagogies that education gets done’<sup>109</sup>.

Islamic schools’ commitment to distinction, namely a faithful vision for learning and for education, entails an accompanying commitment to distinct pedagogy. Different traditions have different conceptions of knowledge and different ways of knowing, and these necessarily imply different pedagogies<sup>110</sup>. Learners in Islamic schools benefit from principled (faith/tradition), flexible pedagogies that are chosen to align and suit the purposes of education (macro – articulated here, and micro – articulated locally at each Islamic school), the context of learners, and the ways in which the *why*, *what*, and *how* of learning is understood<sup>111</sup>. An Islamic Pedagogy does not promote foreclosure to other pedagogies, but is a foundation for purpose, coherence, and alignment.

This stimulus paper therefore emphasises that the ‘logics of good pedagogy’ in Islamic schools remains open for

examination, reflection, and ongoing renewal and redesign<sup>112 113</sup>. This challenges dominant standardised notions of ‘good pedagogy’ or ‘quality teaching and learning’ that claim to be ‘evidence based’ and promote generalisable ‘what works’ approaches. Islamic schools instead favour research-informed accounts of ‘what works’ practices supported by the local, ongoing, and dialectic process of ascertaining what works for their context and their learners. Approaches that consider the realities of Islamic school educators work in light of the moment-by-moment dilemmas in real-time<sup>114</sup>, constituting ‘what works’ approaches for them in the context of their practice and with their learners.

Islamic schools committed to distinction are encouraged to remain vigilant about standardised notions of quality teaching and learning that lead to reductive scripted forms of transmission pedagogy. For example, forms of pedagogy that reduce learning to incremental improvements in discrete decontextualised knowledge or skills, or learning divorced from purpose and holistic notions of growth (i.e., *taqwa*).

As a collective, Islamic schools instead:

- Value, prioritise and promote the efficacy of our educators - i.e., our pedagogues enacting our pedagogies;
- Value our educators' 'professional knowledge' above 'what works approaches'<sup>115</sup>;
- Apply a critical approach to educational research<sup>116</sup>, specifically 'evidence based' claims that have not considered the priorities or context of Islamic schools or the needs, strengths and interests of Muslim learners;
- Challenge and resist the technologising of educators' work<sup>117</sup>;
- Recognise that dominant scientific (measurable/visible) approaches to learning and teaching are limited and will not encompass, or on their own advance, this distinct vision for learning and for education<sup>118 119</sup>;
- Utilise approaches within dominant positivist paradigms of pedagogy (e.g., school improvement and school effectiveness) selectively and strategically; mediated by our commitment to *faithful praxis*<sup>120</sup> (see below) and our educators engaging in the 'ongoing and dialectic process of determining "what works" for them'<sup>121</sup>; and
- Consider both faithful and local understandings of learning to be much more sophisticated than those of scientific or quantitative one-size fits all standardised approaches to teaching and learning<sup>122</sup>.

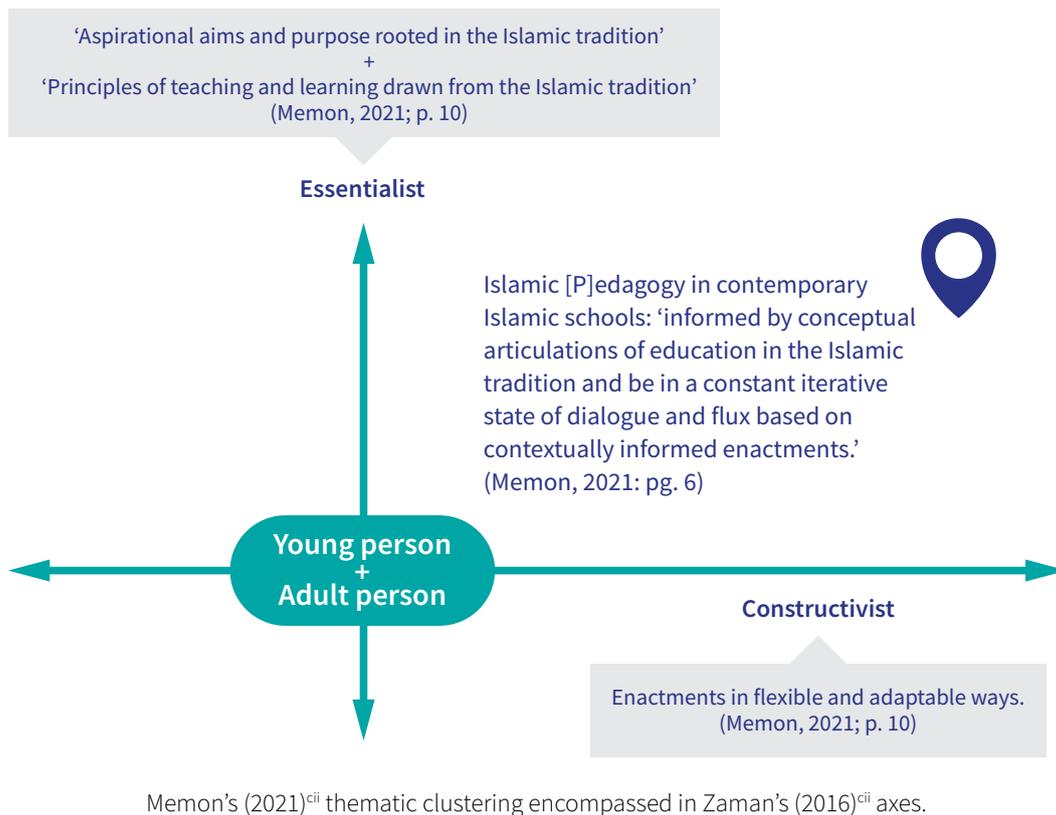
### Islamic Pedagogy

- This stimulus paper highlights the centrality of Islamic Pedagogy to Islamic schooling in Australia. Islamic Pedagogy, 'not simply as

instructional technique, but as a human science, addresses the big questions about what makes education that is "Islamic" distinct'<sup>123</sup>.

- All Islamic schools recognise the primary sources of Islamic educational thought (*Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*) in the Islamic tradition as enduring anchors. Our shared commitment to Islamic Pedagogy allows Islamic school leaders and educators to philosophically draw principles of teaching and learning from the Islamic tradition (vertical axis) allowing for enactments in flexible and adaptable ways (horizontal axis)<sup>124</sup>.
- As a collective, our attention to philosophy of education within educational practice serves to make implicit values, perspectives, and understandings of education or logics of 'good pedagogy' explicit. Our collective commitment to Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education, also serves to ground Islamic schools in faith-based educational theory to inform our educational practices – *faithful praxis*.





**Figure 1.6 – A contemporary Islamic Pedagogy, drawing on both essentialist and constructionist views**

Description: Memon’s (2021)<sup>128</sup> thematic clustering encompassed in Zaman’s (2016)<sup>129</sup> axes.

As a collective, our attention to philosophy of education within educational practice serves to make implicit values, perspectives, and understandings of education or logics of ‘good pedagogy’ explicit<sup>125</sup>. Our collective commitment to Islamic Pedagogy, as a distinct philosophy of education, also serves to ground Islamic schools in faith-based educational theory to inform our educational practices – *faithful praxis*<sup>126</sup>.



Alkouatli (2022) explains, Islamic pedagogies

***‘link unique human dimensions to unique objectives’ of education in the Islamic tradition, ‘evoking self, social, and spiritual transformation in learners and educators.’***

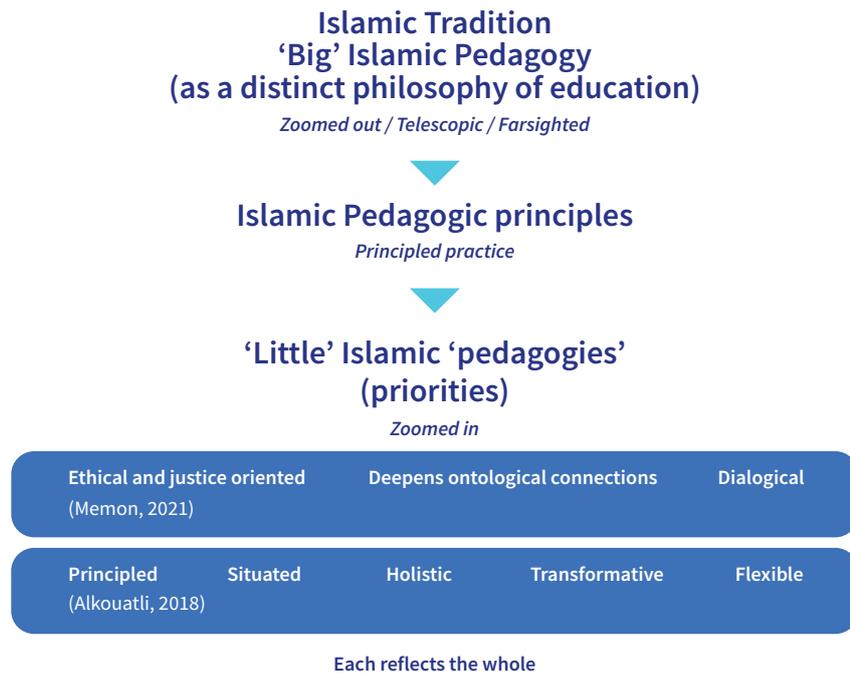
She highlights that,

***‘Islamic educational expressions differ from secular ones at the level of pedagogy’, indicating a unique iteration of pedagogical knowledge.’***

She contends that,

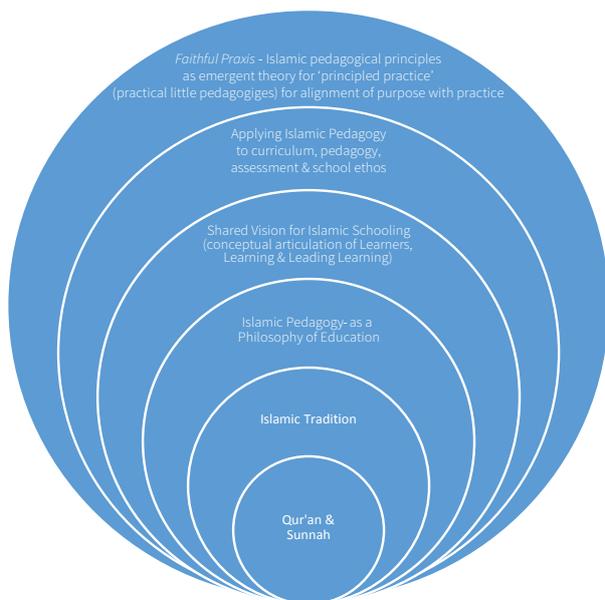
***‘recognition that Islamic pedagogies are pivotal’ for Islamic school educators’ ‘repertoires and in Muslim learners’ development’ is of tremendous relevance to Islamic schools in our collective.***

(p. 129)<sup>127</sup>



Adapted from Alkouatli lecture materials, Course Islamic Pedagogy: Principles and Praxis, Graduate  
**Figure 1.7 – Precipitating practical little pedagogies from big Islamic Pedagogy**

Figure 1.7 above illustrates a distinct feature of an Islamic paradigm and worldview, being the capability to be ‘telescopic’ – whereby we can aim to zoom out to discover the details of the object being discovered, our big ‘Pedagogy’ (as a distinct philosophy of education), as farsighted and open, whilst zooming in on the object of study (our pedagogy), to a close up on our little pedagogies, but always within in a larger view<sup>130</sup>.



**Figure 1.8 - Anchors Constituting a Distinct Philosophy of Education**

As a collective, Islamic schools appreciate that<sup>131</sup>;

- ‘Pedagogy is **coherent** when a teacher’s practice is consistent with his or her theory and approach to teaching. *This is the How.*
- Pedagogy is **effective** when a teacher’s practice facilitates the aims and objectives of education, which includes curriculum. *This is the What.*
- Pedagogy has **purpose** when a teacher’s practice is rooted in a philosophy or belief or reflects a particular ethos or worldview. *This is the Why.*

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# STRATEGY FOR ISLAMIC SCHOOL RENEWAL

**For Islamic schools, action research provides a professional learning strategy to develop a common educational language, deeply engage with the contextual arrangements that inform school practices, and foster relationships between educators and with the school community broadly.**

Schools and educators continue to grapple with approaches to professional learning and growth. This stimulus paper endorses the shift toward professional learning that is educator-led through formation of professional learning communities, promoting reflexive and reflective practice, via various forms of practitioner research. A strategy around action research is offered below in this stimulus paper to cultivate a culture of research and inquiry within our own practice in our Islamic schools<sup>132</sup>. In the absence of a single way of doing Islamic schooling, but yet shared Islamically-informed educational aspirations, action research can serve as a tool to foster a school-wide culture of educational inquiry and pedagogical innovation and renewal that  is rooted within education in the Islamic tradition - an Islamic Pedagogy. Action research is not solely about renewing educational praxis or zeroing in on classroom practice, but also about the collective constructive thinking that is required by educators to get there. We envision Islamic schools blossoming into knowledge-producing sites, producing praxis knowledge<sup>133</sup>,



In the name of evidence-based policy and practice, Islamic schooling urgently needs forms of educational research that

*'contests the influence of positivist and decontextualised knowledge that offers little insight into realities' of actual Islamic schools, that is detached from our shared metanarrative of purpose, our shared vision for Islamic schooling, and peculiarities of local schools visions, and yet that 'falsely asserts a 'what works' (Biesta, 2007) discourse of one-size-fits-all prescriptions on to educators' working in our Islamic school communities.*

(Hattam, Sawyer, & Gannon, 2018; p. 295;<sup>137</sup> Biesta, 2007<sup>138</sup>; Memon, 2021)<sup>139</sup>

where educators work collaboratively to grapple with Islamic educational theory  and how it can attend to purpose, be more responsive to our Muslim learners, and address urgent educational challenges.

Although there are different ways of approaching action research, this stimulus paper leans toward a form that begins with reading that leads to reflecting on stimulus in relation to the practice challenges of educators in their schools, and results in enacting renewed



1

PROFESSIONAL  
LEARNING  
SHOULD BE  
PURPOSEFUL

2

EDUCATORS  
MUST BE GIVEN  
AGENCY TO NAME  
THEIR EXISTENTIAL  
CLASSROOM AND  
PRACTICE-BASED  
CHALLENGES

3

INNOVATIVE  
CLASSROOM  
PRACTICE IS  
THEORETICALLY  
INFORMED

4

EDUCATORS  
EXPERIENCE,  
KNOWLEDGE, AND  
DISPOSITIONS ARE  
RELEVANT

5

LOCAL SCHOOL  
CONTEXT AND  
COMMUNITY  
MATTERS

*‘Despite a rich heritage of educational thought in the Islamic tradition, a significant disconnect between Islamic educational theory and Islamic schooling practice remains.*

As schools continue to strive toward distinction, bridging this theory–practice divide is critical. Moving toward Islamic pedagogy, not in the sense of a method of instruction but pedagogy as a human science that addresses the big questions about what makes education that is “Islamic” distinct, will ground Islamic schools in a nuanced educational theory they can call their own.’

(Memon, 2021; p. 1)<sup>140</sup>

pedagogies. We strongly recommend beginning by establishing a foundational understanding in the Islamic worldview and its implications for teaching and learning first among all staff to create a common language. A strong foundation in Islamic Pedagogy (as a distinct philosophy of education)<sup>134</sup> ensures that foundational concepts of education in the Islamic tradition and Islamic pedagogical principles guide renewal of practice.

Once foundations are established, action research, as one potential approach to a school-wide professional learning program would provide opportunities for

1. Purposeful professional learning
2. Educators’ agency to name their

existential classroom and practice-based challenges

3. Innovative classroom practice that is theoretically informed
4. Educators to draw on their prior experience, knowledge, and valued dispositions
5. Local school context and **community** priorities to be centred.

These five pillars of professional learning have the potential to reshape the way Islamic schools think about renewal. Renewal from this perspective begins with the educators themselves - not external expertise or one-size-fits-all ‘best practices.’<sup>141</sup>

We ought to resolutely

*‘resist the deficit framing of teachers and their profession by the media, by politicians and by policy logics that frame teachers as the problem, and require policy technologies of control and compliance.*

Teachers are the key education actors in the lives of their students and, because of this, must be enabled to make important decisions about curriculum and pedagogy with their students in ways that they see as appropriate to their context. In particular, what needs to be resisted is the kind of scripted instrumentalist form of teaching that has become so prominent.’

(Hattam, Sawyer, & Gannon, 2018; p. 2)<sup>141</sup>

Action oriented renewal begins with centring school-based contexts, challenges, and priorities and acknowledging that place matters. Secondly, renewal of this sort is led by the educators themselves having the agency to name their own practice-based challenges, draw on their collective experiences, and push their own boundaries of thinking toward purposeful professional learning that speaks to their classroom or practice realities<sup>141</sup>.

Establishment of professional learning communities (PLC) and engagement with school-wide action research add a level of focus and rigour to educator growth, learning, development, and school renewal initiatives. Research has shown that such initiatives improve staff morale, positively impact student learning, share good practice, and embed on-going learning across the school community.

In the table below, this stimulus paper outlines a suggested a year-long action research plan that draws on this pedagogical resource (i.e., the stimulus paper) as impetus for school-wide renewal. The plan adapts and borrows from action research steps outlined by Kemmis et al. (2013)<sup>136</sup>. This plan assumes that a whole school initiative for renewal will be led by a school leader or a director of teaching and learning, or someone playing a similar role in their educator teams. However, a plan such as this can be easily adapted to include parent committees, learner representatives, board members, or school community partners. Essentially, each stakeholder develops their own research question (note: action research is, by definition, inquiry into one’s own practice) that focuses on renewal within their own remit but within a broader shared articulation of a way forward. Assuming this stimulus paper provides that shared articulation of a way forward for your school, the following process for school renewal then provides the action plan.

***“Teachers researching their own practice is a key strategy in developing schools as places that not only consume knowledge but also produce praxis knowledge.”***

Such a knowledge-producing school with teachers as researchers creates a space for academic researchers and teacher researchers to work together to problematise and redesign teachers’ work and student learning. Such collaborations create opportunities for teacher-researcher/academic-researcher partnerships that scrutinise and problematise the most basic taken-for-granted assumptions, often about students.’

(Hattam, Sawyer, & Gannon, 2018; p. 297)<sup>143</sup>

The following are five stages of action research adapted from Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2013)<sup>135</sup>



Figure 1.8 - Five Stages of Action Research<sup>142</sup>

## Action Research Plan (Suggested)

MONTH	ACTION	DESCRIPTION
February	Reconnaissance	<p><b>1. Pre-Reading:</b> Read 'A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia' with the following guiding questions in mind: a) What are the key ideas presented in this document? b) So what? Why do these key ideas matter to our collective work in Islamic schooling? c) Now what? What are the implications of these key ideas to our educational practice?</p> <p><b>2. Meeting #1 (Overview)</b> Collectively discuss the three guiding questions provided: a) What; b) So What; c) Now What? in relation to your school context and begin to formulate high level priorities for change based on the 'Now what'</p>
March	Reconnaissance	<p><b>3. Pre-Reading:</b> Revisit 'A Shared Vision for Islamic Schooling in Australia' with the following guiding questions in mind: How do ideas presented in this stimulus paper help us rethink and renew our collective understanding of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discipline in relation to dignity of the child?</li> <li>Assessment with <i>ihsan</i> and <i>muhasabah</i>?</li> <li>Learning when ilm and amal are balanced?</li> <li>School ethos if humility is the defining element?</li> <li>Curriculum if educating the whole learner?</li> <li>Early years if awe and wonder are central?</li> <li>Leading if <i>nasiha</i> and <i>maslaha</i> are active?</li> <li>Teaching if <i>niyyah</i> must be aligned?</li> <li>Purpose if <i>fitrah</i> is the primary goal?</li> </ol> <p><b>4. Meeting #2 (Deep Dive):</b> These are BIG questions that will have a significant impact. Decide as a collective how best to approach these questions. Possibly select ONE as an entry point and a focus for the entire year. Or possibly divide up into smaller groups/committees to explore different questions. The goal is this meeting is to articulate a <b>research question</b> that will drive the action research inquiry for the rest of the year. Developing a research question can take time. Don't rush this stage. See Appendix A for sample action research questions.</p>

MONTH	ACTION	DESCRIPTION
April	Planning	<p><b>5. Pre-Reading:</b> Read what action research entails. It is important to ensure everyone involved is on the same page. This stimulus paper recommends reading: Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart &amp; Rhonda Nixon. (2013). <i>The Action Research Planner</i>, 2014th edn, Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, Singapore. Chapter 7 entitled: 'The Planner Part' provides a solid overview.</p> <p><b>6. Meeting #3 (Consolidating Research Question):</b> Going on the assumption that the previous meeting was not sufficient to consolidate research questions, this meeting should focus on that only. This meeting is also a good time to provide a high level overview of what action research is and the plan for the coming months in relation to planning, enacting, reflecting, and re-planning. A final outcome of this meeting should be a plan for reading in relation to research questions developed. The recommended readings in this stimulus paper are a good place to start.</p>
May	Planning	<p><b>7. Pre-Reading:</b> Pre-reading for this meeting is determined by the readings identified in the previous meeting that support renewed thinking in relation to the research question.</p> <p><b>8. Meeting #4 (Developing a Plan):</b> Here the focus needs to be on developing an action plan of what each educator intends to enact differently as a response to the research question and in relation to the reading that should be informing renewed thinking. The focus of this meeting is to begin formulating an action plan that includes specifics of what you will attempt differently, when, how, how often, and with whom. Chapter 7 from Kemmis et al (2014) should provide helpful guidance here.</p>

MONTH	ACTION	DESCRIPTION
June	Planning	<p><b>9. Pre-Reading:</b></p> <p>Pre-reading for this meeting is determined by the readings identified in the previous meeting which support renewed thinking in relation to the research question. Ideally these readings should continue throughout the year as an on-going professional learning activity.</p> <p><b>10. Meeting #5 (Identifying Evidence):</b></p> <p>Essential to your action plan is the evidence you will gather that allows you to reflect on the impact you are making. Again, Chapter 7 from Kemmis et al (2014) should provide helpful guidance here.</p> <p>By the end of this meeting each educator part of this initiative should have a one-page plan in place that includes a) Challenge; b) Research Question; c) Reading Informing Renewal; d) Action Plan (detailed); and e) Evidence to Collect.</p>
July	Enacting/ Reflecting	<p><b>11. Enacting:</b></p> <p>During the month educators should be enacting their action research plans - whatever that may entail and keeping a log of reflections and/or gathering of evidence (e.g., learner voice, learner artefacts, assessment submissions) as per their individual or collective plans.</p> <p><b>12. Meeting #6 (Reflection):</b></p> <p>During the monthly meeting, the focus is for educators to share reflections on a) what they have implemented; b) how their plan is progressing in relation to what they had intended; and c) what they may adapt in their plan prior to next month. These meetings are important for sharing ideas and successes, mitigating and iterating around challenges, and planning a way forward.</p>
August	Enacting/ Reflecting	<p><b>13. Enacting:</b></p> <p>Repeat with revised plan</p> <p><b>14. Meeting #7 (Reflection):</b></p> <p>Repeat reflection forum</p>

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>Enacting/ Reflecting</b>	<p><b>15. Enacting:</b> Repeat with revised plan</p> <p><b>16. Meeting #8 (Reflection):</b> Repeat reflection forum</p>
<b>October</b>	<b>Re-Planning</b>	<p><b>17. Action Research Forum:</b> An important part of school renewal is to acknowledge, reflect, and celebrate the significant strides toward renewal that the school is taking. An annual action research forum that invites learners, parents, and possibly educators from other schools is an important aspect of consolidating thinking and inspiring innovative thinking. This can be done in many ways however we recommend a forum that provides each educator with an opportunity to showcase their action research project in all of its stages through a multimedia presentation that can be showcased on the school website after the event also.</p>
<b>November</b>	<b>Re-Planning</b>	<p><b>18. Re-Planning:</b> The end of the academic year is a good time to begin to re-plan for the following year. Revisiting this stimulus paper along with original reconnaissance is well suited for this meeting. Use this meeting to either identify new challenges to focus on in the new year or further existing action research projects with renewed critical research questions and readings to further innovative practice.</p>

# SUGGESTED FACILITATION TIPS

The following are suggested facilitation tips for those leading action research initiatives:

1. Read about action research in advance. We highly recommend: Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart & Rhonda Nixon. (2013). *The Action Research Planner*, 2014th edn, Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, Singapore.
2. Assign roles ensuring the initiative has someone who is coordinating meetings, sending reminders, facilitating discussions, consolidating ideas through minutes and action plans.
3. Try to keep all meetings 'action oriented' and not get consumed in negativity or seemingly insurmountable challenges.

## FURTHER READING

Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart & Rhonda Nixon. (2014). *Doing Critical Participatory Action Research: The 'Planner' Part*. In: *The Action Research Planner*. Springer, Singapore.

Bridget Somekh & Ken Zeichner. (2009). *Action research for educational reform: Remodelling action research theories and practices in local contexts*. *Educational Action Research*, 17:1, 5-21,

Muriel Simms. (2013). *A Teacher-Educator Uses Action Research to Develop Culturally Conscious Curriculum Planners*. *Democracy and Education*, 21(2): 1-10.

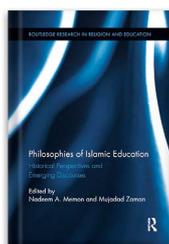
Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart & Rhonda Nixon. (2013). *The Action Research Planner*, 2014th edn, Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, Singapore.

Christine Edwards-Groves & Peter Grootenboer. (2015). *Praxis and the theory of practice architectures: Resources for re-envisioning English education*. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 38(3), 150-161.

# RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

The following is not by any means an exhaustive list of readings and resources on Islamic Pedagogy and Islamic schooling from the emerging field of Islamic Educational Studies. The readings and resources listed below are recommendations as a starting point for schools which aspire to establish a professional learning community or enact an action research school renewal initiative. The recommendations are with the purpose of school renewal in mind:

**Category I: Push Your Thinking:** These resources are academic books will help develop a common language about the purpose of Islamic schooling within your school.

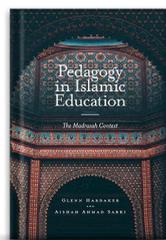


#### REFERENCE/ACCESS

Zaman, Mujaddad & Memon, Nadeem A 2016, *Philosophies of Islamic education*, vol. 4, Routledge, New York.

#### RECOMMENDED USE

This book has a number of thoughtful contributions by luminaries in the field of contemporary Islamic Studies and their reflections on a way forward for Islamic education. Use it to inspire thinking through collective reading in PLCs and/or shaping action research projects.

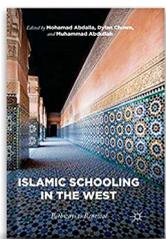


#### REFERENCE/ACCESS

Hardaker, Glenn & Sabki, Aishah Ahmad 2018, *Pedagogy in Islamic Education*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley.

#### RECOMMENDED USE

This book has a number of case studies of institutions (contemporary madrassas) implementing Islamic pedagogy in unique ways. Use this book to inspire thinking through collective reading in PLCs and/or shaping action research projects.

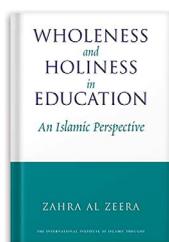


#### REFERENCE/ACCESS

Abdalla, Mohamad, Chown, Dylan & Abdullah, Muhammad 2018, *Islamic Schooling in the West*, Springer International Publishing AG, Cham.

#### RECOMMENDED USE

This book has important reflections on aspects of Islamic schooling which require urgent renewal: curriculum, school ethos, and professional learning, to name a few. Use this book to inspire thinking through collective reading in PLCs and/or shaping action research projects.

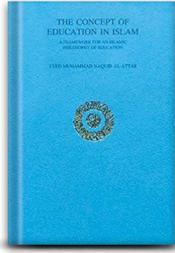


#### REFERENCE/ACCESS

Al Zeera, Z 2001, *Wholeness and holiness in education: an Islamic perspective / Zahra Al Zeera.*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, VA.

#### RECOMMENDED USE

This book offers a deep conceptual articulation of what Islamic education is. Those who aspire to renew their commitment to Islamic schooling and why it is distinct should consider reading this book. Chapters of this book may be useful for a school-wide PLC.



**REFERENCE/ACCESS**

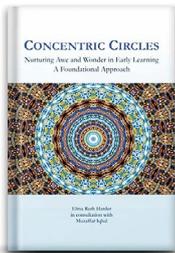
Al-Attas, Muhammad Naguib. (1991). *The Concept of Education in Islam a Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University.

<https://www.amazon.com/Concept-Education-Islam-Framework-Philosophy/dp/0934905932>

**RECOMMENDED USE**

This book is arguably the most widely read and referenced book on the meaning of education in Islam in our age. Islamic Studies teachers would benefit greatly from reading and summarising key ideas in this book for all staff as provocations for renewal.

**Category II: Renew Practice:** These resources will provide impetus for school wide pedagogical and curriculum renewal.

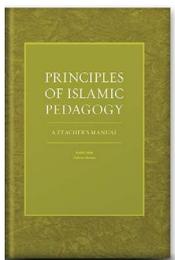


**REFERENCE/ACCESS**

Harder, Elma. (2006). *Concentric Circles: Nurturing Awe and Wonder in Early Learning - A Foundational Approach*, Canada: Muslim Education Foundation, Al-Qalam Publishing. [http://www.mef-ca.org/index.php?page=MEF\\_Store](http://www.mef-ca.org/index.php?page=MEF_Store)

**RECOMMENDED USE**

For schools aspiring curriculum renewal and to develop an in-house integrated curriculum, this book will provide a useful framework to consider shaping curriculum from an Islamic worldview. This book is highly recommended for curriculum leaders and curriculum integration working groups.

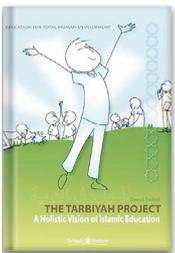


**REFERENCE/ACCESS**

Ajem, Ramzy., & Memon, Nadeem. (2011). *Principles of Islamic Pedagogy: A Teacher's Manual*. Unpublished manuscript. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22872529-principles-of-islamic-pedagogy>

**RECOMMENDED USE**

For schools aspiring for pedagogical renewal and toward establishing principles or a framework for pedagogical practice that is Islamically grounded, this teacher's manual will be useful. Directors of Teaching and Learning or those that oversee instructional practice will find this resource useful.



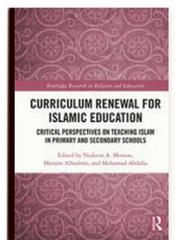
**REFERENCE/ACCESS**

Tauhidi, Dawud. (2001). *Education For Total Human Development: The Tarbiyah Project: A Holistic Vision For Islamic Education*. Tarbiyah Institute.

[http://www.islamicstudiesresources.com/uploads/1/9/8/1/19819855/a\\_holistic\\_view\\_of\\_islamic\\_educaion\\_-\\_dawud\\_tauhidi.pdf](http://www.islamicstudiesresources.com/uploads/1/9/8/1/19819855/a_holistic_view_of_islamic_educaion_-_dawud_tauhidi.pdf)

**RECOMMENDED USE**

This is one of four resources from the Tarbiya Project that are reading available online. For those aspiring curriculum renewal with a focus on character and values based Islamic education, these resources will be invaluable. These resources are highly recommended for curriculum leaders and curriculum integration working groups.

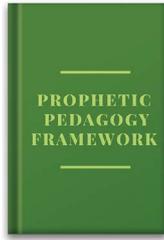


**REFERENCE/ACCESS**

Memon, N. A., Alhashmi, M., & Abdalla, M. (2021). *Curriculum Renewal for Islamic Education*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429276811>

**RECOMMENDED USE**

This book puts forward 15 distinct chapters on curriculum guidance for Islamic school educators. The first section of the book focuses on renewal of Islamic Studies; the second section addresses teaching state curriculum from an Islamic worldview and the final section addresses broader recommendations for curriculum renewal. This book is highly recommended for curriculum leaders and curriculum integration working groups.



#### **REFERENCE/ACCESS**

Abdullah, Muhammad. (2018). 'A pedagogical framework for teacher discourse and practice in Islamic schools', in *Islamic schooling in the West: pathways to renewal*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, pp. 195–226.

#### **RECOMMENDED USE**

For schools aspiring for pedagogical renewal and toward establishing a standard for pedagogical practice that is Islamically grounded, this article offers a framework of Prophetic Pedagogy aligned to state teaching standards. Directors of Teaching and Learning or those that oversee instructional practice will find this resource useful

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# APPENDIX A: SAMPLE ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Framing a broad shared articulation of a way forward.

- How might sections on learners (including the distinct theorisation of the Muslim learner and of development), learning, and leading learning presented in this stimulus paper prompt us to rethink the purpose, alignment, and coherence of 'normative' educational frameworks and models in our Islamic schools (e.g., pedagogical, wellbeing, classroom management, character education etc)?
- How does the theology of the Muslim child and broader child theory presented in this stimulus paper help to renew / rethink / reimagine our relation to and engagement with our learners?
- How do we maintain asset-based views of our learners, translating to our language and practice, and consistently and systematically reject deficit-based views?
- How do we develop an authentic whole-school/community culture of care?
- How do we invoke awe and wonder in our classrooms?
- How do we create a learning environment that is sacred, disciplined, caring, and functional?
- How can we enable critical dialogue and inquiry in our learning and teaching?
- How do we honour the importance of play and play based pedagogies (particularly in early years)?
- How do we ensure our learners can see themselves in the curriculum?
- How do we give voice to our learners in our classrooms (teaching and learning), schools, and school communities?
- How can we empower our learners in negotiating themes of study, learning processes and assessment design and practice?
- How can we establish our classrooms as research centres, guiding and learning with our learners in inquiries relevant to their lives?
- How do we avail from our learners' funds of knowledge (accumulated bodies of beliefs, ideas, skills, and abilities based on their faith, familial and/or life experiences) as resources for teaching practice to connect curriculum with our learners' lives?
- How can we provide space for our learners to develop their capacities as theorists of the cultures they inhabit to ensure they are creators of culture and not merely consumers?
- How can we provide opportunities for learners to take an active role in addressing the specific social issues they identify and to critically reflect on the action taken?
- How can we promote God consciousness?

# APPENDIX B: SAMPLE ACTION RESEARCH EDUCATOR INQUIRY QUESTIONS

For educators and other stakeholders to develop their own research questions (note: action research is by definition inquiry into one's own practice) which focus on renewal within their own remit but within a broader shared articulation of a way forward.

**Suggestion:** Begin research questions outlining a practice inquiry with either of the following sentence stems:

- a. What can I do differently in my teaching to...
- b. In my teaching, how can I...

**Sample partial research questions (illustrating how the stem initiates an inquiry into one's practice):**

- In my teaching how can I draw on asset-based views of my learners, and translate this into asset-based pedagogies which...
- What can I do differently in my teaching to promote a culture of care in my classroom in order to...
- How can I invoke awe and wonder through my teaching and our learning to...

**Actual sample (Islamic school educator colleagues) research questions:**

- In my teaching, how can I foster deepening God-consciousness (taqwa) as an ongoing socio-spiritual process for my learners' holistic learning and development, such that they strive towards Ihsaan or excellence in every action?
- What can I do differently in my teaching to develop my senior learners' intentions, purpose, and motivation for their own learning, inside and outside the classroom?
- What can I do differently in my teaching to foster holistic learning, intrinsic motivation, and a lifelong passion for knowledge and personal development for my middle years' learners?

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**ISBN: 978-1-922046-30-7**

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