

Trial by Fire: Islamic Schools After 9-11

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There is an unusual pine tree that grows in the western regions of America called the knobcone pine (*Pinus attenuata*). This tree is unusual because it requires searing heat, usually in the form of a brushfire, to open its cone and spread its seeds. The brushfire further benefits the tree by burning away the undergrowth so that when the seeds drop, they will have room to grow. The ash from the fire also helps provide just the right type of soil for these seeds to take root and develop. Too much heat will kill them; too little heat will prevent growth.

The 9-11 terrorist attacks on our country were a horrific event that created fear and grief in all Americans of every race and creed. The immediate effects of 9-11 were clear: death, destruction, prejudice, and uncertainty. However, the long-term effects, some of which will be positive, have yet to be fully realized. As with the pine tree, the searing heat that has been brought to bear on the Muslim community initially, and Islamic schools most recently, has the potential to bring growth out of destruction.

The Heat

Initially after 9-11, Islamic schools were generally overlooked by the media. Most schools kept a low profile and focused on explaining the constantly changing situation to frightened, bewildered, and upset students. However, as time passed, the media began to search farther afield for stories, and Islamic schools caught their attention. True to

form, the serious news-oriented media produced fair and informative reports.

Meanwhile, the “Jerry Springer” ilk of media delivered its usual trash, poorly (if at all) researched video bites chosen to inflame passions and render rational thought useless.

This current situation is a brushfire that we must endure, perhaps even embrace, for the welcome clarity of vision it will leave behind. It is time to clear away the deadwood and allow the seeds that have been germinating in the field of Islamic education to take root.

The tragic events of 9-11 have turned up the heat on the issue of curriculum, and Islamic schools in America can, and will, meet the challenge and be the better for it.

Curriculum: The Seeds of Education

The most fundamental area of education in which we seek clarity is the area of curriculum. As a young and growing community, we Muslims need time to sort through and determine our needs. This is very difficult to accomplish with an issue as complex as curriculum, but that is exactly what the community of Muslim educators has been doing for years. A school’s curriculum is the most divisive, most influential, and least understood issue that educators, parents, school boards, and communities must decide.

What is Curriculum?

The short and simple answer is that a school’s curriculum is every academic skill, concept, value, etc., the school says should be taught to the children and at what level it should be taught. Sometimes these are expressed as benchmarks, guidelines, or

student learning outcomes that offer the educator a wide range of ways to make that happen. Sometimes the curriculum is very general: *Students will demonstrate appropriate use of punctuation.* Other times the curriculum is more detailed: *Students will demonstrate appropriate use of capital letters, periods, and commas in a series.*

Although it is supposed to be the guiding force that frames all that is taught in a school, the curriculum is often overlooked. Many curricula are written down in a document that might or might not be given to the teachers before being consigned to a shelf for “safe keeping.” As the school year progresses, the textbooks often become the curriculum by default as teachers plow through the chapters, pushing to finish. Teachers forget that the textbook was not designed to fit their school’s specific curriculum. Because they forget this, they also forget that they should be selecting from and supplementing the textbook, not just trying to finish it. Islamic schools and public schools both face these problems of curricula.

If a curriculum is everything that should be taught, who decides what the curriculum will be? For Islamic schools, Boards usually make this decision. They frequently chose the curricula for academics from the local school districts, and even the same textbooks are often used. This is done for a couple reasons. First, most Islamic schools offer only K-8th grades. Therefore, the students will almost surely attend their local public high school, and they will need to have studied a similar curriculum if they are to be properly prepared for that local public high school. Secondly, Islamic schools rarely have sufficient financial resources to pay a qualified professional to spend months and

months writing a curriculum, a curriculum that still might not allow for easy transfer from private to public school.

In an Islamic school that has the time, qualified professionals, desire, and resources, the curriculum (or portions of it) is often created by the school itself. This is most likely to occur when the school offers all grades K-12. When all levels are offered, there is no need for students to transfer to public school and no need, therefore, to align the curriculum with the local public school. More importantly, Islamic schools that write their own curriculum can most easily integrate the study of Islam into all aspects of the curriculum – a concept known as ***tarbiyah*** that is being eagerly embraced by Islamic schools across the United States and Canada. *(For more information on tarbiyah, please see accompanying article by Dawud Tauhidi and www.4islamicschools.org)*

When an Islamic school adopts the local public school curriculum, it usually makes adaptations to it. Because of the need to add Arabic language instruction and Islamic studies, Islamic schools usually drop subjects such as music and gym, which are often considered – rightly or wrongly – to be expendable. Consequently, the basic curriculum pattern for a new Islamic school is usually the local public school academic curriculum with Arabic language and Islamic studies added. This is the least expensive and easiest way to start a school and allows for the easiest transition to the local public high school in the future. *It is not, however, the most desirable way for an Islamic school to continue.*

The Problem with Curriculum

If curriculum is so simple, why does it create debates within our communities and across the general public? Curriculum has the potential to be divisive because it encompasses all that should be taught – the critical word here is ***should***. The word *should* implies that someone will make a judgment based not only on knowledge but also on *values*.

If we take the example of sex education in the public schools, we can most easily see the role that *values* play in curriculum decisions. First, there is the decision that educators will teach about sex in the school instead of parents teaching it at home. This demonstrates a value for school being the place where society thinks sex education should occur. Then the decision must be made about what the educators will actually teach – the basics of reproduction, reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex, pregnancy prevention, and/or abstinence? Will the teacher say to the students that they should wait until they are ready to have sex, or will the teacher say that the students should wait until they are married to have sex? The curriculum will determine the answer.

Every word that the teacher says, every class discussion held, and all materials used must have as their goal the teaching/learning of the approved curriculum.

Consequently, the people who create that approved curriculum decide exactly what your child will be taught. If you are a typical parent of a Muslim child, you probably have never seen your public school's sex-ed materials, nor have you looked at the detailed

curriculum, sat in on a class (if your school allows that), or attended a meeting of the sex-ed board. You, like most other parents, do not know **specifically** what values your child is learning about sex. Unfortunately, this is all too common.

If curriculum is so loaded with values, why don't parents form a group and just make all the curricular decisions? Parents alone cannot choose curriculum because there is another critical element to deciding curriculum, and that is knowledge of education. Educators have spent years in a classroom learning their profession – first as students and then as teachers. It would not serve our children if we wasted this incredible wealth of knowledge and expertise by removing educators from these decisions. Educators are essential to the process. Obviously, the closer an educator's values and beliefs are to the values and beliefs of the parents, the easier it is to agree on curriculum. Hence, it is imperative that Islamic schools hire Muslim teachers. They can provide that critical combination of professional expertise and knowledge of Islam that a school's curriculum team needs.

Educators and parents can and should work together to make curriculum decisions, each valuing and respecting the other's right to be there. Public schools, overall, have done very poorly in this regard. While parent advisory groups have been active for years with the sex ed curricula, most public schools either do not or are only just beginning to extend that parent participation to other aspects of the curriculum such as math, social studies, etc. Public charter schools and private schools, in general, do a much better job of educators and parents really working together to create curricula.

Islamic schools, unlike other schools, do not fall into an easily recognizable pattern regarding shared curriculum decision-making. They range from a co-op structure where the parents' role in their children's education is so deep it rivals that of home schooling to the other end of the spectrum, a traditional public school-type where parent teacher organizations (PTO's) are focused primarily on fundraising and not on substantive curricular issues. Each Islamic school is different.

The degree to which an Islamic school welcomes and encourages parents to share serious curriculum decisions depends mostly on the principal's professional training and experience. Most university teacher education programs, both in the U.S. and overseas, base their training on a fairly traditional model of education where the most critical curriculum decisions are made by educators with only minimal input from parents. To put it bluntly, most educators are not trained *how* to integrate parents into curriculum decisions or *why* doing so is highly desirable. Consequently, it is by accident, not design, when an educator learns to value parents as curriculum partners.

Naturally, there are always those Islamic school principals who have somehow discovered the alternative to the traditional public school model. They facilitate and ensure parental involvement in major curriculum decisions. They also serve as role models for other Islamic school administrators. Fortunately, Islamic schools are in a unique position to move away from the dysfunctional traditional public school model to an inclusive model that is more in keeping with Islamic values. As Muslims, we cannot marginalize the role parents are designed by God to play in their children's lives. If we

educators had received our own teacher training within an Islamic education paradigm, we would already know this.

Islamic Curricula in a Pluralistic Society

Muslim communities across the U.S. are extraordinarily diverse. We are American born and immigrant. We speak all the major languages of the world. Our iman ranges from pious to pitiful. We are good, bad, and mediocre. We vote Democratic, Republican, Independent, and more. We are an exciting and dynamic group. It is challenge to balance a curriculum when students come from widely varying cultures and countries and also live in a country made up of similarly diverse groups. There is both a strength and weakness in this. Core Islamic values unite us as Muslims, but culture-specific assumptions divide us.

Muslims in America need to balance not only our internal concerns, but our external concerns as well. We have to design a curriculum for our Muslim children so that we prepare them to live in America, not Egypt or Saudi Arabia. According to Dr. Ilyas Ba-Yunus, Professor of Sociology at SUNY-Cortland, approximately 50% of Muslims in America are under the age of 20. They need an education wherein Islam is relevant to and dynamic in their daily lives as well as their future. Islamic curricula must actively address real issues in our children's environment. We cannot prepare our Muslim-American children for their multi-ethnic American futures as politicians, media executives, journalists, lawyers, engineers, and more unless we value diversity ourselves. Islam teaches diversity; no other religion is more tolerant or celebrates

differences more than Islam. As parents and educators, we should strive to put aside our divisions so that we can create meaningful curricula for our children. If we focus on core Islamic values and teachings, we can do this.

Islamic Schools: Smoldering Fire or False Alarm?

Regrettably, it is not always a given that educators will focus on core Islamic values and teachings. Sometimes educators indulge themselves by deviating from core values to divisive and extremist values and teachings that mainstream Muslims do not accept. Although this occurs infrequently, it is highly irresponsible because of the damage it causes to our youth and to Muslims in general. We are facing such damage today in America as a result of the media unearthing textbooks in a few Islamic schools that contained extremist teachings. Islamic schools have been working on curricular problems for years, so Muslim educators were well aware of the foreign textbooks with hateful passages in them long before the media discovered them. Unfortunately, because the media prefers innuendo to the truth, we are all tainted by this situation.

Our internal problem became public when the Washington Post produced a piece on Islamic schools that, given the current climate in American society, seemed – and indeed proved to be – inflammatory and misleading (“Where Two Worlds Collide” 2/25/02 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/education/>). Mixing a little bit of truth with a lot of innuendo and quoting inappropriate sources, the article concluded with sweeping implications that Islamic schools in the DC area, and in general, teach hatred.

Immediately following the Post article, and referencing only the Post as a source,

syndicated columnist Cal Thomas in his article titled “Where Are the Sleeper Cells?” (3/7/02 <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/calthomas/archive.shtml>) alluded to Islamic schools as terrorist “sleeper cells.” Not content with this shocking accusation, he called for Americans to “shut down” these “...training grounds of hate currently on American soil.” “This is sedition,” Thomas sermonized.

This is not sedition. This is nonsense, and such tactics are worthy of only the sleaziest in the media. The truth is that a handful of Muslim educators made a serious mistake that is directly related to a lack of funding for Islamic schools across the United States. Do these textbooks exist? Yes. Do they teach hatred? Yes. Do, as Cal Thomas and others imply, Islamic schools across America use them? **No**.

Islamic schools all across America were initially interested in a free textbook because they needed to save money whenever possible. However, once the objectionable (objectionable to we Muslims, by the way) passages were discovered, the vast majority of schools rejected the texts. In addition to the problems with the content of these books, the way the books presented material was old-fashioned and based on a poor understanding of how children learn. They used “skill and drill” teaching methods that are useful for rote memorization, a technique required for only a tiny portion of a modern Islamic school curriculum.

The handful of schools that might have retained those books for actual classroom use would have been way out of the norm for Islamic schools. Unfortunately, neither the

Washington Post reporters nor Cal Thomas bothered to make that clear. This entire media circus is much ado about nothing, but it does sell newspapers.

While there is no excuse for the unprofessional anti-Islamic bias in American media, Muslims must not be intimidated into silence, silence motivated by a need to protect ourselves from further media attacks. We must struggle to keep from behaving like an embattled minority, and we must discuss our problems openly. The vast majority of Muslim educators rejected the hateful texts independently and without knowledge of what other educators thought or were doing. We knew they were not presenting correct Islamic values and teachings. All across America, educators said “NO” to hatred in unison and rejected those texts.

The tiny minority of schools who accepted these texts usually skipped over the objectionable parts when teaching out of them. However, some schools did teach the content of the texts to their students. Whether part of a school’s official curriculum or an unauthorized decision by a classroom teacher, the fact remains that students learned this nonsense in school. Let us state unequivocally for all the world to hear that we Muslim educators reject the teaching of hatred as completely incompatible with Islam as taught in the Holy Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Quite the contrary, our Prophet enjoined peace, tolerance, and moderation upon us.

There is no need to attempt to rationalize this behavior. We should acknowledge our mistakes, correct them, and move on. Even though only a handful of educators actually

erred, we all sat quietly by and watched the situation develop. Each of us shares the responsibility for those textbooks ever reaching Muslim students' hands. School boards allowed power struggles to supercede the need to properly fund the schools with quality textbooks. Administrators focused on when teachers arrived to class rather than on what teachers actually taught in class. Teachers allowed themselves to rest idle in their ignorance, permitting the politically twisted so-called "Islamic teachings" of their youth to go unchallenged and unexplored. Surely common sense would dictate at least a cursory examination of these politically and culturally bound curricula of their countries of origin. Parents soothed their own pangs of guilt for having left their home countries in favor of America by supporting or ignoring this politically motivated rhetoric. Community members focused on acquiring all the material trappings of the American dream instead of strongly supporting their local Islamic school – new cars instead of new texts. We all share in the blame, so we must all share in the solution.

Despite the temporary media interest, we can and will address our problems in the long run. This is merely a piece of the big picture, not the big picture itself. We know Islam does not teach hatred. All of these media articles and accusations about Islamic schools boil down to a question about curriculum – a complex, value-driven issue. The Post article took a limited look at a limited number of Islamic schools and wrongly extrapolated that situation to all Islamic schools. At this point in the development of Islamic schools, about the only generalization one can reasonably make would be that Islamic schools are experiencing rapid change. Schools are moving away from curricula oftentimes dictated by lack of funds and expertise towards curricula based on sound principals of learning, education, and Islamic knowledge.

Initial Phase: Putting Down Roots

The choice of a curriculum is affected by many external circumstances. When a new Islamic school begins, the driving force is usually parents. They form a group, gather their financial resources, search for a physical place for the school, hire a principal, and hand the principal a copy of the local public school district's curriculum – usually in that order. The principal studies the public school's curriculum and tries to find textbooks that will cover the majority of it while sticking to a very limited budget, hiring new staff, helping locate used school desks, etc.

The first chance the principal might have to look at Islamic studies and Arabic language curricula could be when the UPS delivery person drops a box of books at the school door. Because Islam is still relatively new to America, there has not been much time to develop Islamic studies curricula in English. 'Iqra International Foundation, headed up by Dr. Abidullah Ghazi and Dr. Tasneema Ghazi, was a dedicated trailblazer in this area, focusing on texts and materials for weekend "Sunday" schools. Others, such as the *Tarbiyah Project* with Dawud Tauhidi, are creating and developing entirely new curricula and accompanying materials designed specifically to meet the needs of Muslim children in *full time* Islamic schools. However, this task is a daunting one because, contrary to the implication in the Washington Post article, Islamic schools have **no** national curriculum and **no** consensus on whether such a curriculum is even desirable.

With so much leeway in deciding what to teach and so little time or money available to develop a curriculum, it is easy for beginning Islamic schools to use whatever texts are available. That first year they are likely to buy used texts or use free texts and try to make up for the weaknesses in the texts by skipping sections that are poorly written or objectionable, creating support materials, substituting portions, etc. This initial phase of development is the time when schools try to determine the thrust of the Islamic studies and Arabic language curricula. Although the results are promising, we have a long way to go.

Secondary Phase: Growing Stronger

Once the typical Islamic school has turned the corner on basic survival issues, it begins to develop the resources to tackle the more difficult curriculum decisions. These usually begin with getting rid of the free and used texts and replacing them with texts that reflect the beliefs and values of that school's community. In our pluralistic American society, children need to learn core Islamic values that reflect the teachings of Islam rather than the culture of their parents. To create an educational system that meets these complex needs, one must focus on three areas of concern: pedagogy (art/method of teaching), content (what is taught), and paradigm (a pattern).

Thanks to tremendous research that has been done on the brain and learning, educators know quite a bit about *how* children learn. (*Please see "Brain Compatible Learning" article by. Sommieh Uddin*) Knowing how children learn deeply affects

pedagogy – the art or method of teaching. The interesting aspect of this is that if we paid closer attention to the *sunnah* of our Prophet, we would have discovered it already.

Brain-based learning research has documented a concept that we have seen modeled for us by our Prophet, and that is the need to provide a safe and loving environment in which children may learn. The Prophet was known by all to be a loving father, grandfather, and teacher of children. He always spoke kindly to children and allowed them to behave according to their age, adjusting expectations as they grew older and more mature. Intimidation played no part in his role as a teacher. Modern research has offered an explanation for that which we can infer from our *sunnah* – when children are afraid, they cannot learn well. The brain will not attend to both fears and facts simultaneously. When a child feels fear, the brain focuses on that fear and dulls attention to other issues. The brain deliberately makes it difficult for children to learn when they are afraid. The simple consequence of this knowledge is to decrease fear. When teachers provide a safe and happy environment in which children can learn, they free up more of the children’s brainpower to focus on learning.

The second concern of developing a new curriculum is *content*. We have to decide *what* our children will learn. In the past, we have relied on overseas and traditional Islamic studies curricula. For a variety of reasons previously discussed, we no longer need or desire to do that. Muslim children born and raised in America face certain challenges that overseas Muslim children do not, and vice versa. The needs of the American-Muslim children must guide us in selecting the concepts, skills, and knowledge that will be our curriculum while rejecting or diminishing others that do not

meet these needs. This selecting and rejecting is not an arbitrary process; it is a necessary process. Islam is simply too vast a body of knowledge for anyone to learn it **all**. Since we cannot learn it all, we must pick and choose what we *can* learn. Given that core Islamic values are the primary criteria for choosing, the secondary criteria will be the needs of children in a specific culture or situation.

For example, American life exposes Muslim teenagers to a rich variety of beliefs and behaviors. Since teens naturally desire to copy their peers, and since most Americans are not Muslim, there is great pressure for our Muslim teenagers to conform to behaviors and beliefs that may or may not be in keeping with Islamic teachings. This occurs at a time in their development when they are not fully able to accurately judge differences or withstand pressure to conform. In America, we cannot expect the larger society to push our teenagers closer to Islam. Therefore, teenagers in America are expected to develop a sense of *self* or identity that is strong enough to withstand the pressures of American society. The curriculum that will develop this strong Islamic identity must first recognize the need for special emphasis on this trait.

On the other hand, teenagers in Saudi Arabia, for example, must develop a sense of their Islamic identity, but not anywhere near what their Muslim-American counterparts need. Saudi Arabia is a very homogeneous society, and its dominant culture is Islam. There is very little need for a Saudi child to develop the internal strength to be different from all his/her classmates or to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of those differences. Saudi children do not need to learn to resist the basic message of the larger society or that of their peers. Because the need for a strong Islamic identity to

withstand social pressures is less, the amount of time and importance the Saudi curriculum must place on developing that Islamic identity is reduced.

Consequently, the needs of the two groups of children are different. The primary criterion – developing a strong Islamic identity – guides us to teach this to all children. The secondary criterion – the need to evaluate and sometimes resist the non-Muslim dominant culture and maintain one’s identity as a Muslim – guides us to teach Muslim-American children about *self* as a much deeper and essential behavior. Failure to recognize the difference in needs results in a failure to provide Muslim-American teens with the curricular-based spiritual support and education they need to develop an Islamic identity sufficiently strong to exist in our diverse American society. American life is filled with diversity, and that is very positive. However, children must be given the tools to navigate that diversity. Learning to value differences and learning to evaluate differences are essential skills for Muslim children in America.

The third critical component in creating a curriculum for Muslim-American children in Islamic schools is creating a new paradigm, or pattern, of the systematic way information/learning is conceptualized. This new paradigm is the full *integration* of Islamic studies throughout the entire curriculum (*see Tarbiyah Project article*).

The traditional educational paradigm assumes instruction through segments. Math class is strictly math and does not concern itself with Islamic values or information. Numbers are simply numbers and are to be manipulated and learned. Most Islamic schools initially adopt such a curriculum from their local public school and then tack

Islamic Studies and Arabic language on as separate classes. While this is oftentimes a necessary first step for a new school, the second step is to move away from this segmented paradigm towards a paradigm where Islamic studies is fully woven into all academics. Eventually, all subjects intertwine, as they do in real life.

In the new paradigm, math becomes more than just numbers, as students learn to explore math with the expectation that Islamic values related to math should be discussed alongside formulas and concepts. Teaching statistics and probabilities in the new paradigm now might involve discussing gambling. How many times can I roll a “7”? When students learn the truth about such probabilities and then connect that to the potential loss of their homes, cars, and even families, that becomes a very powerful integrated math and Islamic studies lesson. The study of math becomes more meaningful to the student’s real life, and the message about the evils of gambling suddenly is more tangible.

The new paradigm of integrating Islamic studies (and ultimately all studies) across the curriculum is foundational to the child learning that Islam is part of every aspect of our lives. Separating Islamic studies from math, science, social studies, etc., sends a powerful subliminal message to students that Islam is irrelevant in “real” life – limited to certain times, places, and circumstances.

Textbooks – A Special Concern

A new curriculum will affect almost every aspect of our education, but textbooks might be most affected. Textbooks for an Islamic-American curriculum must incorporate all the concerns previously discussed: modern research, brain-based learning, the teachings of Islam chosen to meet the needs of Muslim children in America, and integration of Islamic teachings into academics. Unfortunately, the texts we need to support such a curriculum do not yet exist.

Public school texts, as excellent as many are, cannot support an integrated Islamic curriculum. Because some of these texts are so well designed with rich content, beautiful illustrations, and modern teaching approaches, Muslim educators find these difficult to ignore, and for the near future, they are still our best choices. However, texts designed for public schools must eventually be left behind for several reasons.

First and foremost, these texts lack the Islamic content so critical to an integrated approach, but as texts for public schools, that is exactly how they should be. We could continue to use the texts and adapt them to our needs, but this is time consuming at best and highly ineffective at worst. Using secular texts encourages an unnatural separation in a child's thinking, pressing the child to accept the myth that there are many aspects of life that are divorced from Islam.

There are Islamic textbooks, but there are two main problems with them when we try to adapt them to an integrated curriculum. The first problem is that Islamic texts, like their

public school counterparts, are based upon the traditional segmented knowledge paradigm. There is no fault in this. Such texts were desperately needed, and bless the Sisters and Brothers who were dedicated enough to write them. However, gratitude is no substitute for the integrated texts we need. When a high school teacher is creating lesson plans for a discussion of a classic American piece of literature, s/he will spend twice, or even three times, the amount of time planning the lesson if s/he has to create all the Islamic studies aspects of it than if those materials were integrated into the text already. The thought of further overburdening our overworked and underpaid teachers is offensive.

The second problem with current Islamic texts is that only a few of them are based on modern educational pedagogy. Al-hamduli Allah, this problem is improving, but the rate of change is so very slow. The old “skill and drill” rote memorization methods are still the most common methods assumed in these texts. Instead, students must be challenged to develop their critical thinking skills. While some rote learning is necessary and desirable, it will not prepare our children to be future leaders. Islamic texts need to deal with the real issues that face our children in today’s world, issues such as capitol punishment, AIDS, drug use, business ethics, finances, premarital sex, euthanasia, and more. The greatest issue we Muslim parents and educators face is making the connection between Islam and the real world for our children to see the relevance in their lives. When texts focus on traditional teaching methods and sterile presentations of “truth,” they create a disconnect between what the student is learning and what the student is experiencing. There is no need to do this. Texts can and will be written to meet the needs of Muslim children today.

The good news is that there are some exciting developments available through the Internet that might solve some of our textbook problems, at least at the high school and middle school levels. Publishing companies* have developed a way of creating textbooks that allows schools/teachers to pick and choose aspects of the text they want to include along with stock lessons and more. More importantly, they allow schools/teachers to insert their own materials right into the textbook. Once all the selections and insertions have been made, the text is bound and shipped to the school. The texts can be modified and updated as often as the school is willing to pay for new texts, and the entire process can be completed in as short a time as 3 – 4 weeks.

(*For an example of this, see www.pearsoncustom.com)

Colleges and universities have been first to see the potential for this new development in publishing. Because higher education has a critical need to tailor the text to the exact specifications of a course and because students bear the burden of purchasing the texts, rapid modification is a tremendous benefit to improving quality. Islamic schools can take advantage of this to achieve the integration of Islamic teachings directly into the texts. As schools share their resources more, the inserted materials will evolve into top-notch quality materials based on modern pedagogy, real life content, and a fully integrated paradigm. Publishers of Islamic materials can play a significant role in this, but they will have to move quickly, operate more bottom-up, and work closely with groups like the Islamic Schools' League of America that are able to facilitate such work. The days of a publishing company getting an author to write a text, publishing that text,

and selling it to schools is fast fading. The schools will now be the creators as well as the consumers of the texts. Publishing companies that move to best facilitate that interaction will emerge as leaders in this new and growing process of meeting the textbook needs of students.

Tertiary Phase: Branching Out

The current dynamic and progressive changes that are occurring in Islamic schools' curricula today are exciting and positive. Muslim educators are beginning to do the crucial and time-consuming work of connecting Islam to a vibrant, modern pedagogy. The new vision is stunning and holds tremendous promise for the Muslim *umma*. It will eventually reach every aspect of Islamic education, even weekend "Sunday" schools where the largest number of Muslim children will benefit.

Several Islamic groups are working on these changes: the Islamic Schools' League of America (the League), the Tarbiyah Project (Dawud Tauhidi), the Center for Islamic Education in North America (CIENA), FADEL, International Board of Educational Research and Resources (Iberr), the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT), and others. Fortunately, these groups are coming closer together to better share resources and prevent costly and wasteful duplication. There is so much work to be done that there is plenty for everyone to do. The changes that are occurring are thoughtful ones, not hasty or ill conceived. Groups like the League systematically include Islamic school parents and vested community members into its structure so that this evolution of thought is occurring in a synergistic fashion rather than in isolation.

The new curricula are slowly but surely helping to increase the number of Muslim educators. The integrated curriculum demands this. More Muslims are choosing to become educators as Islamic schools are raising salaries and offering perks such as health insurance. Unlike ten years ago, there are now a number of Muslim teachers graduating from universities across the U.S., most born and raised here with excellent bilingual, bicultural, and language skills. Because they are vested in the schools, these Muslim teachers and administrators are raising the overall standards, requesting the ongoing professional development that is necessary in the field of education. The outlook is very bright, indeed.

The tragic and catastrophic events of 9-11 that created a firestorm of change in the Muslim-American community are having a painful but clearly positive effect on Islamic schools across America. The terrorist attacks created a rapid burning away of the underbrush that so often hindered change, leaving behind a soil laden with rich nutrients ready to nourish the seeds of change. The emergence of a better-defined Muslim-American identity has helped to clarify the curricular choices that needed to be made. The searing heat that was turned on our community has given birth to more than just pain and depression. The seeds of an Islamic renaissance are sprouting in every part of life – professional, political, and spiritual.

As Muslims under fire, we have been forced to examine our personal commitment to Islam. Our identity as Muslims has exploded to the forefront of our public aspect of “self.” There is suddenly a horrific cost connected to our choice to be Muslim. Because

that cost is so dear, we are no longer willing to accept it merely as an inheritance of our immigrant or convert parents. If this religion could cost us our self-esteem, profession, or even life, we will surely evaluate it deeply. This evaluation is bringing clarity and strength to Muslim-Americans. With our feet firmly planted in our Muslim-American identity, we can more effectively embrace our Muslim Brothers and Sisters elsewhere who need our support while forging our future as citizens of the United States. Like the knobcone pine, we will arise from this firestorm having benefited from the clarity and seeds of growth left behind.