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Author(s): Sarfaroz Niyozov and Gary Pluim

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Teachers' Perspectives on the Education of Muslim Students: A Missing Voice in Muslim Education Research

SARFAROZ NIYOZOV
GARY PLUIM
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
Toronto, ON, Canada

ABSTRACT

This article builds on an extensive review of the comparative and international literature on teachers' perspectives on the education of Muslim students in public, Catholic, and Islamic schools. Bringing the teachers' voices and practices to the attention of researchers, policy makers, and general readers, the authors emphasize the centrality of teachers' roles in the education of Muslim students, highlight the constructive and positive work that teachers do, and point out the challenges they face and the support they need in fulfilling their moral and intellectual duties. We situate teachers' perspectives in the context of the upsurge of global interest in Islam and Islamic education and the increase in Muslims' challenges to multiculturalism and the existing education system dominated largely by Eurocentric, Hellenic-Judeo-Christian heritage and modernist values. The article examines and challenges the research, media and publicly produced contradictory and overlapping statements about Western teachers' work with Muslim students. Predominantly pessimistic, these pronouncements implicate teachers in (1) racism and Islamophobia; (2) an unwillingness and inability to include Muslims' historical and contemporary contributions and perspectives into the existing school curricula; (3) a lowering of expectations about their Muslim students and channelling them into non-academic streams; (4) cultural and religious insensitivity; and (5) an overall lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims. The article problematizes these observations by engaging with them conceptually and methodologically, and by bringing counter-points from research. The article concludes by proposing a balanced portrayal of teachers' work and the inclusion of teachers' perspectives to improve policy, research, and practice in educating Muslim students within a multicultural society.

The number of Western citizens who describe themselves as Muslim is growing at a higher rate than non-Muslim Western citizens, and Muslims are now the second largest religious denominational group in almost all Western countries, including Canada, Britain and the United States (Adams, 2007; Cristillo, 2008; Siddiqui, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Officially, Canada has more than 820,000 Muslims (Adams, 2007) compared with 1.6

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million in the United Kingdom (Abbas, 2005), 5 million in France (Benhold, 2008), and between 4 and 6 million in the United States (Cristillo, 2005; Merry, 2007). This Muslim presence and the issues related to Muslims' settlement in the Western world are posing serious challenges to education and provoking debates about democracy, multiculturalism, integration, secularism, individualism, and modernity, the hallmarks of contemporary Western societies. Most recent studies of the Muslim community in North America (e.g., Adams, 2007; CBC News, 2007; D'Addario, Kowalski, Lemoine, & Preston, 2008, pp. 4–9; Pew Research Survey, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008, pp. 39–45) suggest that in general Muslims are (1) the fastest growing segment of the population in Western countries (due to immigration, higher birth rates, and conversion); (2) much younger than the other groups (e.g., the proportion of Muslim young adults (18–29 years old) is larger than the average); (3) relatively highly educated (e.g., the percentage of Muslims with professional degrees is higher than that of the average);[1] (4) wealthier than most other identifiable groups; (5) legal residents, unlike other immigrant groups (e.g., around 90% of U.S. Muslim adults are the country's citizens); and (vi) well integrated into the mainstream society compared with Muslims in Europe and also given the relatively young immigration history.[2]

Differing views on Muslims' presence in the West have raised questions about Muslim marginalization and integration, their success and failure, their identity, culture, religion, and education, all which have become issues within the last 2 decades. The emergence of globalized Islamist movements, the depiction of Islam as an adversary in the global media, the increasing geopolitical research and analyses (Abukhattala, 2004; Esposito, 1999; Hahn, 2007; Huntington, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992; Nadapur, 2006; Razack, 2008), and the recent terrorist events involving Muslims or those who claim Islamist ideology have threatened the dominant global political economy and the world order. The confrontations between various Islamist movements and secular states in the Muslim world, and the populist, simplistic explanations of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya (as conflicts of "Muslims" vs. "others") have affected Western Muslim youth more than anything they have been learning in the classrooms or by teachers Western societies (T. Ali, 2002; Saadalah, 2004). Concern about whether Muslims or Islam can ever reconcile with Western and liberal values (such as individualism, human rights, secularism, civic law, separation of state and church, and democracy) have become a major global theme (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1996; Parekh, 2006; Rizvi, 2004).

In the increasingly politicized and polemical discussions, the tremendous complexity among Muslims—of ethnic, socio-economic, linguistic, theological, and cultural diversity—is lost in the depiction of a monolithic Islamic mass by Orientalists,[3] fundamentalists, and nationalists. These stereotypes are just beginning to give way to the acknowledgement of historical and contemporary diversity and plurality among Muslims. There

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have always been many who are culturally and even politically Muslim, but have chosen secularism, while living and working alongside those who are highly devout and politically active. Some Muslims identify by nationality and race (e.g., Turkey) and others by citizenship (e.g., French). The majority of Muslims belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam yet are divided into sects (*mathahib*), such as the Hanafis, Malikis, Shafiis, and Hanbalis. Similarly, the Shi'a minority differs along many lines into Twelvers, Ismailis, Alawis, and other subgroups. While some Muslims are among the richest citizens of the world, the majority of Muslims constitute the poorest, most marginalized and least educated population of the world—including many Muslims in Britain, Canada, France, and the United States (Abbas, 2005; Adams, 2007; Garbi, 2004). Some speak Arabic and Bengali; others Urdu, Turkish, or Persian; while others speak a number of languages in addition to English, French, and Dutch. Some Muslims believe in literalist reading of the scriptures, while others engage in esoteric and allegorical interpretations. Some Muslims wear traditional Muslim dress, while others consider this unnecessary. Muslims as individuals and groups have been entangled in power dynamics along family, class, ethnic, theological, race, and gender lines (Fatah, 2008). This diversity and complexity have tremendous implications for teachers' and educational systems' efforts to meet the needs of Muslim students. The study of the teachers' work with Muslim students is especially relevant, because 50% of Western Muslims are youth, and more than 90% of Muslim youth attend public schools (Cristillo, 2005; Merry, 2005; Parker-Jenkins, Hartas, & Irving, 2005; Modood, 2007; Zine, 2008). However, the recent growing enrolment of Muslim youth in Islamic schools has become a source of concern for policy makers in the West. There are approximately 51 Islamic schools in Canada (Memon, 2009) compared with 150 in the United Kingdom, 200 in the United States, 100 in the Netherlands, and 4 in France (Merry, 2007).

The education of Muslim students[4] is receiving much attention in comparative research, media, and the education policy arena in the West, as the religion of Islam undergoes resurgence in popular culture and public sphere. Educational institutions have been deeply affected by the implications of these issues. Since the 1970s there has been a rapid increase in academic, policy, and media studies about the relationship between Islam, Muslims, and education. These include discussions on both Islamic education (e.g., Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Merry, 2007; Zine, 2004a, 2004b, 2008) and Muslims' experiences of secular education (e.g., Cristillo, 2008; Sarroub, 2005).

Yet, despite the increased global attention, much confusion and misunderstanding remains about Muslim education. Islamic schools have become a controversy of their own. In Ontario, Canada, for example, a promise to fund religious schools (which included the province's 35 Islamic schools) cost the Conservative Party the 2007 provincial election

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(Niyozov, 2007). Even though Islamic education may be seen as an attempt to revive a form of knowledge subjugated by the processes of westernization, colonization, secularization, and globalization (Milligan, 2005; Zine, 2004a, 2004b), it faces major challenges and criticism. Some scholars see Islamic schools as aspiring to embed Islamic epistemology and praxis into the formal and hidden curricula and to teach all subjects from an Islamic perspective (Merry, 2007; Zine, 2008, pp. 13–22). These researchers claim that a major challenge for Islamic educators and schools is to Islamize the Western-dominated curricula. Conservative Muslim intellectuals and groups have always praised and glorified Islamic education, claiming that it is morally superior, of higher quality, more comprehensive, and holistic (Al-Attas, 1979; Husain & Ashraf, 1979). Others have criticized the purpose, role, and practices of Islamic schools, especially in the West. Ramadan (2004) criticizes Western Islamic schools for the following:

> reduction of spirituality to ritual technicalities, and the adoption of dualistic and Manichean approaches based on "us" as opposed to them . . . the teaching . . . offered is completely unconnected to American and European realities. It is as if children still live "there" and if one refers to "here," it is above all to emphasize the defiance that the youth should feel toward a society that is not ours, or theirs. (p. 127)

One serious gap in the research on Muslim education is the lack of teachers' voices on their practices. Teachers' work with Muslim students in the Western context is influenced by a number of realities stemming from demographic changes and Muslims' ability to organize their political, religious, social, cultural, and educational institutions (Lewis, 1994). Yet, despite the exponential increase in the studies of Islamic education, studies of teachers' practices, roles, and voice are almost absent (Merry, 2007; Milligan, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2008, p. 29). The studies of teachers' experiences in Islamic schools indicate differences and similarities from those in public schools. Tapping into these can provide important insights for education.

This article aims to develop a comprehensive argument for the inclusion of teachers in that dialogue; Teachers, the primary and most consistent agents in the education of Muslim youth, should take a central role in the discourse on Muslim education. Above, we have summarized a backdrop of issues and realities of the growing interest in Muslim education, and the challenges those realities pose for teachers with Muslim students. We now turn to a literature that raises concerns about the marginalization of Muslim students in public schools and implicates teachers in these concerns. We question this predominantly negative view of how public school teachers relate to and work with Muslim students, and offer an alternative and more positive interpretation of these teachers' efforts. Following from this more balanced portrayal of their work, we conclude with a seven-point

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rationale for engaging the perspectives of teachers to understand and improve education of Muslim students.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING OF MUSLIM STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE CRITIQUES AND COUNTER CRITIQUES

The international literature endorses teachers' centrality to quality education and to enabling students to reach their aspirations (e.g., Alexander, 2000; Avalos, 1985; Bacchus, 1997; Dalin & Rust, 1990; Farrell, 2008; Ghuman, 1994; Henry, 1996; Niyozov, 2008; Thiessen, 1993). Next to parents and peers, teachers spend the most time with students. Teachers filter the official policy, curriculum, and textbooks through their personal and professional knowledge; they make decisions on pedagogy and strategy; they determine the mode of classroom interaction and manage students' behaviours; they deal with parents and colleagues; and they make hundreds of calculated decisions during every working day (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). However, in research on Muslim students' education, especially in public schools in the West, teachers' voices and practices remain marginalized (Abbas, 2002; Merry, 2007; Milligan, 2005; Zine, 2007, 2008).

The literature on Muslim students' education, whether journalistic (Jafri & Fatah, 2003), policy-oriented studies (Trichur, 2003), historical (Milligan, 2005), ethnographic (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2001, 2008), or otherwise (Cristillo, 2005, 2008; Daun & Walford, 2004; Merry, 2007), has predominantly focused on the voices of Muslim students, parents, and Muslim organizations (such as Muslim Students Association [MSA], Islamic Society of North America [ISNA], Council for Islamic Schools of North America [CISNA], Arab European League) and on these stakeholders' observations about schools and teachers. Their observations typically implicate public school teachers and schools in (1) not responding to racism and Islamophobia; (2) failing to include Muslims' historical and contemporary contributions and perspectives into the school curricula; (3) having low expectations of Muslim students and channelling them into non-academic streams; (4) being insensitive to Muslim culture and religion; (5) lacking knowledge about Islam and Muslims; and (6) lacking legitimacy in working with Muslim students. Polemical in tone, most of the research on the subject tends to legitimate rather than critically engage the negative observations about teachers, especially in public schools.

By contrast, these stakeholders rarely criticize Islamic schools and their Muslim teachers. For example, Merry (2007) noted Islamic school teachers' determination, sensitivity, care, zeal and commitment:

> [Islamic school teachers] work tirelessly to provide the highest level of instruction, while attending to the personal and developmental needs of students. Islamic

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school educators clearly recognize the advantages Islamic schools provide, including the feeling of security, acceptance and affirmation of one's faith, and the integration of this faith with learning. (p. 61)

Our concern in this article is the overemphasis on the negative, one-sided, and often decontextualized portrayals of teachers' work in public schools. Such approaches, in our view, are not conducive to positive educational and social change. We do not deny historical and contemporary Islamophobia, racism, colonialism, classism, and other forms of discrimination against Muslims in Western societies and schools. Instead, we acknowledge that the critical research and movements (e.g., anti-racist education) and the efforts of Muslim individuals and organizations to raise awareness have reduced stereotyping, Islamophobia, and racism (e.g., Azmi, 2001; Dei, 1996; Fatah, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996; Zine, 2004b). But the unforeseen outcome has been the reverse stereotyping of public schools and teachers as biased or incapable in dealing with Muslim students. We intend to problematize these misgivings against public schools and teachers from both conceptual and methodological perspectives. In the following five sub-sections, we provide a summary of those critiques, and offer counter-critiques from research and other resources (e.g., policy documents, round table) that point to an alternative view on assessing public school teachers' work with Muslim students. We then discuss the implications of these alternative views for policy, research, and practice in education, curriculum and teacher development within multicultural society. We end with suggestions for a more balanced, complex portrayal of teachers' work and for bringing this portrayal to the attention of policy makers, practitioners, Muslim students, their parents, and organized Muslim groups.

1. RACISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

One of the most often repeated charges against public schools and teachers is that they display racism and phobia against their Muslim students, thus damaging students' self-esteem and identities (Abbas, 2005; McCreery, Jones, & Holmes, 2007; Shaik, 2006; Van Driel, 2004; Zine, 2004b). Zine's (2001) pioneering study of the struggles of a group of Muslim youth in a Toronto public school in developing strategies to maintain an Islamic lifestyle while dealing with the pressures of conformism, racism, and Islamophobia depicts public school teachers as largely indifferent, ignorant of Islamic faith and history, arrogant, and sometimes racist. Zine also describes Islamic identity as observing the pillars of Islam and ensuring externally oriented behaviours and dress codes which appear fixed and unchangeable. The internal dimensions of identity and what constitutes the core of Islam's spirituality and universal Islamic values (such as honesty,

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generosity, reasoning, hard work, respecting the law of the land, forgiveness, love, compassion, and so on) receive less attention. As an example, Zine (2001) presents one student's statement about her teachers:

> They just look at me and their initial reaction is just shock, like, "My God you're allowed out of your house." And then they talk to me like in slow English and I just answer back in proper English, and then they think, "OK, she's been born here, she knows English." (p. 409)

Zine analyzes the student's response:

> She perceives the attitudes of certain teachers toward her [and] the identification of difference as foreignness is an attitude that often frames the relationship between Muslim students and teachers. . . . These attitudes can be understood as part of the hidden curriculum. . . . In Zeinab's case, she received messages of inferiority, or as she later explained, looks that she understood as: "Why is she wearing that? What is she doing? This is Canada! When in Rome you should do what the Romans do." (p. 409)

Unlike her portrayal of public schools, Zine's (2004a, 2007, 2008) ethnography of Islamic schools in Canada portrays Muslim teachers in Islamic schools (many of whom are graduates of Canadian and other secular schools) as tremendously dedicated and committed to their students' academic and social success. The students in Zine's study consider their teachers in Islamic schools to be like brothers and sisters. The students are not racially profiled: they freely eat *samosas* and other ethnic food (as opposed to peanut butter sandwiches in the public schools); they are "with their kind" as opposed to being with strangers; they dress in Muslim clothes; and they do not experience the negative pressures of their public school peers. Islamic school teachers are portrayed as visionaries and role models. They prepare their students for active participation in public spaces, public schools and non-Muslim communities. Teachers in Islamic schools resist accusations of cocooning, ghettoizing, self-exiling, and segregation:

> In their view, the issue of being separated out was an effect of the discriminatory funding policies of the government and the way in which they [as teachers in an Islamic school] felt positioned by the dominant culture and society rather than a conscious attempt by Muslims to self-exile from society. (Zine, 2007, p. 91)

The Muslim teachers care about the broader community, admonish their students for using the word *kafir* (infidel) towards non-Muslims or Muslims of different sects, and cautiously prepare their elementary students for the challenges of the public high school life. Zine's (2008) Muslim teachers work hard to Islamize the existing curricula and pedagogy by replacing the Eurocentric perspective with an Islamic one, and by decolonizing the knowledge through reviving Islamic alternative epistemol-

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ogy. Thus, Islamic school teachers try to infuse the Qur'an and hadith into the topics in the existing curriculum, insert Muslims' historical contribution to science, geography, mathematics, and history, integrate Islamic and secular knowledge, frame their students' lives within Islamic ethics, and model Islamic behaviours and dress. Zine also acknowledges the limitations faced by the Islamic school teachers (e.g., lack of resources and facilities, lower salaries, lack of professional development, influence of conservative Islamic ideology, religious dogmatism and rigidity in matters of arts, music, physical education, and rituals). Promoting a faith-based critical pedagogy, Zine invites Islamic educators to ensure continuity between schools and homes, reject rigid dogmatism, and re-examine many taken-for-granted aspects of Islamic traditions:

> It is not enough to simply integrate Islamic knowledge, but it is critical to be attentive to what kind of knowledge is being imparted and whether it sustains the core values and ethos of justice and equity in the Qur'an or whether it has become subservient to patriarchal or authoritarian orientations. (p. 246)

Selby (1992) spoke to teachers in Islamic schools in the United States and Europe, in some cases observing their pedagogical practices. Like Zine (2004b, 2007, 2008), she also found that Muslim teachers attempted to find materials that could be connected to their students' Islamic experience and exhibited tremendous dedication, care, and hard work to help their students succeed in Western society while remaining true to their Islamic values and identities. Selby, Merry (2007), and Zine have disproved the common negative generalizations about Islamic schools, a valuable achievement, given current anti-Islamic sentiments in the Western world and ignorance about Western-based private Islamic schools.

They miss that majority of public schools are also highly committed, and caring about their Muslim students. To the contrary, Abu El-Haj (2002), highlights public schools' (and their teachers') prejudices and their unwillingness to address racism, Islamophobia, and threats to Muslim students' safety:

> Recently, I attended a meeting at which the incongruity of engaging multicultural discourse in the face of racist politics bordered on the bizarre. At the behest of a leader in the Arab American community, the administrative team of a local high school had invited Arab parents to attend an evening meeting. One administrator began the meeting emphasizing that the purpose of the meeting was to address "safety concerns" only. . . . Through their tone and the constant repetition of this parameter, the school administrators—all of whom were white—set a clear boundary around what could and could not be discussed. Genuinely concerned about the well-being of Arab students in the aftermath of September 11, the various school personnel stressed repeatedly that the climate they tried to cultivate was one in which students treated each other with "respect" and "accepted differences" through a "zero tolerance for intolerance" policy. However, this language of respect and tolerance elicited questions of racism, ideology, and conflict. Within this inter-

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pretive frame, incidents such as students ripping off Muslim girls' head scarves and an off-duty police officer putting a gun to the head of a local Pakistani store clerk were explained away, respectively, as teenagers doing "silly things" and "cops acting unreasonably." All talk about Middle East politics and several verbal and physical conflicts between teachers and Arab students—conflicts that had ensued from incompatible perspectives—was swiftly silenced by fearful school practitioners and Arab parents. As engagement with politics, conflict, race, and power was banished, only tolerance of, and respect for, cultural differences were left to discuss. At this historical moment when the boundaries of race and inclusion are being reconfigured, multicultural discourse in a variety of public educational spheres offers up cultural understanding as the glue that might bind together those who remain insiders. This multicultural discourse perniciously obscures the banishment of alternative perspectives that could challenge oppressive, discriminatory and exclusionary practices. (pp. 311– 312)

Allen (2007) relates a story of a Pakistani girl in high school in Britain who spoke of her teacher's indifference to her reports of teasing by her peers. This girl was confronted by non-Muslim students in the aftermath of September 11 telling her that "We killed hundreds of your lot yesterday- . . . . Saddam is your dad, you love him, don't you . . . we are getting revenge for what you Pakis did to us on 11 September." According to the student, the teacher brushed aside her concern by saying: "Never mind, it is not serious. It'll soon pass. You'll have to expect a bit of teasing at a time like this" (p. 1). Sirin and Fine (2008, pp. 55–57) quote Sahar, an American-Palestinian Muslim girl who struggles with lack of support and an indifference by her teacher, guidance teachers, and the school administration in her encounters with a student who gets away with the negative remarks she makes about Sahar. Sheridan's (2004) survey in October and November of 2001 in Leicester and Stoke-on-Trent in the United Kingdom indicates a rapid rise of anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiments after 9/11. In addition to extensive survey data, Sheridan also quotes a South-Asian Muslim teacher who allegedly overheard a non-Muslim teacher's confession to another dark-skinned but non-Muslim teacher: "I hate Muslims—they are a waste of time and space and they cause trouble all the time" (p. 175). Sheridan raises no question about the validity of her informant's statement.

In the Netherlands, Hermans (2004) found that many Moroccan parents complained that public schools did not endorse aspects of education such as respect, discipline, and morality. Schools gave children too much freedom and did not value religion or parents' authority. Children in public schools were encouraged to question "everything too much, even the certainties they had been taught at home . . ." (p. 434). Schools forbade girls to wear headscarves, did not respect Muslim holidays or dietary laws, and had unacceptable approaches to sexual education. According to these parents, Moroccan culture was disparaged at school as old fashioned, primitive, and backward. Moroccan children were treated as academically hopeless and in danger of becoming drug addicts or criminals. Women and

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children were portrayed as victims of Moroccan patriarchal cultural traits. The parents perceived the schools as having a hidden agenda of distancing children from their cultures and parents. Moroccan parents and the community's religious activists believed that the West was fundamentally racist and was continuing to colonize the world as it had been doing for centuries.

> The situation of young Moroccans in Brussels or Antwerp did not differ fundamentally from that of Palestinian youngsters in Israel. For some it was a Zionist plot against Islam, for others it was Orientalism where negative prejudices and biases were connected to exploitation. (p. 436)

Surely, the above portrayals could be truthful and backed by many more anecdotal and statistical data. In all of the cases above, there is no cross-referencing with teachers, nor a sensitive deconstruction of the students' perceptions. In our view these cases could also be examples of one-sided negative generalizations and stereotyping of teachers and public schools. Such portrayals could serve as a foundation for a number of Islamic clerics' declarations that sending Muslim students to public schools was like sending "lambs to slaughter" (Yusuf, 1994, cited in Zine, 2008, p. 10). As a result of mainstream prejudices, in some instances the public rather than the Islamic schools have become possible ghettos for those Muslim students who try to maintain their identity. Many non-Muslim students have left public schools where Muslims have become a significant majority, even though these may be the closest schools to their homes; some biased non-Muslim teachers have encouraged and even joined this "exodus" (the "white flight" syndrome).

Fortunately, there are studies that convey a different story. For example, Sarroub's (2005) study on Yemeni high school students in the United States and Abbas's (2002) study on teachers' perceptions of their South Asian students in the United Kingdom challenge the intentionality and significance of racist and Islamophobic attitudes among non-Muslim teachers. Refusing to blame teachers' mentality, Abbas points out that students' success or failure should be positioned in the broader context of varying forces, among which teachers are only one. More significant are socio-economic class, gender, language, parents' education, and family and community involvement. More than two thirds of the teachers in his sample of schools in Birmingham, United Kingdom, disagreed with the following statement: "The domestic situation of all Asians is problematic for effective schooling" (p. 456). This widespread disagreement suggests that teachers are able to relate—at least somewhat—to the domestic situations of Muslim students. Abbas also referred to Ghuman's (1994) work on Asian teachers in British and Canadian schools, where only 6 of 62 teachers agreed that "Muslim pupils/students are more confused about their identity" and only 9 of 65 teachers agreed that "Muslim pupils are far more likely to be religious

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than Sikhs" (p. 456). In England, Abbas (2002) found that teachers in public schools "were on the whole positive and were committed to their pupils and students"; "racist teachers could not work in the inner city schools because they would find it difficult to operate in such an environment"; teachers were "aware of gender as well as religious differences between the various South Asian groups in education" (p.468); "teachers truly empathized with the realities of their pupils and the cultural and social 'baggage' that they took with them to school" (p. 466); the school administrators close the school for *Eid,* plan teacher training around Eid, and "give teachers time to spend with their families" (p. 464); schools "have a festival of cultures . . . which tries to unite cultures from all over the world" (p. 464); and teachers are aware of the need to positively improve the lot of otherwise impoverished students. A senior male teacher in this study suggested:

> [Occurrences of "racist" teachers] tend to happen less in schools like this because the staff tend to be more educated in terms of the area, the needs, the culture, background, they happen to be more understanding. I think it happens more in typical white middle class schools. (p. 463)

Abbas's data show that the teachers reject sweeping generalizations about Muslim students and are generally reluctant to make reductionist statements on the relationship between Islam and education. Sarroub's (2005) study is also replete with cases of intimate, friendly, and trustful relationships between Muslim girls and their non-Muslim teachers and researchers (i.e., herself). Cristillo (2008) found that (only) 17% of the 323 Muslim students surveyed in New York City public schools reported having been objects of bigotry, often in the form of teasing, or offensive taunting about being Muslim and a "terrorist" (p. 6). Generally, 80% of the 323 students thought that their schools are "pretty cool" and 85% percent said they felt safe (p. 6). Thirty percent of the students said the terrorist attacks of 9/11 made them feel uncomfortable about their Muslim identity and 16% said it made them question their religious beliefs (p. 7).

Kathleen Stark (2008) is an American teacher whose immigrant and refugee students have undergone many traumas before joining her elementary Grade 1 class. She learns from her students (many of whom have Arabic and Muslim names) and their parents about their traumatic experiences; she picks up a few key words in their languages, and she meets their parents. Spark enables her students to feel safe with her as well as to dialogue and collaborate with each other and feel welcome in her class. The Anti-Islamophobia resource developed by York Region District School Board (YRDSB, 2004) in collaboration with the local Muslim educators in Toronto is another example of how not just teachers but also education systems as a whole are becoming more aware and taking actions to ensure Muslim students feel included, safe, and welcome at the public schools. The YRDSB package includes print and Web site resources, lists organiza-

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tions in the United States and Canada that provide academic and professional resources on curriculum, religious accommodation, and anti-Islamophobia assistance to teachers and students.

In addition, a growing number of teachers and social workers in the public school system are themselves Muslim. These professionals, in addition to teaching their subjects, have been providing valuable services in bridging cultures, helping their colleagues understand the nuances of the students' backgrounds, recognize the students' deeper needs, and allay parents' misconceptions about public schools and Western societies (Collet, 2007). One such scholar-practitioner, A. Kassam (2007), reflects on her teaching of high school English in a Toronto school from a critical and post-colonial perspective. She reveals a complex portrayal of the students' trans-national identities and how this could affect their perception of their experiences. In an instance, Alia, a "hijabi girl," composes a poem, which reveals her fear, frustration, and disappointment about racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia in Canada. Although Alia's perception is rejected by her classmates—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—Kassam sensitively engages with the poem. She enables Alia and her class to realize the differences between perception and reality, and between hidden and overt forms of discrimination, as well as the need to unpack their internal cultures and find points of connection with the larger society and global world. Kassam suggests that a critical post-colonial pedagogy requires historical and political analysis of personal experience, texts, and contexts, not just a celebration of the voice. She finds that this approach is in line with the Ontario curriculum guidelines. It encourages teachers to follow a critical multicultural perspective and to involve their students' experiences and their cultural contributions. However, Kassam does acknowledge that there might not be enough systemic encouragement and resources to do so.

These studies do not ignore the existence of discrimination, racism, and phobias of all sorts. There are indeed teachers who consciously or unconsciously practice racism and Islamophobia (Alladin, 1996; Allen & Neilsen, 2002; Sheridan, 2004). But the studies also show that many teachers are aware of racism and Islamophobia and work against them: They try to reach their students, make connections, and befriend their students and their families to ensure their students feel safe, comfortable, and welcome (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming). This implies that the focus on negative elements should be balanced with the positive attempts by teachers and systems to overcome them. To do so, requires engaging with teachers' voices and practices.

2. TEACHERS DENIGRATE OR IGNORE MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS

Another critique arising from recent research is that ethno- and Eurocentric teachers with Judeo-Christian backgrounds ignore or denigrate the

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historic and contemporary contributions of Muslims to science, architecture, culture, geography, navigation, literature, and history. This point has been emphasized by various scholars (e.g., Abukhattala, 2004; Douglass & Dunn, 2001; Nakhosteen, 1964), Islamic organizations (e.g., CIE, 1995), and Muslim leaders (e.g., Aga Khan, 2006). There is a heated debate about whether Islamic doctrines and history should or should not be part of the American curriculum (e.g., Sewall, 2003). In Canada, according to Azmi (2001), the movement to change the curriculum was only partly successful in meeting its goals of representing Canadian society's plural contributions and perspectives. This failure "confirmed that there existed only a token willingness to accommodate Muslim concerns on the part of education authorities" (p. 262). Overall, the critique of representations of Muslims and Islam in the public school curricula enumerates several shortcomings: Islam and Muslims are absent from Western textbooks or present only to a limited extent as part of subjects such as Social Studies, World Religions, World History, and Geography. Whenever Muslims are represented, the depictions are very simplistic, such as images of Arabs with camels. The texts portray Islam as the religion of Arabs and Mohammad, give Eurocentric versions of the Crusade stories, and present pro-Israeli depictions of the Arab–Israeli conflicts. Orientalist depictions of Islam and Muslims are backward, anti-modern, oppressive of women, intolerant to diversity, subject to and supportive of despotic rulers and corrupt politicians, and devoid of any genuine intellectual life and creativity (Abukhattala, 2004; Said, 1981). And on top of all this, in some textbooks, the information on Muslims has factual errors (M. Ali, 2007).

During the last 2 decades, textbook producers in the United States have hired Muslim consultants, clerics, and scholars to help with the representation of Islam and Muslims in texts. One of these consultants is the Council for Islamic Education (CIE). Susan Douglass, the Council's leading expert, mentions that the recent textbook editors' adherence to the principles of authenticity, fairness, and balance has improved the quality of the American high school textbooks on Islam as well as other faiths (Douglas & Shaikh, 2004, p. 10; Douglass & Dunn, 2001). More recently, Ouselati (2008) has noticed a considerable improvement in the representations of Islam and Muslims in Canadian textbooks and resources used in elementary and high schools.

However, a number of faith-centred, multiculturalist, and anti-racist educators have gone to depict almost all Muslims—their history, cultures, doctrines, and lives—as glorious, without problems, romantic, revolutionary, and anti-imperialistic. Arguing with this movement, Sewall (2003) has raised several problems with the new and positive representations of Islam and Muslims in American high school textbooks. He argues that idealized depictions are presented as realities of Muslim historical and contemporary life. Problems, if mentioned, are contextualized in ways that exonerate Muslims and blame their neighbours, both Western and non-Western, for

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creating the problems. These "revisionists" often use critical analyses of Western history and contemporary life by Western scholars (of both left and right) as evidence of the immorality of the West, Western, and non-Islamic societies to show how the West has regressed, devolved, decayed, and strayed away from progress, development, spirituality, and morality. For example, Wan Daud (1998) used such evidence to argue that liberal democracies are not the culmination of social evolution (as Fukuyama, 1992, suggested), but examples of its decline for their increasing absence of spiritual (i.e., religious) dimensions (see also Nasr, 1987). For Wan Daud, human/social development peaked with the revelation by Prophet Mohammad as the final messenger. Al-Attas (1979), Wan Daud (1998), and other Iranian religious clerics point to "the superiority of Muslims who are endowed with the best and most complete religion, teaching the best way of life" (Mehran, 2007, p. 64).

According to Sewall (2003), such revised depictions of Islam in Western textbooks are just as unfair and hypocritical as previous ones, and these new "content distortions and inaccuracies have not occurred by accident" (p. 4). Donner (in Sewall, 2003, p. 6), confirmed that "while most Muslims applaud the decision to present more material on Islam and Islamic history, their approval is constrained by their own strong views on how this material should be presented." Sewall blames the lack of a fair-minded approach in Islamic representation on multiculturalism, a lack of scholarly rigour, and a double standard in comparative methodology. He argues that such overly positive representations, coupled with passive teaching methods, may lead to brainwashing and indoctrination of Western readers about Islam and Muslims and of Muslims about the West.

Like Sewall in the United States, Panjwani (2005) in the United Kingdom analyzed school textbooks dealing with Islam. He noticed that often community members, clerics of a particular religious denomination or activists with particular agendas are involved in the production of textbooks, leading to a number of limitations. He found that the textbook authors—mostly non-Muslims, yet often supported by Muslim scholars, imams, and sheikhs—have presented Muslims through interpretations of Islamic history and dogmas in either idealized or simplistic forms. Panjwani suggests that the representation of Islam in social science–related textbooks in the United Kingdom follows one of four simplistic paradigms:

(1) The *Monist* paradigm presents predominantly Sunni interpretation of Islam as a monolithic faith, where even internal Sunni differences are avoided and texts reduce the sources of authority to the Qur'an and Sunna only, ignoring imams, Shi'i *akhbar,* Sufi Murshids (Sheikhs), and philosophers' reason;
(2) The *Literalist* paradigm describes how textbooks ignore the vast diversity of Muslims' theological, cultural, and historical approaches to

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religious texts and practices, such as the cognitive, symbolic, allegorical, and mystical interpretations;

(3) The *Absolutist* paradigm does not acknowledge religious change and Shari'a—a historical and man-made body of laws, regulations, and thought, and morality—is reduced to religion only, leading to the impression that no good person can exist outside the religious moral frame and that any religious person is a good person;

(4) The *Apologetic* paradigm presents Islam and Islamic history as unproblematic and idealistic. On the basis of this framework, Panjwani (2005) concludes that "as far as the teaching of Islam is concerned, the content of religious education is such as that it leaves out much that ought to be part of 'education about religion' and includes much that should not be" (p. 390). Moore (2006) noticed a similar trend, and suggests that "teaching about Islam—like all religions and historical events—requires a comprehensive and accurate presentation of positive and negative events; it is unethical and educationally dishonest to tell only one side of the story" (p. 283).

In addition to revisions in texts and curricula, growing numbers of public school teachers enthusiastically incorporate positive perspectives of their students' religious backgrounds. Ghuman (1994) reported on a teacher in the United Kingdom who observed the importance of using "the experience which children bring into the school" as "an important psychological principle which underpins sound classroom practice" (p. 180). In fact, the Asian teachers in Ghuman's study thought that "teachers at their schools were very positive and thoroughly professional in their commitment" towards students of multi-cultural and multi-religious backgrounds (p. 181). Stark (2008), an American elementary schoolteacher who works with Muslim and Arab students from conflict-ridden societies, reminds her students "how lucky they are to speak two languages"; she asks them to "tell stories their parents and grandparents have told them" (p. 4). She models multilingualism with them and illustrates its value when she talks to their parents:

> The possibility that my students will return to their countries of origin is one reason why I want to encourage not only the maintenance of their home languages, but their development as well. . . . However the primary reason is that I know that much of the child's cognitive and psychological sustenance can be lost if heritage language is lost; the language that carries the history and culture and the family and the child's early sense of identity. (p. 3)

The inclusion of Muslim history and Muslim contributions in Western public school curricula is surely legitimate, not only for affirming Muslim students' self-esteem and identity but also because it is part of the anti-hegemonic discourse. It can challenge the dominant Western historical and social paradigms, provide an alternative to them and expand the

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learners' horizons (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). However, from a critical multiculturalist viewpoint, Muslim knowledge, history, and contributions are complex and contradictory, incorporating both dominant and subjugated forms of knowledge and epistemologies (Asgharzadeh, 2007). Hence, like Western knowledge, non-Western knowledge (in this case Islamic histories and contributions) should also be critically examined in relation to its power dynamics and principles of justice.

Further, one must pragmatically ask how much knowledge of Islam teachers could be expected to have, when many Muslims themselves have limited knowledge about their own particular tradition and its history, let alone about other Muslim traditions (Ghanea-Bassirri, 1997). Furthermore, in Western classrooms, Muslim students share space with students of other religious and cultural groups. This condition of multiple, conflicting perspectives requires a deep re-conceptualization of the teacher's role. What is the purpose of diversifying and adding new materials to curricula? The affirmation of students' identity, the enhancement of their self-esteem and dignity, and the acknowledgement of their historical and cultural contributions may not be a sufficient reason. A celebratory, feel-good approach might lead to entrenching students in their cultures of origin, constricting them to a framework they may themselves resist (Garbi, 2004; Ghuman, 1994). In other words, it is important in addressing students' cultures and experiences to consider deeper pedagogical goals, such as critical analysis, independent problem solving, and students' autonomy (Jackson, 2003). Simplistically, introducing glorified versions of minority cultures and religions in the curriculum may not differ much from the standard neo-conservative agenda of "back to basics, great books and the morally superior past" (Apple, 2001; Wheeler, 2003). The inclusion of any cultural content in school curricula should be useful in developing students' critical capacity, autonomy and independence, rather than in fulfilling desires of their parents or the agendas of conservative clerics and politicians and of market fundamentalists (Apple, 2001). Surely, the ultimate point of including past cultures and histories is that their lessons will help the students succeed in new times and places.

There have been constructive developments in the inclusivity, balance, diversification, and sophistication of pedagogical approaches to multicultural curricular enrichment in public school systems (Banks, 2006; Ouselati, 2008). However, the important question arises of whether these balanced and inclusive approaches are used equally in Muslim educational systems. For example, Western-based Islamic schools have been reprimanded for following older state-mandated curricula, which excludes Muslim historical and contemporary achievements (Zine, 2008, pp. 28–29). However, few reprimands have touched Muslim countries' curricula, where the negative portrayals of Westerners, Christians, Jews, Ahmadis, Bahais, secular Muslims, women, atheists, queers, and other non-Muslim groups have changed very little over time (Doumato & Starrett, 2007; Spink, 2005).

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Muslims' exposure to non-Muslim perspectives would not only open horizons and possibilities for dialogue but would also show that Muslims' fundamental concerns and successes are similar to those of others and that Muslims are part of the global community, its successes and problems (Fatah, 2008; T. Kassam, 2003; Parekh, 2006).

In sum, there has been some quantitative and qualitative improvement in the inclusion of Muslims' historical and contemporary contributions and of students' personal and communal experiences in the Western curricula and schools through critical constructivist, active texts, and pedagogies.[5] However, this move requires a simultaneous consideration of deeper educational goals. It also suggests the need for a correspondingly constructive inclusion of non-Muslim perspectives and heritages in the curricula of Muslim schools in Muslim countries and diaspora communities.

3. TEACHERS LIMIT MUSLIM STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT

A third criticism is that due to the low expectations that public school teachers have of their Muslim students, they channel them into general or lower streams,[6] and/or into English as a second language (ESL) classes ultimately hindering the students' current achievement and future aspirations (Archer, 2002). Zine (2001) concludes that teachers' low expectations of racial and ethnic minority youth in Canada can lead to negative evaluations and bias in assessing these students as well as their underachievement (p. 416). Merry's (2005) study of social exclusion of Muslim youth in Belgian schools illustrates how Muslim students vocally challenge policy makers on issues of immigration, parental roles, and teacher expectations. In his study, teachers report that Muslim families "do not value education to the same degree as Belgian nationals and they do not imagine schooling to lead to better economic opportunities" (p. 14). Further, many of the teachers complain that Moroccan students were extremely difficult: they caused disruptions, lacked discipline, betrayed trust and tested limits (p.15). These students were perceived as academic failures and potential drug addicts or criminals. Moroccan women and children generally were seen as suppressed by their culture (Hermans, 2004). Sirin and Fine (2008 pp. 55–57) point out how a Muslim girl named Sahar, has been repeating her grades and failing her subjects partially due to the little support she receives from her teachers of social studies and science.

Muslim educators Elnour and Bashir-Ali (2003) discuss how American teachers can improve the educational experiences of Muslim girls. "Often teachers in the United States know little about the norms of Islam or the cultures of Muslim students. . . . We know of teachers who lower Muslim girls' grades because they consider them to be disregarding rules by covering their bodies" (p. 62). In Zine's (2001) study, a student by the name of Amal concluded:

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It wasn't my grades that the one [teacher] who told me to go into general was looking at; she was looking at my whole outer appearance, and that meant "dumb," "ignorant," "Oh, we don't want them to succeed." That's what I felt. (pp. 415–416)

By contrast, Sarroub (2005) found that the majority of the teachers at her school described themselves as ". . . teachers who have the same expectations of all their students, regardless of ethnicity, and whose main objective is to teach their subjects" (p. 93). All of the teachers Sarroub spoke with ". . . remarked on the *hijabats*' good study habits; the hijabats [*sic*] were far more diligent about their schoolwork than any of the other students in the school" (p. 98). As a non-Muslim scholar, Sarroub managed to establish cordial relations with her student participants who confided in her their many hopes and secrets that they would have not shared even with their parents.

There are other examples in which teachers recognize Muslim students as extremely motivated and as superior achievers. School staff in Abbas's (2002) study obtained support from the outside "to help kids who have problems with language, etc., regardless of whether a child is South Asian or English" (p. 460). The primary schools work hard "to ensure that South Asian pupils had satisfactory levels of mathematics and English, equipping them with vital tools necessary for effective secondary schooling" (p. 460). From his work with 23 teachers, Abbas (2002) describes how it "would seem that teachers remained largely reluctant about labelling one religious group more or less academically able than another . . ." (p. 454).

Teachers defend their Muslim students' hopes and aspirations—not only within their schools, but also with their parents—enabling their students to succeed. Often teachers, together with their Muslim students, struggle to convince their parents to allow their children to pursue their passions, interests and talents rather than follow their parents' insistence on careers in medicine, law, information technology, business, and engineering (Siann & Knox, 1992). Many non-Muslim teachers, conscious of the sensitivities surrounding Islam and Muslims, make extra efforts to celebrate Muslim festivals, traditions, and achievements, and help their Muslim students with legal and other problems they face in their schools and community. In our study (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming), a Toronto public school teacher of Law and Civics mentioned that she not only helps her students academically, but also acts as their legal advisor, and as a liaison with their parents (i.e., she is a friend to a number of the students' mothers). An Evangelical Christian teacher in a Toronto public school (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming) acknowledged that Muslim students are among her top, award-winning students. A Catholic school teacher of religious studies pointed out that his female Muslim student won the best prize, writing an essay on the differences and similarities between Christianity and Islam. She asks them to help the other Muslim and non-Muslim students in dealing with the challenges of science topics. A Muslim teacher

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stated that Muslim students are not the only ones attending ESL classes. According to her, the mere fact that someone is born in Canada does not make that student fluent in English, especially in academic English needed for higher education. Speaking from her South Asian community experience, she acknowledges that some of her friends' families watch Indian movies and programs, speak Urdu or Hindi, and socialize in their diaspora milieus. All these habits lead to their children's weak English proficiency. While she was not against enrolling her students in ESL classes, she suggested that enrolment in the ESL classes needs an accountability check, in terms of ensuring that ESL students are rapidly progressing and moving out of ESL classes. This check would be an important safeguard against stigmatizing the ESL students (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming).

In sum, the reports of teachers' low expectations and their channelling of students into lower-achievement streams are not necessarily the case in every situation. Non-Muslim teachers do not conspire against their students, as some suggest or imply. This negative view is probably based on lack of listening to teachers' voices and, subsequently, a failure to understand the complexity of their working lives, including their passion, ethics, love for profession, and goals. Together with knowledge base and pedagogy, these constitute their core work of making a difference in the lives of their students, regardless of their students' background (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). The majority of teachers above appear to have positive views about their Muslim students' achievements. They have high expectations of these students, and they take extra steps to support their development.

4. INSENSITIVITY IN ACCOMMODATING MUSLIMS' RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND RITUALS

Western teachers are often accused of not accepting many Muslim rituals and rules such as Friday prayers, fasting, prohibitions against weekend and overnight trips, camping, swimming, dance and music classes, and co-educational sports activities. There are many of examples of this in the literature. Secular and Western teachers, argue conservative Muslim groups, fail to understand that Islam does not separate the private from the public, and that "religion is expressed in every aspect of life, character, mannerism, clothing, etc." (Sirin & Fine, 2008, p. 51). Parents and students blame teachers for not allowing their students to attend Friday prayers. Teachers justify this ban by saying that missing the same subject every week leads to failing the test and losing credits necessary for graduation; that some students misuse the prayer time, do not go for prayer, or do not return after it. Teachers are seen as secularizing their students (and in some cases converting them) by pressuring them to participate in field and overnight trips, and co-education arts and sport activities (Azmi, 2001;

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McCreery et al., 2007; Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005). However, Sarroub (2005) illustrates that the above charges are problematic. She presents many positive examples of teachers' commitment and dedication, while mentioning that, for teachers

> The most controversial issues revolved around . . . Friday prayer. . . . This confused teachers because the purpose was not clear to them. (p. 103) More than any other district wide policy, this one angered teachers. (p. 105) . . . Teachers were still irritated that the students could leave during the school day. It came to their attention that within Islam, it was not necessary for the boys to pray between noon and two-twenty in the afternoon, that they could just as easily pray after or before school on Fridays. (p. 106)

Another teacher in Sarroub's study elaborated:

> See, well I'm tolerant and I celebrate all religions, I truly do. But . . . I feel a child's primary responsibility now is to get an education. . . . And it seems that most of the things that are asked for are accommodated. Instead of saying, you know, we understand this and we appreciate this, but the facts are that the Imam should have said education first. (p. 106)

Another (gym) teacher in the same study voiced a different perspective:

> I try to learn from them and I try to allow room for their differences . . . many of them have said we are not allowed to do anything physical in front of the guys . . . you know now we are getting to such extremes. I want to be considerate of the difference, I want to be as helpful and, but I can't . . . (p. 106)

Chan (2006) looked at several Toronto middle school teachers' responses to barriers preventing students from participating in field trips. She quotes one student saying, "It's against my religion for girls to go out [on a weekend field trip]" (p. 162) and notes that "it became evident that many of the South Asian girls were not permitted to go" (p. 166). Through her analysis of a teacher's response, Chan concludes that the teacher "was aware that the cultural and social narratives guiding his practices might differ from those guiding the parents of his students, and he was committed to acknowledging the diversity of his students" (p.166). Chan felt that throughout her years of work in a Toronto school, she "saw examples of the teachers' willingness to learn about the cultures of their students and to accommodate for different practices" (p. 164). At the same time, Chan presents teachers' dissatisfactions about the negative assumptions Muslim and other parents may have developed about school, including its extra-curricular activities. What emerges is a dissonance between teachers' and parents' views about what education is and how it interacts with home culture. The teachers in Chan's study felt a lack of support and a need to engage with parents at the broader public level about the nature of education, its connection to social cohesion and citizenship, and the factors for

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children's success in society at large. In our current study (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming), one teacher in a Toronto school mentioned that the teachers have been able to resolve or reduce parents' concerns about their children's (especially girls') field trips. Through direct discussion about these concerns—by illustrating their strategies for addressing them, involving Muslim teachers in the trips, and proving their credibility in the Muslim community through years of helping their Muslim students succeed—the school's teachers have been able to win the majority of the parents' consent and trust.

Abbas's (2002) study of public schools in Britain concludes that "teachers were considerate of all religions" (p. 454). In his research, Abbas found that 94% of the educators that he spoke with agreed that all religions should be respected for their intrinsic values, and a full 82% disagreed with the statement that "pupil religion and culture ought to be left at home" (p. 454). His overall findings suggest that "many teachers were positive advocates of the different faiths" and that "both religion and pupil ought to be given the respect they deserved" (p. 454). Moreover, Collet's (2007) work with Somali high school students challenged the clichéd research assumption that all Muslim parents and students would like to avoid co-education, sex education, music courses, and gym classes. In contrast with the tendency to disparage teachers for their inability to deal with Muslim students' sensitivities, Norberg (2000) cites instances in her work with teachers (in Sweden) in which empathy and understanding were at the forefront of their approach to sensitive issues for Muslim students:

> If the Muslim children did not want to undress or shower in front of their friends, in connection with swimming and physical education, their demands were handled with respect. The teachers emphasized the importance of respecting the students' integrity. When they allowed pupils to change clothes in privacy, they were offered an opportunity to get accustomed at their own pace. (p. 514)

Unlike Chan's (2006) inquiry, Collet (2007), in his study of Somali Muslims in Toronto, cites Alaso's (a 25-year-old woman student) view of her teacher, refuting the generalizations about Muslim students' perceptions of teachers' misunderstanding their life priorities:

> They had a room for the prayers, yes. And it was very good. Actually, I was very amazed that there was a room for us to go and pray. But the thing is if you had another prayer, sometimes, the other prayer, which is around three o'clock, there is no time, you are in the class. So some of the teachers, I feel like they are upset, you know, "Also, you cannot just go." And you know . . . Like one time—usually I just sit there. Even I don't like to use the bathrooms, so I just to sit there. But one of the teachers especially, I feel like she's not okay with the idea. So I was trying, like if I see that I cannot make it home before the other prayer, I don't want our prayers to come together, you know, they have to be separate. . . . I would just say, I'm sorry, I have to go out. And I tell her, just 10 minutes, because I'm taking off the shoes, 10 minutes and I will finish everything. But if I feel that I can make it home, I don't bother her, I just tell her, you know what? I'm due at home. (p. 143)

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Collet's report on the students' opinions reveal that it is impossible to generalize about even a single school's Muslim community, let alone the Muslim community as a whole. Some of the students and their parents avoided and rejected "sensitive" subjects, such as mixed athletics, swimming, and general co-education, while others appreciated their usefulness. Adey, a practicing Muslim student, apparently had no problems with co-education; her comfort derived from her love of sports and there was no conflict that she was a Somali Muslim girl together with boys in the physical education class (p. 144). Some Muslim students are successful at sports and music, others struggle with them, and some want to avoid them; some Muslim students stress religion in their life, some adhere to it to a lesser degree; and still others see no incompatibility between Islam and arts, music, or co–ed sport activities. Some love math, others enjoy the arts. Indeed, all of these differing approaches to sports, art, music, drama, drawing, and singing are justified by different Muslim traditions, including primarily religious ones (e.g., Abou El Fadl, 2002; Al-Qaradawi, 2001). Teachers understand that there are several contested views on the *hijab*, on evolution and creation, on co-education, and on prayer (Chan, 2006; Collet, 2007).

Sex or reproductive education has been another issue. While parents and religious activists are generally presented as attacking public schools and teachers for teaching these subjects, the research revealed that both proponents of Islamic education and Islamic schools have themselves supported teaching this subject (e.g., Halstead, 1997; Mabud, 1998; Sanjakdar, 2004). Sarwar (1992, quoted in Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005) states that "the need for sex education is not in doubt. The debate is concerned with where, how, and by whom this education should be given" (p. 138). Collet illustrates that what parents and religious leaders may consider as taboo, students themselves realize as possible and important. Omar, a 19-year-old boy, spoke to several of these points:

> Yeah. Basically, I believe that if you learn sex education, like for example in Somalia they probably think it's wrong to learn sex education. But if you learn it—and in Ethiopia as well—but if you learn it from the beginning, like the more education you have on it, it could stop things. Like we'll be more aware of AIDS and things like that. But people don't really think of that. They think it's wrong to have. They think that it's going to make kids want to go and have sex. But in actuality that thing, that's still going to happen. But if we're educated on AIDS and how to prevent it and different STDs [sexually transmitted diseases], it would maybe help with that. I think that's going to be hard to instill in the people, very hard actually. (p. 138)

Another Muslim student affirmed this view as follows:

> Yeah, I understood why the teachers did it. I understood that a lot of kids engaged in it, you know, and that it was only right to at least teach them about it if they're going to do it. You can't lie to yourself and force yourself [into believing] that these

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kids are not doing it. So, they are just taking precautions. They said, "Here, if it's going to happen, let's just teach them about it for two weeks." You know, it wasn't a whole course, it was just kind of a unit. . . . I understood that. I learned it, and I think that was helpful, to be honest. So whenever I wish to engage in it, I'll know what to do, you know, I will have enough background for it. (p. 147)

These above raise questions about respecting and critically engaging students' rights, voices and needs as different from their parents and communities (Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005) rather than patronizing and infantilizing them (Barber, 2007). By virtue of living in an increasingly pluralistic society, public school board policies have become more responsive to the practices of Islam. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) states that it "will take reasonable steps to provide accommodation to individual members of a religious group who state that the Board's operations or requirements interfere with their ability to exercise their religious beliefs and practices" (2000, p. 3). The guidelines provide specific accommodations for Muslim students so as to respect the Five Pillars of Islam, to acknowledge Muslim norms, to respond to incompatibilities with the existing curriculum and to address issues about extracurricular activities. They also include accommodations made for daily prayer and Muslim holy festivals. For example, the TDSB has drafted a schedule for teachers for times during which the noon prayer must take place. Muslim students are allowed to use all or part of their lunchtime for prayers, and when prayer obligations occur during class time, students are allowed time for prayer. The Board also recommends an allocated space in the school for prayers, especially for Friday prayer; when that is not possible, students have up to 1 hour to attend a nearby mosque. Muslim holy periods are respected in a variety of ways: students are excused from school for *Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-u-Adha*, and *Ashura*; there is an understanding of the requirements of fasting during Ramadan; and accommodations are made for students traveling to Mecca for hajj. School food items containing ingredients derived from pork are clearly identified and vegetarian and Halal food are encouraged. Board policy advocates acceptance of Islamic dress, as well as clear consequences for harassment by intolerant peers. Board guidelines also inform teachers to be observant of male–female relations: Special arrangements may need to be made for student seating, parent meetings, and group work.

In curriculum areas, the TDSB guidelines provide accommodations for physical education, music, visual arts, human sexuality, and dance. In physical education, schools are advised "to ensure that Muslim parents know and understand the physical education curriculum so that they can come to an informed decision about co-educational activities, acceptable attire for gym or swimming, and spectator sports" (p. 30). Privacy in showering can be arranged through available suitable facilities or allowing appropriate covering by students. In music, teachers are encouraged to take song lyrics and use of instruments into account: A focus on percussion

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rather than melody may be more appropriate for some Muslim students. In visual arts, teachers are recommended to be sensitive to images of humans or animals, and concentrate on "assignments of line pattern, colour, and texture" (p. 33). In these subjects, as well as human sexuality and dance, Muslim students may be provided with alternative programming, gender-segregated classrooms, or an outright exemption from the subject.

The TDSB also stipulates that consideration should be given to the timing of extra-curricular events within the school day:

> Students should be given valuable alternative activities if a dance happens during the school hours. Parents are recommended to be given reasonable time to review detailed information about the purpose and nature of school activities. For overnight and camping excursions, the provision of separate sleeping facilities for males and females should be communicated and explained to parents. Meals, snacks, and drinks must consider Muslim dietary restrictions (Halal). School accommodation suggestions for male/female interactions should be followed. Provide alternative activities in area of dancing and music when necessary. (p. 32)

Not only have the above accommodations been written as policy, but also teachers have responded to this policy by becoming more informed, better trained, and increasingly aware of Muslim culture. Our work with the Muslim Education Project at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) (Niyozov & Memon, 2006), and the preliminary findings from our research on teachers' work with Muslim students (e.g., Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming), both indicate that teachers know much more now than ever before about Muslims and their religious, social, and academic needs. Indeed many public school teachers are religious and they identify similarities between their and their Muslim students' ideas and practices. In sum, public schools in Canada and elsewhere in the West have been making efforts to understand and accommodate the needs of Muslim students. While these accommodations may be not as fully comprehensive, their structures not as permanent, nor their response as quick as religious parents, students and organizations would wish, it is important to acknowledge the progress and the system's willingness to accommodate.

5. LEGITIMACY OF NON-MUSLIM TEACHERS

The final critique suggests that non-Muslim teachers do not have the background, knowledge, and right to teach about Islam and Muslims. Durkee (1987) spoke against non-Muslim teachers teaching in Islamic schools, as their presence would contradict the Islamization of the curriculum which Muslim teachers model as lived practice. Backed by some of the anti-racist and anti-colonial writers, this viewpoint assumes that outsiders

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are not emotionally, socially, academically, and even psychologically qualified to talk about Muslim culture and religion. As Hewer (2001) further asks, "Why should any pupil believe in the message that is being taught unless the teacher not only believes in it first, but also bears the fruit of that belief in every aspect of daily life?" (p. 51). This logic suggests that even if they include Islam in their textbooks, Western schools will also need specially trained Muslim teachers to teach it accurately and sensitively. There are some bizarre accusations of non-Muslim (or "not-proper" Muslim, e.g., secular, liberal Muslims, in the eyes of conservative Muslims) teachers converting, secularizing, and corrupting Muslim children by simply raising questions about any Islamic issue, bringing alternative Islamic, non-Islamic, or anti-Islamic perspectives to the classroom, or by meeting their students after school. Such accusations have become problematic as more consideration is given to the internal diversity, forms of injustice, and minority–majority relations in the Muslim communities.

Yet, examples from research show that teachers do not necessarily categorize their Muslim students as generalized and culturally fixed representatives. Teachers see Muslim students as young children and adolescents not uniquely different from other students in their class.

> When I encounter the students in my classroom, I am dealing with the individual culture that a student brings to me. That culture is influenced by their fathers' attitudes towards books and their's towards girls in school, their grandmothers' cooking, their mothers' songs, their level of comfort in their homes, the level of conflict in the home; it's the reality that the young person brings with them everyday to school. In that way, all 20 or 30 young people in my classroom are unique. Every student I have brings a unique collection of artifacts. . . . an archive.
>
> My job is to bring the archive to let's say a midpoint and the new knowledge that I am facilitating to the same midpoint, a kind of epiphany, a new kind of understanding, and then the students archive grows, gets enriched, diversified. (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming, p. 13)

Describing three critical incidents (e.g., teaching prepositions, pair work, and prayer time) during her mentoring of an Angolan-American-Muslim graduate student who taught ESL to international students in Minnesota, Kimberly Johnson (a secular, feminist scholar-practitioner) mentioned that Ali (the student) enabled her "to confront assumptions about herself and others . . . look differently at her Muslim students . . . wonder what [she] can do differently, . . . about the role religion plays in our teaching" (2003, pp. 798–799). Despite many difficulties of working with Ali, Johnson also records that Ali "told me that he again thanks God that he has had the chance of working with me, because he does not think he would have done as well with anyone else" (p. 799). Johnson became Ali's ally "who lasted throughout his tenure" (p. 799) and became a reference point for him whenever it was necessary. Ghuman (1994) and Sarroub (2005) show that there are Muslim students who want

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to have teachers who are not from their own culture because their Muslim teachers, acting according to cultural/religious values, try to over-discipline them, require blind submission and obedience, misinform their parents on their behaviours, or control them in the name of culture and religion. Some Muslim students also do not want to be part of Muslim students' organizations, which in addition to organizing awareness campaigns about diet, Muslim rituals and celebrations, and spaces for prayers, and identity protection, sometimes try to control them by imposing parochial perspectives and by setting boundaries that limit the students' interaction with others (Choudry, 2000; Sarroub, 2005). Students legitimately want to be exposed to alternative views and prefer to have non-Muslim teachers and peers to whom they may confide their secrets and personal concerns. Niyozov's (2001) study of teachers in Tajikistan shows that Muslim students often found non-Muslim teachers and instructors to be friendlier, more caring, more knowledgeable, and more inclined to help them fulfill their dreams and become successful. In fact, many non-Muslim teachers relate and empathize effectively with their Muslim students. Sarroub (2005) shows that a number of teachers understand the tension between the two worlds of their Muslim girl students and are passionate to help the students address this tension. She cites examples from teachers in her study:

> Your heart goes out in a way to the female students because . . . it's been indicated "we wish, we wish we could do some of these things . . . take part in more activities at school." I've had girls in my classroom who have broken down and cried. . . . (p. 99) I have a female student [whose] . . . uncle came from Yemen and when he heard that she was going to a school with boys, they're sending her back to Yemen. You know, and this teacher was broken hearted. (p. 98)

In a workshop on Muslim education in Toronto in November 2008, attended by Niyozov, a non-Muslim teacher asked the panel (which consisted of a number of Muslim community leaders and heavily involved parents) a question about a Shi'a Muslim group in which she had a number of friends. Two of the panelists gave very simplistic answers about the Shi'a–Sunni differences (and implying that the Shi'a were wrong in fighting for power after the Prophet Muhammad's death, which has led to bitterness, violence, and divisions among Muslims). They also implied that the particular Shia group's claim to "Muslimness" was dubious because their practices were different in a number of ways. The men in the panel, one of whom was an Islamic scholar kept quiet and asked Niyozov to divert from the topic. Ironically, the non-Muslim teacher defended that particular Shi'a group, asserting that the group's members call themselves Muslims and are aware of the negativity toward them among other Muslims. This echoes what Sirin and Fine (2008) suggest—that like other immigrants, "Muslims have imported their internal conflicts" to the Western societies (p. 46) and continue passing negative remarks about each other.

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All of these studies and events indicate that the assumption that Muslim teachers are better suited to teach Muslim students about their history and culture may be unfounded. However, the accusations of non-Muslim teachers' ignorance or non-legitimacy to teach about Islam or Muslim students—which come from conservative parents, students, organized groups, Muslim media, politicians, and some scholars—have led many teachers to play it safe, avoid controversies, and not engage critically with the implications of cultural and religious practices and avoid encounters with Muslim students and their parents (Collet, 2007). This, in turn, leaves students unequipped to deal with issues, conflicts, and disagreements within and outside the Muslim communities. Currently, non-Muslim and even Muslim teachers are discouraged from addressing controversies such as the Iraq War, terrorism, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflicts. At the same time, parents, community activists, religious preachers, and populists actively analyze them in alternative spaces. Many of these populists form negative judgments about non-Muslim societies, religions, and cultures, and ask their students to self-isolate and segregate from their non-Muslim peers (Fatah, 2008; Modood, 2007; Nomani, 2005). Denying teachers and students the right and opportunity to engage in these debates ultimately may lead to unbalanced explanations and plays into the hands of "victim" politics promoted by anti-integration discourse, which blames non-Muslims for every single problem Muslims face and denies Muslim the opportunities to engage in self-analysis.

Yet, there are several examples of teachers who have ventured into debates involving Islamic history, creed, and social realities. Across Western education systems there are agreements that public schools should not be teaching or promoting any particular religion. At the same time, they are encouraged to teach about religions, especially those of their students (Wheeler, 2003). To that end, Wheeler uses a comparative pedagogical framework that critically engages the themes of Prophethood, Canon, *Shari'a* Law, Ritual, and Society and Culture, and that could be used in liberal arts programs in universities and high schools alike. Jackson (2002) cites examples of European teachers who use dialogue, interpretation, debate, and critical analysis in teaching about historical and contemporary issues, including Islamic doctrines. Y. M. Ali (2000) worked with 16 educators in Islamic schools in a southern U.S. state and found that teachers' opinions cover a broad spectrum of options and approaches in dealing with the issues of Islamic and Western education. With regards to one issue, the theory of evolution, half of the teachers in Y. M. Ali's (2000) study opposed its teaching: one teacher would address it in its entirety, two would juxtapose evolutionism with creationism, and five were undecided. According to our preliminary findings (Niyozov, 2010, forthcoming), all four science teachers in our sample allow for both theories (i.e., teaching evolution is required by the Ontario curriculum, and creationism comes from either

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the teachers' or students' beliefs) with their variations (i.e., intelligent design) to be discussed in their classes. The teachers reported that they rarely impose any particular version on the students but let them decide, while helping them with the process of making decisions (i.e., weighing the evidence and logic behind the alternative theories). All the teachers found that their students like being exposed to several ideas rather than to one single viewpoint. However, all four teachers were ambivalent about whether they would actually allow their students to decide that creationism is true and evolution is false, given that evolutionism is a requirement of the curriculum. Two of the four teachers pointed out that they would disclose their viewpoints (pro-creationism) if their students were to ask them; the two others (one of them Muslim) suggested they would not disclose their positions to not affect their students. None said they would directly challenge the students' views whether those were pro-evolutionism or pro-creationism. All four teachers said they would let their students know that there are alternative perspectives, and all acknowledged that this is a highly sensitive issue noting that they try to avoid engaging in debate on it because of their unpreparedness and fear of reprisals from the administration or negative reactions from parents.

According to Panjwani (2005), the recent shifts in religious education (e.g., toward increasing over-sensitivity, uncritical celebration of differences, and avoidance of controversial issues) often blur more serious discussions on the actual aims of education. These trends do not help students to develop analytical skills and engage in open-minded discussion, do not expose students to more than one view, and do not enable them to reflect upon the existential and social questions of the day. Nevertheless, there is a continuing realization that avoiding issues and adopting superficial "liberal" approaches—such as uncritical celebration of cultures, heritages, and voices—are failing children and societies educationally and socially (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Until teachers and students in public and Islamic schools alike are encouraged to problematize the curricular content and to take risks in handling religious and other sensitive issues, including examination of dogmas and doctrines, and to learn from those risks—without fear of being called racist and phobic—all efforts at culturally relevant, empowering, and meaningful education will be irrelevant and futile no matter who teaches the multicultural student population.

In sum, the answer to the question "Who should be teaching Muslim students?" is not simple. This question is as much about the teachers' backgrounds as about their pedagogy, ethics, and intentions. If we are to ensure that education leads to more justice, quality, equity, and internal and external pluralism, one must agree with Merry's (2007) and Zine's (2008) suggestion for the empowering of community-oriented intellectuals and teachers, Muslims and non-Muslim alike to critically engage with their personal and communal values, traditions and contemporary practices.

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IMPORTANCE OF THE INCLUSION OF TEACHERS' VOICES IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

There is a global surge of policy and research interest in the education of Muslims, particularly of the young. This has led to the rapid increase and qualitative improvement in our understanding of the complex, diverse, and evolving educational, social, and cultural needs, hopes, and challenges of Muslim students, parents, and institutions. Debates about Muslim education pursue a number of goals and agendas, ranging from genuine aspirations about students' identity and social and academic development, to parochial political interests promoted through culture, identity, and power politics. In these debates, it is important that fundamental educational questions—such as the nature of knowledge, purpose of education, teacher's role, and how to best prepare our students for the 21st century's globalizing knowledge society, do not become trivialized and subordinated to the conflated politics of and infatuation with identity, difference, cultural sensitivity, superficiality, and communal cohesion myths. In this article, we have tried to show that when research undermines or ignores the teachers' views and experiences, we come to a different understanding of some of the prevailing critiques to Muslim education in Western societies. If the Muslim community is not threatened by having non-Muslim teachers teach its children, it is therefore imperative that teachers' centrality, their worldviews, pedagogies, and practices be further recognized in education for Muslims. One might argue that most of what is said about schools directly or indirectly relates to teachers' work. However, we should not confuse the voices of parents, students, Muslim organizations, and researchers with the voices of teachers. This article undertook a meticulous and targeted literature search to provide a balanced portrayal of teachers' voices and work in and about Muslim/Islamic education in the West. We provided both the teachers' stories and stories about teachers told by others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Some of the evidence for our counter-critique comes from research that gives prominence to teachers' perspectives; some evidence is from researchers who study the education of Muslim students; and some evidence is from our re-interpretation of reported data on the basis of alternative considerations and other sources (e.g., district documents, journalist reports). We acknowledge the negative aspects of Western schools' work with the Muslim students, and appreciate the positive. We notice that most of the portrayals of Muslim situation in Western schools, whether public or religious, continue to emphasize the negative and the hopeless. We argue that this emphasis is due to four factors:

1) *Concern with parents' and students' satisfaction with curricula*: Under the prevalent ideology of free markets and consumer choice, education has become a commodity to satisfy the tastes of the clients (i.e., parents and communities). Education's priorities have shifted to

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resolving questions of identity, accommodating difference and celebrating diversity, and filling the job market, rather than developing the students' knowledge, critical capacities and serving justice. In such a situation, teachers' transformative roles and critical engagement with the texts, with students' cultures and with religion, are seen as least helpful by market-oriented policy makers.

2) *Uncritical celebration of parents', students', and communities' voices*: Ironically, like that of the Western, conservative, moral majority (Apple, 2001), Muslim educational discourse is dominated by radical, uncritical "multiculturalists" who unstintingly promote Muslim cultures, histories, and religion in an ideological confrontation with Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and neo-conservatism. More reflexivity is needed by researchers about their passions and ideologies. Ironically, many Western critical leftist scholars have found friends in conservative and radical Islamists (see Fatah, 2008; Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2006 for a critique). Uncritical multiculturalists' voices and wishes alone may not be in the Muslim parents' and children's best interests and rights (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005). Indeed, some Muslim parents' and children's voices and needs, even when heard, may actually not be their own but an unconscious and uncritically internalized regurgitation of a discourse by organized and parochially oriented religious groups, clerics, and lobbies. The realization that pluralism is not innocent and could be hijacked for conservative, destructive purposes is emerging among scholars, policy makers, and teachers alike. Therefore, voices, from all walks, should not only be heard and celebrated "but also engaged, reconciled and argued with. It is important to not only attend to the aesthetics of articulating [stakeholders'] voices, but also to the ethics of what these voices articulate" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 62).
3) *Continuing disregard for and distrust of teachers' work (especially in public schools)*: There is a general misunderstanding of the complexity of teachers' work and working conditions, and a disregard of the secular nature of the public schools. Both the disrespect and deprofessionalization of the teachers and the further intensification of their working life, caused by increasing pressures, greater expectations, and decreasing support have undermined their image (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Given intra-Muslim diversity and complexity, Muslim education stakeholders need to understand the tremendous challenges that teachers face in meeting the evolving, and complex social, academic, and religious needs and aspirations of diverse Muslims and non-Muslim religions or communities.
4) *Poor methodological approaches in the research projects*: Much of the research on Muslim students in Western schools has suffered from limitations in data collection and analysis. There are cases where Muslim education researchers' projects are turned down by schools

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and education boards due to "sensitivity."[7] This limits access to richer data and triangulation. Other limitations may include a selective appropriation of data, including teachers' voices, to support the researcher's bias or ideological stance (e.g., promotion of anti-racism or Islamic schools). Studies on Muslim students' education have relied predominantly on interviews. Studies which have used both interview and observation methods may lack critical engagement with their own and the participants' assumptions, biases, and superficiality. In sum, the research on Muslim education needs to further acknowledge its epistemological and methodological limitations, use multiple methods and reflexivity, where the voices of the researchers are examined as critically as those of teachers' and students' (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

On the basis of our earlier observations and these four points, we suggest that teachers' work in and out of classrooms, the conditions of their work, and the foundations of their knowledge become central to any agenda of further research on Muslim education for seven reasons. First, teachers' agency and subjectivity affect curricula, pedagogies and relationships at both conscious and subconscious levels. This is as true of Muslim education as it is of any other education projects. Without engaging the teachers' agency and subjectivity—regardless of their quality—we cannot improve teachers' learning, nor by extension their students' learning. Instead, we should seek to examine both those voices and practices that we *like* and those that we *dislike*, and engage all, openly and fair mindedly. Such a critical approach exposes not just the aesthetics and ethics of these voices and practices, but it also reveals their history, their causes of, and the reasons for their formation. A better and more complex understanding may allow for the sensitive and sustainable transformation of these practices into more inclusive, more equitable, more relevant, and better ones.

Second, more radical Muslim educational research needs to move beyond one-sided, narrow-minded, and ideologically framed approaches, which tend to dismiss unexpected evidence and cherish the data that prove their arguments and hypotheses. For example, the predominant research focus on injustice, insensitivity and discrimination—although undoubtedly important—could lead to the glossing over of the positive and constructive work of the Western schools and teachers in meeting the needs of their multicultural student populations. One-sided presentations are not useful for reform because their implied conclusion seems both unworkable and unjustified. For example, if public schools and their teachers are insensitive, racist, exclusionary, hopeless, and presumably incorrigible, then the logical solution is to close the public schools, fire all the teachers, and replace them with new, "perfect" teachers and schools. Next, if public schools are only bad, and Islamic schools and their teachers are only good,

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this logic suggests that all students should leave public schools and join Islamic schools. The one-sided critics of public schools are not just naïve; they are also promoting obsolete reform propositions based on essentialist, fixed, and monolithic assumptions about the nature of knowledge, human beings (e.g., students), and social structures. A better proposal, suggested by Thiessen (1993) and others, calls for a paradigmatic shift from a *bureaucratic* approach to a *professional* one:

The bureaucratic path views teachers as ineffective public servants who are unable

> . . . to fulfill their obligation as purveyors of policy. They neither satisfactorily enculturate their students in the norms of society, nor provide them with sufficient knowledge and skills for effective participation in life's endeavours. The professional path, by contrast, assumes that some excellence already exists, that many teachers already have the capacity and will to create excellent classrooms and schools, and that the further solutions will come from working closely with more empowered teachers. (Thiessen, 1993, p. 284)

Third, in addition to the necessity of more balanced perspectives among researchers, teachers of Muslim students need to proactively write, speak, and present their positive work and good practices (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1993; Coles, 2004, p. 124). These teachers should use different fora —conferences, workshops, associations, newspapers, journals, and newly emerging arenas such as Internet Web sites, blogs, and online video sharing—to connect with their colleagues across the globe, share their experiences and challenges, and collaboratively develop creative solutions relevant to all their students and to particular groups, including Muslims.

Fourth, research and policy analyses, whenever they identify teachers' faults, should contextualize them; that is, find their reasons, history, time, place, causes, influencing factors, and implications. This contextualization should not deterministically justify the teachers' mistakes by placing the blame elsewhere. Neither should it suggest a relativist model where nobody is wrong and everything is vindicated by context. Critical contextualization leads to better understanding and serves a diagnostic purpose directed to sustainable solutions. In other words, to repair something, both internal and external barriers must be identified. To that end, teachers, Muslim students, their parents, and their communities should see themselves as part of the problem as well as the solution, rather than as victims of conspiracies and external forces (Abou El Fadl, 2002; Fatah, 2008; Ramadan, 2004).

Fifth, the following structural adjustments must be accommodated to better meet the needs of Muslim students:

- Provision of curricular and textbook materials that would help teachers to further their understanding of the complexities of Islam and

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Muslims. These materials should not, however, provide idealized and "imagined" realities and portrayals of Islam and Muslim history, and should not hide or avoid Muslims' social and historical problems. They should present Muslim history and personalities as human with their ups and downs. Critical psychoanalytical and post-structuralist analysis should be brought to expose the socially constructed, evolving, contradictory, and mutable nature of religious and cultural traditions and practices, including Islam. This can show realism and the possibility for change (Arkoun & Lee, 1994). Such resources could provide, as Ramadan (2004) suggests, more defensible and achievable models of learning and living.

- The achievements of multiculturalist, antiracist, and citizenship education in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, spirituality, and culturally sensitive pedagogies could reframe and broaden teachers' pedagogical orientation (Banks, 2006; Dei, 1996; Jackson, 2002; Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Zine, 2004b). Banks (2006, pp. 8–21) spells out five approaches by which teachers can provide authentic instruction to increasingly multicultural classrooms. These include (1) content integration (e.g., teachers use examples from their students' cultural backgrounds to illustrate key concepts and generalizations in their disciplines); (2) the knowledge construction process (teachers use activities to enable students to critically engage with curriculum biases and prejudices and transform them into empowering means); (3) prejudice reduction (e.g., teachers' and curricular interventions to challenge and transform students' biases and attitudes); (4) equity pedagogy (e.g., teachers use approaches that will facilitate their students' academic achievement, ensuring that it is quality instruction rather than race, color, or gender that influences one's academic success); and lastly (5) empowering school culture and structure (e.g., examination of schools' latent and manifest organization and culture to determine the extent to which it fosters or hinders equity).
- The Internet provides access to multitudes of items on any topic on Islam. Daily news, documentaries, movies, and other media add to this pool of resources in the most remote corners of the globe. Given the technological implications of globalization, the perils of neglecting critical, balanced, and independent analysis that would allow students to process this information have never been as potentially alarming as they are today. In this age of the knowledge society, teachers and students must be able to deal not only with simple knowledge increase, but also with the proliferation of multiple perspectives on a wide variety of topics (e.g., critical, conservative, religious, secular, or even more than a single Islamic viewpoint on an issue), in order to turn their potential conflict into constructive dialogue (Barnett, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003).

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Undoubtedly, the above suggests that teachers are provided with time, and financial and moral support to handle the new complexities of their profession in today's knowledge society (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996).

Sixth, given that most statements from Muslim parents, students, and organized groups, within and outside schools, are indirect complaints about teachers, schools must be as proactive as mosques and community centers in reaching these audiences. Muslim parents, mosques, and communities need to be made aware of the teachers' positive work, and that they generally do not differentiate among or discriminate against their students on the basis of religion. Communications between parents and teachers need to be strengthened. Parents need to visit schools, attend their children's classes, talk to the teachers directly, learn about broader and deeper issues of education and engage with non-Muslim parents to allay the misconceptions about non-Muslims and secular society that are sometimes promulgated in Muslim parochial venues. Other factors affecting students' success should also be highlighted, such as family conditions; students' linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds; and teachers' working conditions. Parents need to know that Muslims are only one group among many other religious and ethnic bodies, and that like any other religious, ethnic, or cultural group, Muslims are not homogeneous. While teachers should be encouraged to know more about their students' backgrounds, one must honestly question how much teachers can know, given the increasing demands and shrinking support in the general context of the intensification of their work. Problematic pronouncements from Muslim sources asserting that Islamic schools are the only solution and that public schools lack morality and contradict family and community norms, need to be directly critically engaged with in terms of their purpose, agenda, evidence, logic, truth, and implications for society.

Finally, Muslim education as a concept, whether in public or Islamic schools, needs to be discussed seriously, openly, and fairly. This discussion must provide logical answers and evidence on how that educational concept fares in the face of competing forces, such as the neo-liberalist push for marketization, standardization of content, commodification, efficiency, and teaching to the test. Similarly, there is a need to know how Muslim education can deal with the conflicting demands for parochial morality and indoctrination as well as for citizenship education with its emphasis on critical thinking, individual autonomy, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Comparative and global perspectives should be brought in so as to reveal the particular differences and commonalities between Muslims and non-Muslims so as to shift allegiances from the narrowly religious and parochial to a fundamental global citizenship involved in issues such as social justice, sustainable ecology, and peace (Parekh, 2006).

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NOTES

1. It is important to note that not all Muslims fare equally well. In the United States, for example, 29% of Afghan American, 26% of Iraqi American, and 22% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi American children of immigrant families were living below the poverty line.

2. This paper does not discuss the education experiences of the indigenous black American Muslims, organized around the *Nation of Islam* and Warith Deen Mohamed's community. Suffice to say that this Muslim community's experiences have been very different from those of the immigrant Muslims in terms of academic achievement, race and class aspects (for more, see Jackson, 2005).

3. *Orientalism* in this case refers to a new twist given to the term by Edward Said. In his book, *Orientalism* (1985), he describes orientalism as a tradition, both academic and artistic, of hostile and deprecatory views, and essentialized and prejudiced depictions of the Eastern cultures and people by the Europeans in the 19th century. Said was critical of this scholarly tradition and its neo-colonial disciples. We also acknowledge that Orientalism has many forms. In addition to the above negativities, it also contributed to our understanding of the non-Western people and cultures and, in some cases, had little connection with colonialism (e.g., Turner, 1994).

4. In this article, Muslim education refers to all forms of formal education of Muslim students at primary and secondary school levels.

5. There is an unnoticed irony in the issue of Muslims' call for inclusion of their historical contributions to Western curricula. On the one hand, Muslims complain that their contributions and perspectives are not represented. On the other hand, Muslim scholars unanimously concur that the current Western achievements in all fields of knowledge (e.g., science, theology, arts, music, food) would have not been possible without Muslims' contributions. Questions such as "Is Western knowledge a culmination of humanity's collective contribution across histories and places?", "Could a knowledge based on Islamic contribution be entirely un-Islamic or anti-Islamic?" beg for response.

6. That is, lower track, non-academic stream.

7. In 2007, Niyozov obtained a Social Science and Humanities Research (SSHRC) grant from the Canadian government for his research on "Teachers' perceptions on the education of Muslim students in public, Islamic, and Catholic schools in Toronto." The preliminary analysis provides many examples of the positive work these teachers do to help their students succeed academically and socially. Most of the public school teachers in the study mentioned that Muslim students are among their best students and that they have wonderful professional relationships with them, including those who wear hijab or abaya.

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