



BRIDGING CULTURES

Issues & Strategies *A Guide for Schools*



MIDDLE EAST CENTER
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies

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A Guide for Schools

Acknowledgements

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About the Middle East Center

The Middle East Center is a comprehensive National Resource Center (NRC) funded by the United States Department of Education. It is the oldest, continuously funded National Resource Center at the University of Washington. The Center currently has sixty affiliated faculty drawn from departments and programs across the UW campus and from area colleges. As a comprehensive NRC, the Center dispenses significant funds to support undergraduate and graduate-level foreign language training in modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. The Center also serves as the conduit for partnerships beyond the University that enhance and strengthen Americans' understanding of the Middle East.

For more information about the Middle East Center or Bridging Cultures, contact mecuw@uw.edu or visit <https://jsis.washington.edu/mideast/>



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The contents of this publication were developed under grant P015A140160 from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
About Bridging Cultures	
Understanding Islam	
BEING AN ALLY	5
Resisting Islamophobia & Discrimination	
Building Safe Spaces	
Supporting Refugees & Immigrants	
Tolerance & Cultural Competence	
Encountering Racism: What to Do?	
RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS	20
Prayer	
Fasting	
Gender & Hijab	
PE & Swimming	
Arts in the Curriculum	
Sex Education	
Holidays	
PARENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	26
Outreach & Engagement	
INCLUDING MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTIONS IN CURRICULUM	28
RELIGION IN THE CLASSROOM	31
REFERENCES	32

INTRODUCTION

About Bridging Cultures

How can we help students from Muslim-majority countries succeed in the American educational system? What challenges do these students face? What are some strategies for successful interaction with students and their parents?

These topics, along with many others, are addressed in the Bridging Cultures presentations and workshops designed by the Middle East Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington and facilitated by Middle East Specialist David Fenner. These workshops can be specially tailored to the needs of particular school districts and provide a basic overview of Islam and Muslim cultures in addition to helping teachers understand how to build bridges between themselves, their students, and communities.

In this guide, real questions asked by participants in these workshops (highlighted in the gold boxes) are addressed with suggested strategies on how to interact with students from Muslim-majority countries in Western classrooms.

The strategies, which come in the form of excerpted quotes from various resource guides and articles, deal with topics ranging from combating racism and Islamophobia to making religious accommodations to meet students' needs.

Overall, the research suggests building **tolerance and cultural competence** to interact successfully with Muslim students, establish ally-ship, and build safe spaces. The literature also suggests **incorporating Muslim perspectives into curriculum** to portray Muslim and Arab cultures accurately. When it comes to making religious accommodations, the consistent advice is to **engage in negotiation** with students, parents, and community members to find the best arrangement.

Understanding Islam

By David Fenner, Affiliate Lecturer, Middle East Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington

What Is Islam?

This is the title of the best book on Islam to be published in decades (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015). It was written by Harvard University's Shahab Ahmed who was perhaps the world's most insightful modern scholar of Islam, the faith of nearly one quarter of the world's population. And "beginning to answer" the relatively straightforward question in the title took him 624 pages. For the purposes of this Guide, we'll be far less comprehensive, but hopefully just as faithful to the subject matter.

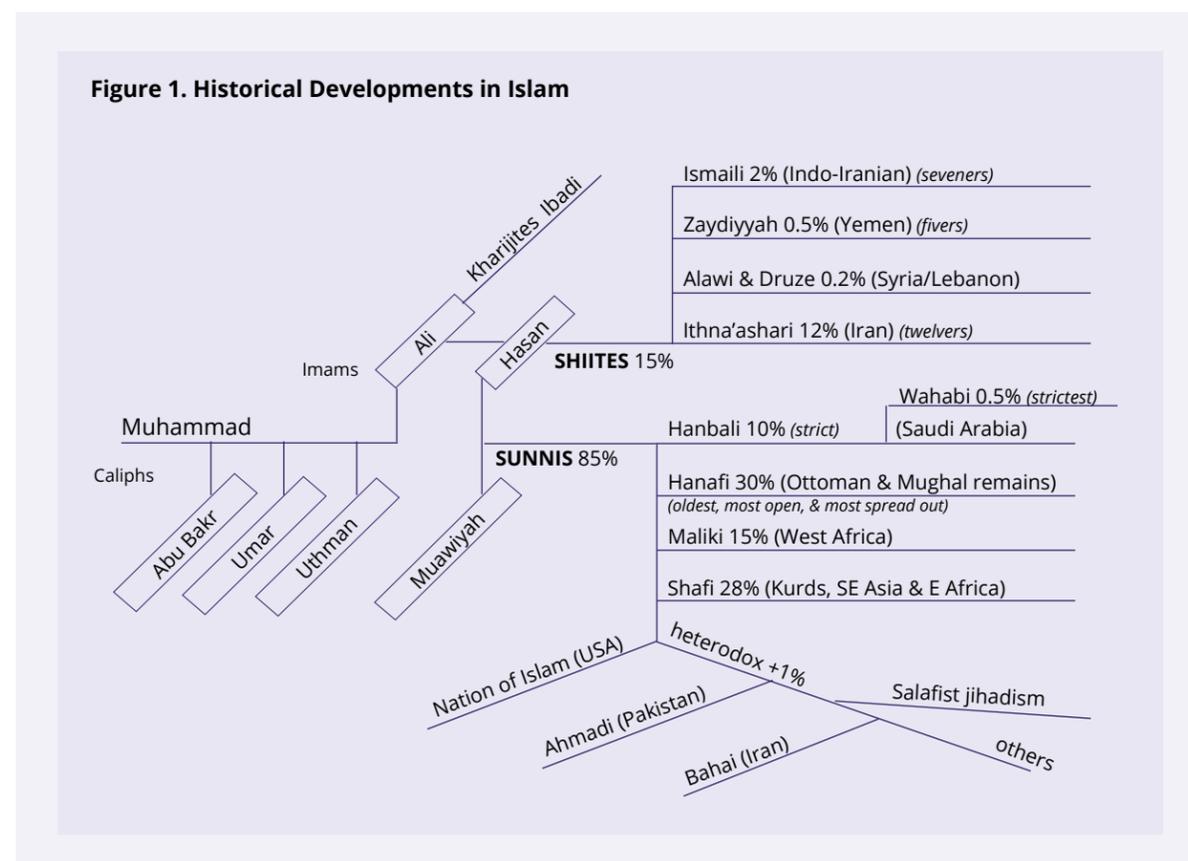
Joining Judaism and Christianity, Islam is one of the world's three great Abrahamic religions. Like these other faiths, it is richly diverse in interpretation, custom, geography and culture. But at its most fundamental level, Islam can be defined in this way:

Submission to the will of God (Allah), the way of life embodied by all the prophets, given its final form in the guidance brought by the prophet Mohammed.

History and Development of Islam

Muslims believe that beginning in the year 610 of the Common Era (CE), a caravan merchant in Mecca named Mohammed began to receive revelations from God (Allah), delivered by the Angel Gabriel (Jibreel). These poetic revelations continued for more than 20 years, and were eventually gathered together in written form, comprising what we know today as the Koran (Qur'an).

The transmissions revealed to Mohammed the Oneness of God (the same monotheistic God of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus) and also provided a blueprint for a new kind of society, one founded on justice, compassion, equality and respect, rather than on class, wealth, tribal allegiance or race. As one might imagine, this radical vision did not go down well with the polytheistic ruling tribes of Mecca.



The Five Pillars of Islam

In the absence of a Pope, a hierarchical clergy, or an “infallible” earthly authority, there are five basic components of the faith that determine who is a Muslim (a follower of Islam). Four of the five “pillars” are aspirational (to be completed if one is able), and one is obligatory. The pillar at the very center is a public declaration of your faith that:

There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Messenger

According to the Hadith (the sayings and way of life of the Prophet Mohammed), the other pillars are:

- Giving alms (charity) to the poor
- Praying five times a day
- Fasting between sunrise and sunset during the month of Ramadan
- Visiting Mecca during the month of the Hajj (pilgrimage)

Sunnis and Shiites (Shi'a)

By the time of Mohammed's death in 632 CE, the revelations had provided a roadmap for building a new kind of society, but did not provide a clear idea of succession. Who would lead the fledgling Muslim community after the Prophet was gone?

In the decades-long power struggle that ensued, one group believed that any righteous man in the community could be selected by consensus as the Caliph (literally, the Successor) to Mohammed. These became known as Sunni Muslims. Another smaller group believed that the leader (Imam) could only come from the Prophet's bloodline through his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. These became “Shi'at Ali”, the “Party of Ali” or, simply, Shiites.

Today, approximately 85% of all Muslims consider themselves Sunni, and 15% Shiite. (See Figure 1: Historical Developments in Islam.)

Holidays and Customs

The Islamic Calendar is structured around 12 lunar months, and so the dates of the holidays mentioned below change by about 11 days each year, moving the celebrations forward from one year to the next in the Gregorian calendar that we use in our schools.

The two major holidays observed by all Muslims are Eid al-Fitr (Celebration of Breaking the Fast) and Eid al-Adha (Celebration of the Sacrifice). The first occurs at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan; and the second (often called the “Big Eid”) takes place on the tenth day of the month of the Hajj. These two (often multi-day) celebrations are separated each year by about six weeks. Shi'a Muslims also observe Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram. This is the date they observe and mourn the death of the Prophet's grandson Hussein at the Battle of Karbala in the year 680 CE.

The customs of Muslims around the world vary with each and every culture where Islam is practiced. Remember that the most apt description of Islam around the world is “diverse”!



Photo credits: AMISON Public Information/Flickr | herman yahaya/Flickr | University of Huddersfield

Dress and Gender

In the Qur'an, both men and women are given very little guidance on clothing beyond the general instruction to "dress modestly." Perhaps the best way to illustrate how several different cultures interpret this guidance is with photographs of the three devout Muslim women pictured above.

Individual choice, family input, cultural appropriateness and, of course, style, all go into the decisions Muslim women and girls make about what they wear. Muslim men and boys usually follow suit, rarely wearing even sportswear that exposes much skin.

Navigating gender issues can be one of the greatest challenges facing both native-born and immigrant Muslim students in America. Often they come from traditional families and cultures, where ever-evolving 21st Century American norms about dating, homosexuality, and the role of women may not be accepted or ever broached as something to discuss. As with all children and their parents, these issues can cause real friction, and once you add culture, tradition and religion to the mix, situations can easily escalate into real tension.

There are no simple solutions to this set of issues, but exploring all of the strategies outlined in this guide will give educators more information and insight into how to maximize Muslim student and family success in our schools and communities.

- David Fenner

BEING AN ALLY

How can I help make my Muslim students feel welcome in my classroom & establish myself as a safe space/ally during the first week of school?

What are some of the best strategies I can use to make Muslim students feel included? What can we do in the classroom to embrace differences without singling anyone out?

The Situation

"Muslim youth often find themselves in a defensive position and find themselves having to apologize for the actions of terrorists acting in the name of their faith."¹

Strategies

Teachers should "encourage students to learn how to be an ally when faced with bias or bullying."² Students must be "treated as equals under the law and by the same social standards as others — not to be viewed as suspect or racially or religiously profiled."³

Educators should offer:

- "Validation of [students'] feelings of fear, confusion and betrayal.
- Respect for their choices of dress, diet, social, religious and/or moral values.
- Solidarity when fear and hatred is being directed towards them because of their religion, the colour of their skin or their culture.
- Services they can access, without fear of stigmatization, from counselors in school to whom they can turn for support during periods of grief and anguish owing to war in their countries of origin [or hate crimes targeting Muslims domestically].
- Safe spaces where they can express who they are in a supportive atmosphere, and where they can find quiet spaces to pray and speak frankly about their fears and questions.
- Assurance of their civil and human rights."⁴

"Respect diversity within your school body and facilitate conversations and interaction between students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, value systems and faiths."⁵

1 *Helping Students Deal with Trauma Related to Geopolitical Violence & Islamophobia: A Guide for Educators* (Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA) & National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), 2016).

2 Jinnie Spiegler, "Protecting Our Muslim Youth from Bullying: The Role of the Educator" Stop Bullying Blog, February 9, 2016.

3 *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 3.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. 14.

Resisting Islamophobia and Discrimination

As teachers, how do we deal with issues of Islamophobia and discrimination that arise both inside and outside of the classroom— whether it comes from administrators, parents, or other students?

The Situation

“The Berkley Institute on Racism Studies lists five prevailing beliefs as elements of Islamophobia. They report that Islam is often seen as:

- Monolithic and unable [to] adapt to new realities;
- Not sharing common values with other major faiths;
- A religion inferior to the West; is archaic, barbaric, and irrational;
- A religion of violence, which supports terrorism; and
- A violent political ideology.”⁶

Strategies

The following four strategies are excerpted from Jessica Winegar’s piece published in the Huffington Post, “4 Ways to Make Schools Safer for Muslim Students”:

1. All schools need to recognize that anti-Muslim bias is a form of racism, and the tools that schools have developed to address other forms of racism (e.g., anti-black, anti-Latino, anti-Asian, anti-Jewish, and anti-Native American) could be adapted to address this newer ugly phenomenon.
2. School administrators should include lessons on what constitutes Islamophobia, and strategies to confront, it as part of their civil rights and sensitivity training for teachers and faculty. Teachers should also receive training and support dedicated to fighting anti-Muslim bullying. School assemblies and other events to address racism or bullying could, where appropriate, include mention of anti-Muslim prejudice.
3. Teachers should also make sure that classroom material on Islam and Muslims is free of bias. When discussing sensitive topics like 9/11 or ISIS, they should not make Muslim students feel singled out or made to defend their religion.
4. And school districts should develop appropriate responses to support responsible teachers and faculty who oppose anti-Muslim hatred and/or teach about Islam in a sensitive and sensible fashion.”⁷

“School administrators should be especially alert to school policies and practices that may have discriminatory effects. These can include dress codes, access to learning about one’s own religion, lunch menus or holiday schedules.”⁸

⁶ Ibid, 5

⁷ Jessica Winegar, “4 Ways to Make Schools Safer for Muslim Students,” *The Huffington Post Blog*, January 15, 2016.

⁸ *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing*



Photo credit: Pixabay

“School policies and practices should be set up, in partnership with communities and parents, to prevent and counter discrimination against Muslim students.”⁹

OSCE advocates **five different ways to counter discrimination in the classroom** by incorporating these approaches into the curriculum:

1. A Rights-Based Approach: Recommends teaching “Some basic human rights principles relevant to preventing intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.” Requires that “families and communities be consulted and involved.”
2. A Participatory Approach: Recommends the “involvement of students in school governance activities, for example the development of codes of conduct.”
3. Opening Space for Discussion: Recommends providing “opportunities for discussion about stereotypes and portrayals of Muslims,” while exercising caution when “addressing stereotypes that have not been raised by the students.”
4. Ongoing Assessment of the Situation: Recommends that “schools should monitor, in co-operation with all educational stakeholders, manifestations of intolerance against any group on an ongoing basis, in order to take preventive and protective action as needed and to avoid any escalation...”
5. Teaching about Religions and Cultures: Recommends teaching about religions—including Islam—to “contribute to understanding and to reducing intolerance and discrimination.”¹⁰

Islamophobia through Education, (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2011), 19.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 23-30.

“Teach students about stereotypes, bias, and discrimination. This should happen proactively before any incidents—anti-Muslim or otherwise—occur so that young people understand the language of bias and the distinction between different concepts. Use current events—many of which are ripe with examples of bias and injustice, to help students understand real-world incidents and discuss what actions they could take to make a difference. Develop students’ ability to challenge biased language, especially jokes and slurs.”¹¹

“Contrary to the popular notion that ‘standing up’ is the only way to be an ally, there are several less threatening and still effective ways to be an ally including: not participating, supporting the student being bullied, getting to know people instead of judging, and more. In addition, share inspiring examples like *Walk a Mile in Her Hijab*, whose goal is to spread awareness about Muslim cultural traditions and to combat anti-Muslim bias.”¹²

“To counteract politically motivated hostility toward Arabs and Muslims, it is essential that educators make clear to students that the 9/11 attacks were the act of a fringe group that emerged from one sectarian version of Islam.”¹³

“It is important for students to understand that Arab immigration is not a recent occurrence and that once in America, Arabs have worked to positively contribute to this nation and to global needs.”¹⁴

“Presenting a human face overcomes stereotypes, and establishes a climate of welcoming and openness. It reduces the dissonance between the image of Arabs and Muslims that they receive in the home and the image that may be presented in the classroom.”¹⁵

To this end, teachers could show humanizing images of Arabs and Muslims in film. For example, *Reel Bad Arabs* is an excellent documentary that helps students realize the negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream film.¹⁶

Teachers can also introduce students to other news media sources, such as Al-Jazeera English and the BBC. They can then compare the language used in different articles to describe the same event across media platforms, e.g. the “lone wolf” versus “terrorist” descriptor in mass shootings.

“...[I]ssues of being marginalized due to the differences in schools systems and educational programs could be addressed through the following ways: provide social services to facilitate children’s adjustment, provide language instruction to students and their parents, and combat discrimination.”¹⁷ Teachers can not only consult with families, but can also ask them to visit classes and present something about their cultural/religious background, even up through high school.

11 Spiegler, “[Protecting Our Muslim Youth from Bullying](#)”.

12 Ibid.

13 Marvin Wingfield, “[Arab Americans: Into the Multicultural Mainstream](#),” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39.3 (2006).

14 Monica Eraqi, “[Arab-American and Muslim-American Contributions: Resources for Secondary Social Studies Teachers](#),” *Multicultural Perspectives* 17.2 (2015).

15 Wingfield, “[Arab Americans](#).”

16 Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, Documentary, directed by Jeremy Earp (2007, Media Education Foundation,) Film.

17 Sham'ah Md-Yunus, “[Muslim Immigrant Children in the United States: Practical Suggestions for Teachers](#),” *Child Research Net*, January 16, 2015.

Building Safe Spaces

What are some of the best strategies to make my Muslim students feel included? How do I create a comfortable environment for students to discuss cultural differences, without making anyone feel singled out?

The Situation

“It is critical that schools provide safe space for youth dealing with the impact of hate . . . to offer affected youth a healthy outlet for their pain and resentment . . . to resist internalizing hateful messaging about their faith and culture.”¹⁸

Strategies

“Provide space for Muslim students to speak to their peers about their faith and about their feelings on world events that impact them. For your entire student body, bring-in speakers who can help them understand the challenges that refugees will face and how racism impacts their Muslim peers.”¹⁹

Muslim students should be made to feel that they are “...[B]eing valued and respected rather than ‘spotlighted’; for example, being regarded as an expert on everything to do with Islam . . . being stereotyped; for example, Muslim males regarded as potential terrorists, or Muslim females regarded as oppressed.”²⁰

“Within both Muslim-American and Arab-American studies, students can develop anti-racism campaigns, similar to anti-bullying campaigns that aim to disprove stereotypes and misconceptions about these groups.”²¹

“Students could also write letters to their local newspapers or political representatives, sharing their anti-racism campaigns and advocating religious and ethnic tolerance of others.”²²

“Organize anti-racism and human rights days at your schools to raise awareness, empathy and understanding among your students in general.”²³

Teachers can also arrange for all students to explore the moral limits of free speech in an assembly or smaller discussion groups.

“...[W]hile “name-calling” and other disparaging comments may be legally protected forms of free speech, this does not mean they are appropriate or acceptable in a school classroom.”²⁴

18 *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 1.

19 Ibid., 14.

20 *Inclusive Practice in Relation to Students of Diverse Religious Backgrounds, with Special Reference to Muslim Students: Suggested Strategies for Academic Staff* (University of Sydney, 2007), 2.

21 Eraqi, “[Arab-American and Muslim-American Contributions](#)”.

22 Ibid.

23 *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 14.

24 *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, 21.



Photo credit: US Department of State/Office of Overseas Schools

The University of Sydney recommends the following strategies “to prevent discrimination and encourage inclusive attitudes towards students from diverse cultural backgrounds (with particular reference to students of Muslim background).”²⁵

- “Introduce yourself in the first class and disclose some personal details, including aspects of your cultural background that you are willing to share.
- [Periodically throughout the year,] get students to introduce themselves to another student not already known to them, find out something about that student’s background that they are willing to share, and then get them to introduce that person to the class.
- If possible, learn students’ names (and how to pronounce them) and try to make sure students do the same.
- Negotiate ‘ground rules’ with students as early in the course as possible, regarding appropriate classroom behaviors such as courtesy, and respect for different opinions. Link these attributes to the University’s core values and/or generic attributes.
- Give students a copy of the ‘ground rules’ and/or refer to them again if needed. Be ready to re-negotiate later.
- Be aware of your own potential for bias, and help your students to become aware of theirs. Support students in reflecting on these issues.
- Model inclusive behavior towards minority students, neither ‘spotlighting’ them in ways that may be unwelcome, nor overlooking them when they wish to make a contribution.
- Find out the appropriate ways to refer to certain groups; for example, people who adhere to Islam are ‘Muslim’, not ‘Muhammadan’ or ‘Islamic’; and some Indigenous peoples prefer to be referred to as ‘nation’, ‘people’ or ‘community’ rather than ‘tribe’ ...
- Set up a cross-cultural learning environment where students are initially allowed to self-select into groups where they are comfortable, often with peers of similar backgrounds. Inform students that later they will be placed in groups selected by the teacher. Ensure that those groups all contain students of diverse backgrounds.

²⁵ *Inclusive Practice in Relation to Students.*

- Be flexible in encouraging students to do assignments on topics of personal interest to them, including aspects of their religion or culture, and make sure all contributions are equally valued.
- Encourage students to tell you about their cultural and religious sensitivities in relation to classroom or lab activities; for example, Muslim students are often uncomfortable in close one-to-one interactions with a student of the opposite sex; or with exposure to nudity (e.g. in a drawing class).
- In consultations with students of the opposite sex, always leave the door open, and allow students to be accompanied by another student if they prefer.
- Avoid jokes which target any specific group, religion or culture, and actively discourage such references on the part of students.
- Bring in guest speakers from a range of backgrounds to address topics on which you may not have expertise, but remember to relate such content to course assessment.
- Be flexible when students request time off from class, or extensions on assignment deadlines, in order to fulfil spiritual and/or community obligations such as prayer; breaking the fast in Ramadan; attending religious feasts; attending funerals.
- Take students on field trips to places like mosques and synagogues, or to restaurants serving food from diverse cultures. Set research tasks associated with such excursions.
- Use role play where students research and then act out roles dissimilar to their own cultural backgrounds. Get them to reflect on this experience.
- Select course material from a range of cultures, societies and religions . . .
- Ensure that any cross-cultural learning experiences and opportunities are fully integrated into course learning outcomes, curriculum and assessment (not just an ‘add-on’), and relate them to policies on generic attributes such as the qualities of global citizens.”²⁶

“As a solution for immigrant children around the world, Adams and Kirova (2006) suggested some social support strategies such as welcoming children and making their classrooms like home by providing emotional support and a caring attitude such as smiling, projecting an assuring attitude, and staying near the newcomer so the teacher’s proximity can be reassuring. Using a ‘buddy system,’ putting the child in a small group of students for class work, and avoiding giving any one child extensive responsibility for the newcomer are also helpful.”²⁷

“According to Ladson-Billings, CRP (culturally relevant pedagogy) stresses that teachers need to be knowledgeable and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to create an effective teaching style in the classroom... Teachers need to know more about their students’ lives, such as students’ immigration history, family makeup, and favorite activities, to be able to teach CRP in a meaningful engaging way. However, teachers should be careful to avoid generic information about a specific culture that might lead to negative stereotypes.”²⁸ Teachers should learn about and try to avoid microaggressions as well.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁷ Md-Yunus, “[Muslim Immigrant Children in the United States](#),” 7.

²⁸ Hassan J. Alnawar, “[Raising Teachers’ Cultural Knowledge of Middle Eastern Students in The Classroom](#)” (Thesis, California State University, 2015), 19.

Supporting Immigrant Students

What type of support can teachers provide to immigrant students and their families?

The Situation

How should teachers and administrators support immigrant youth and families in their schools and communities?

“Immigrant children and families frequently struggle in their new communities. Some may be dealing with past traumas from persecution, conflicts, or natural disasters in their home countries... Others may be undocumented families or parents who fear exportation, a significant stressor that may keep them from finding higher-paying jobs or receiving health care, or prevent their children from seeking higher education.”²⁹

Strategies

In a blog entitled “10 Ways to Support Students Facing Immigration Crises,” Casavantes-Bradford et al. give the following recommendations:

- “Be aware of the wide range of people affected by proposed changes to immigration policy.
- Educate yourself about the laws and policies that impact undocumented students’ educational access.
- Signal to students that you are supportive. Many colleges and universities offer ally training and provide those that complete it with a sticker to exhibit in their office; do this if the opportunity is available to you. If not, you can signal that you are supportive by displaying flyers about immigration-related events or hanging immigration-related artwork. In your course syllabi, explain how you will accommodate immigration-related emergencies in terms of attendance, late work, extensions and incompletes.
- (Re) consider how you discuss immigration-related issues and the current political climate in your classroom. Advise students in advance before initiating classroom discussions of immigration issues, especially if that is not on the agenda from the syllabus. Avoid spotlighting individual students according to their citizenship status or immigrant background during class discussion. (For example: “Kim, as an immigrant, can you share how you feel about Trump’s proposal to deport three million criminal aliens?”)
- Maintain student confidentiality and privacy.
- Use appropriate terminology when discussing immigration issues.
- Provide resources that will help mediate the financial instability that many students will also be facing.
- Offer career and graduate preparation opportunities.
- Identify, improve and refer students to campus and community resources.
- Identify and raise awareness about your campus’s policies regarding undocumented students.”³⁰

²⁹ *Strategies for Engaging Immigrant and Refugee Families*, (Education Development Center, 2011).

³⁰ Anita Casavantes-Bradford, Laura E. Enriquez, and Susan Bibler-Coutin, “10 Ways to Support Students Facing Immigration Crises,” *Inside Higher Ed*. January 31, 2017.

“Parent Support Groups: Schools should promote the formation of parent support groups for those families with limited English skills to facilitate communication between parents, teachers, and students, and ensure all parents understand the requirements for their children to enter college.”³¹

“Bilingualism: Federal, State, and local education agencies should encourage bilingualism for all students—enabling children of immigrants to maintain ties with their heritage, and enabling children of U.S.- born families to be better prepared for life and work in a global society.”³²

“Children of the Undocumented: Federal, state, and local agencies should explore ways to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the barriers to access to critical supports and resources for children of parents who are undocumented.”³³

The Education Development Center provides the following extensive list with recommendations how to support immigrant and refugee youth in schools and communities below.

“Strengthen Relationships Between Families, the School, and the Community

- Personal relationships make a huge difference. Work to build trust among the families, schools, and community.
- Identify and build on strengths in the immigrant and refugee community.
- Build trust by helping families address needs that are not directly related to education (e.g., access to health care, clothing, neighborhood safety).
- Engage diverse and respected community leaders and cultural brokers to help bridge cultural, language, and generational differences.
- Reach out to families through calls and visits to homes and neighborhoods.
- Strengthen families by providing parent support groups. Acknowledge that many of the challenges that immigrant and refugee families face are due to the immigration process, poverty, and limited educational opportunities, not because of their parenting skills.
- Make the school a de facto community center where families feel welcome and can see that their children’s well-being is being nurtured.
- Invite immigrant and refugee parents and children to participate in Parent and Student Advisory Boards.
- Provide a variety of learning opportunities (e.g., workshops).³⁴

Schools can also offer other opportunities such as cultural fairs, assemblies open to parents, and platforms for parents to share their stories in classrooms. These would all offer opportunities to strengthen connections between students, their families, and the school community.

“Empower Immigrant Youth and Families

- Increase opportunities for participation and empowerment to develop youth and community leadership.
- Offer family literacy programs to enable parents to help children with homework and get involved with school PTAs and other parent groups.

³¹ Margie K. Shields and Richard E. Behrman, “Children of Immigrant Families: Analysis and Recommendations,” *The Future of Children* 14.2 (2004): 13.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Strategies for Engaging Immigrant and Refugee Families*, 11-13.

- Develop opportunities for students and parents to interact and learn from each other.
- Provide opportunities for immigrant and refugee families to tell their stories. Ensure that school staff and the community hear these stories in immigrants' own words.
- Use collaborative community media making (e.g., radionovelas and telenovelas) to address health issues important to the community. Teaching immigrants how to use media tools to tell their community stories can be empowering.

Support Language Differences

- Hire bilingual staff and outreach advocates.
- Offer programs in families' home languages and provide translation and interpreter services. Coordinate with the English Language Department in the school district.
- Use evidence-based programs that are multi-lingual and accessible for a variety of literacy levels.
- Don't rely on family interpreters for mental health services. Provide unbiased professional interpreters.
- Recognize that it often takes five to seven years for students to learn how to read and write in another language (including how to answer multiple-choice questions that make up standardized tests).

Respect Diversity of Needs

- Don't assume all immigrants face similar challenges, even those from the same culture. Assess families' different paths to immigration and identify specific related needs.
- Recognize developmental differences. Don't assume that strategies that work for children who come to the United States at elementary school age will work for students who emigrate during their middle or high school years.
- If transportation is an issue, bring services to the neighborhoods where immigrant families live.
- Provide food and free childcare at school/community events so families can bring their children.

Focus on Student Success

- A common denominator for immigrants is a desire for their children to be successful. Articulate how services and programs can reduce barriers to students' success and help them be successful.
- Address mental health issues that are a result of war, dislocation, acculturation, and fear of deportation, but to avoid stigma, don't use the labels "mental health" or "mental illness."
- Understand and respect cultural values regarding health and mental health issues. Address mental health issues as barriers to student success.
- Identify specific ways to help youth (e.g., academic problems with school, truancy).
- Conduct in-depth assessments of immigrant students' academic skills. Don't assume because they have limited or no English, they won't do well in school.
- Provide immigrant children with support to complete homework [such as tutors for each subject, or a buddy in class to explain directions slowly and clearly].
- Provide mentors for immigrant children. A mentoring relationship with an adult can help children to sustain hope and engagement in school."³⁵

35 Ibid.



Photo credit: US Department of Education/Flickr

Support for Refugees

Are there ways I could further support students who are refugees and faced extraordinary events to just get here?

How do refugees feel about being here, and how willing are they to adapt to our culture?

The Situation

According to the Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA), Syrian refugee students could be experiencing grief, mistrust, dependency, obsessions, flashbacks, betrayal, and stress or anxiety.

Strategies

Teachers and counsellors should attempt "assessment, assistance, and support of students dealing with grief, fear and confusion as a result of Islamophobia and geopolitical issues."³⁶

"Acknowledge that Muslim refugee students... [may be] experiencing trauma and some very intense feelings of marginalization, isolation and fear for their future."³⁷

According to the ISSA, students who have experienced trauma may try to "run-out or act aggressively towards fellow students when a traumatic memory is triggered. Some may withdraw and become non-communicative . . . Anxious children may be fidgety and have trouble focusing. They may also experience anxiety attacks or panic attacks brought on by triggers or feelings of inadequacy of not being on par with peers due to language barriers and different cultures from their own."³⁸

The ISSA goes on to say the following: "Care should be taken not to label such behavior, but provide safe spaces to talk and examine what is triggering the negative action. Talking to a family may offer some insight. Having students write stories about their country of origin, their family and their life before... may be a helpful way of understanding their experience and feelings... Understanding, patience, and positive encouragement and offers of help can ease anxiety of afflicted students.

36 *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 1.

37 Ibid. 14.

38 Ibid. 11-12.

"Fellow pupils can play a healing role and be a comfort by offering a hand of friendship and companionship as they navigate their way through the school environment and expectations."³⁹

See above section on Supporting Immigrant Students for more suggested strategies in providing services for students with refugee experiences.

Tolerance & Cultural Competence

Why is it important to show cultural sensitivity towards students from Muslim-majority countries? Why can't they just adopt our American culture?

How do I form relationships with my Muslim students and show them that I am interested and engaged in learning about Islam, despite our cultural differences?

The Situation

Tolerance is an "an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others."⁴⁰

"Cultural Competency is the acceptance and respect for difference, a continuous self-assessment regarding culture, an attention to the dynamics of difference, the ongoing development of cultural knowledge, and the resources and flexibility within service models to meet the needs of minority populations. Cultural competence is not an endpoint but a continuous process of assessing people's needs and incorporating what is learned into the provision of services."⁴¹

Strategies

"Build Cultural Competence—Understand why cultural competence is important. In mental health care, key elements of therapeutic success depend on rapport, and upon the clinician's understanding of the patient's cultural identity, social supports, self-esteem, and reticence about treatment due to societal stigma."⁴²

"Teachers who wish to include their Muslim students in the learning interaction begin by reflecting upon their own perceptions and beliefs about Islam and Muslims. They acknowledge any stereotypes and prejudice as negative factors and consider the identity of their Muslim students in a positive manner."⁴³

"Inform yourself and others about the backgrounds of your immigrant and refugee children. Have a database of information on historical events that have impacted communities that your students may hail from. Keep informed on current geopolitical issues from various sources for a balanced world view."⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, 18.

⁴¹ *Children of immigrants and refugees: What the research tells us*, (George Washington University: The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, n.d.), 4.

⁴² *Children of immigrants and refugees*, 3.

⁴³ Lena Boustani Darwich, "CHAPTER ELEVEN: Responsive Teaching: Our Muslim Students' Learning Expectations," *Counterpoints* 371 (2010).

⁴⁴ *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 14.

"Educators should not be satisfied with a colorblind ignorance of Arab Americans and Muslims and or a grudging tolerance. Instead they should come to a genuine acceptance of and respect for these communities, and finally to both affirmation and a critique growing out of solidarity."⁴⁵

"Promoting diversity and countering intolerance and discrimination is a challenging and multi-faceted undertaking. Teachers and educators need to be aware of the potential pitfalls that can derail or complicate efforts to address prejudices in a school setting. Some of the issues to keep constantly in mind are:

- The need to communicate effectively and regularly with parents, in order to prevent any negative reaction to policies or activities;
- The importance of exercising care when taking new types of action, of being patient, and of remembering that change takes time;
- The danger of singling out one identifier – Muslim – rather than recognizing intolerance and discrimination as a very complex set of issues;
- The value of looking at the larger picture in regard to exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, recognizing that, while intolerance against Muslims is a problem, it is part of a larger web of problems, including intolerance or discrimination on the basis of "race", gender, disability or other factors;
- The benefits of a holistic approach that includes the broader community beyond the school. Some of the suggestions presented in these Guidelines can be most effectively implemented in parallel with supportive national or regional educational policies. In addition, initiatives by individual teachers or schools often work best when they enjoy the active support of a school community;
- Teachers' professional development is essential to building core teaching competences for tackling intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and for addressing other diversity issues in the classroom. This requires pre-service and in-service training of teachers, which will better equip them to address sensitive issues concerning mutual understanding and respect for diversity; and
- Teachers may also need to have practical resources and materials to use in classrooms to counter anti-Muslim stereotypes and prejudices. Beyond any local resources that may be available, many international organizations also maintain websites where information is accessible."⁴⁶

Confronting Racism: What to Do?

What can and should teachers do when they encounter incidents or attitudes of racism toward their Muslim students?

The Situation

"Discrimination and intolerance have a serious impact on individuals and on their communities. Students who are discriminated against can develop a sense of isolation, fears, negative feelings and other reactions. Discrimination and intolerance in schools may have a particularly negative impact on individuals, since school is supposed to be a safe place where students have the opportunity to develop their skills, capacities and personalities."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Wingfield, "Arab Americans."

⁴⁶ *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, 45-46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

Strategies

“Respond in a timely manner to the needs of your Muslim students when/if they are confronted by Islamophobia, world events or news media treatment of evolving events that affect them.”⁴⁸

“What should be done when a student or a teacher is witness to, or victim of, anti-Muslim discrimination or intolerance?” According to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “The first step is to take the report of the victim seriously.”⁴⁹ They then recommend the following steps:

“React immediately

- If needed, provide immediate assistance, including medical treatment;
- Ask for the support of school psychologists and social workers;
- Interview students and teachers immediately, as the sooner they are interviewed, the clearer their memories about the details of the incident will be; and
- Do not assume that the problem will go away by itself. Some might continue to behave the same way or might increase the level of violence if they are not identified and confronted.

Explain and refer

- Explain to victims or witnesses what you can do and what you cannot do;
- Ask victims or witnesses if they want to stay anonymous, and explain that all or some of their personal details will have to be disclosed if there is to be an official complaint; and
- Refer to the relevant school policy (such as anti-bullying or anti-racism regulations) and the sanctions or consequences for such incidents.

Listen

- Provide a safe space where victims or witnesses will feel confident they will not be overheard. Listen carefully to the student. Remember, describing an incident is often difficult and upsetting.

Validate

- Value the information received. One of the biggest fears of victims is that they will not be believed. The response from the first person they talk to is important in determining if they will continue seeking the assistance they need.

Take notes

- Be sure to note whether the person reporting is a victim, an eyewitness, or is reporting something he or she has heard. The school may develop a standard template for reports; and
- It can be important to record direct quotations from the victims or the witnesses. These may include particular descriptive phrases used by the interviewee to describe the incident or his or her feelings.



Photo credit: US Embassy Tel Aviv/Flickr

Further actions

- Depending on the gravity of the incident, the teacher and/or the school administration have several possible avenues of action:
- Involve the parents of the students – both the perpetrator and the victim;
- Suggest remedies, including disciplinary penalties;
- Report to the police, if appropriate; and
- Undertake discussions in the classroom or in the school about the incident. However, reference to a specific victim or perpetrator should not be made without his or her authorization.⁵⁰

“Discrimination incidents should be turned into learning experiences. If the school does not go into a defensive state of denial, negative experiences can become occasions for strengthening relationships between groups. Schools can encourage students to form antidiscrimination or diversity committees.”⁵¹

“Prejudice is a two-way street and teachers need to acknowledge this clearly in any classroom discussion....When prejudice arises in class discussion, teachers can use it constructively in their teaching. Students should be encouraged to evaluate different perspectives and to challenge them when necessary.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

⁵¹ Wingfield, “Arab Americans.”

⁵² Eeqbal Hassim and Jennet Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another: Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools*, (National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, 2010), 57.

⁴⁸ *Helping Students Deal with Trauma*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, 30.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

Prayer

If parents ask the school if their kid can pray during school hours, how do we respond? Does the separation of religion & school apply?

The Situation

*"Federal law permits students to organize prayer services, and schools should accommodate such requests from Muslims (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 1997)."*⁵³

Strategies

"Without interfering with school district policies, principals have made accommodations for Muslim students who need to pray during school hours. Some schools and administrators have set up prayer time during their lunch period to allow for the Muslim students to pray. School administrators in Prince George County's in Maryland allow students to take eight minutes out of their day to pray.

Finding the space for ritualistic prayer in a classroom of 35 students can be a strategic challenge, so many schools offer a dedicated space called a "meditation room" for the prayer that occurs in the middle of the day. This room is made open to all faiths, and it also meets the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."⁵⁴

"A meditation room offers a distraction free setting for those needing and wanting to pray. So that instructional time is not compromised, many schools have initiated creative scheduling that accommodates the few (3-5) minutes needed for daily prayer."⁵⁵

"In co-ed schools, some Muslim students may request separate prayer spaces for boys and girls. As separate rooms are not always feasible, schools might consider giving male and female Muslim students separate times to use the room during lunchtime, or creating a visual barrier in the room."⁵⁶ "Any room with two sections can be appropriate for prayers as long as it is clean. A carpeted room would be appropriate since Muslim use the floor for all the activities in the prayer room/mosque. The basic requirements of a prayer room are that it is clean and that it has a place where one can perform ablution (separate for women and men) [usually a bathroom]."⁵⁷

53 ERIC Development Team, "Arab American Students in Public Schools," *ERIC Digest* 142 (1999).

54 Wafa Hozien, "Supporting Muslim Students in Schools," *Education News*. December 31 2016.

55 Hozien, "Supporting Muslim Students in Schools."

56 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 70.

57 Amjad Hussain and Kate El-Alami, "Faith Guides for Higher Education: A Guide to Islam," (Oxford, UK: The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, 2007), 21.

Fasting

How should teachers accommodate fasting students during Ramadan, especially during lunch and snack time?

The Situation

See section on Understanding Islam for an explanation of Ramadan and fasting requirements for some Muslim students.

Strategies:

"Fasting students may ask to use the library instead of the cafeteria during lunch. Also they may ask to be excused from strenuous physical activity . . . A teacher may invite a Muslim student or guest speaker to explain the practices and traditions surrounding the fasting of Ramadan."⁵⁸

"The key to managing the issue of fasting and PE is to be guided by the student, and to allow participation or exemption according to each individual's response. The teacher should pay close attention to a fasting child and intervene if they show signs of exhaustion or dehydration. PE teachers should also note that Muslims are allowed to break their fast for health reasons, and most are very reasonable in this regard."⁵⁹

"[Schools] should not schedule tests on major Islamic holidays and should allow fasting students to go to the library instead of the cafeteria during Ramadan."⁶⁰

Gender & Hijab

How should teachers react to issues regarding gender relations or religious dress codes that arise in the classroom? How can we help both Muslim and non-Muslim students learn how to navigate and respect these issues?

The Situation

See section on Understanding Islam for an explanation of different dress and head coverings that may be worn by Muslim students.

Strategies

"Female Muslim students may wear a hijab, or headscarf, regardless of school policy prohibiting head coverings... The U.S. Constitution supersedes the school dress code as it protects the right to religious expression."⁶¹

58 *A Teacher's Guide to Muslim Students* (Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, n.d.), 2.

59 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 52.

60 ERIC Development Team, "Arab American Students in Public Schools,"

61 Hozien, "Supporting Muslim Students in Schools."



“Teachers should work to prevent classmates from pulling on or removing a female Muslim student’s scarf.”⁶²

“It is critical not to make assumptions based on dress.... Ask your student what the significance of her head dress is.”⁶³

“Schools can take care not to discriminate against Muslims. They should not enforce dress codes or showering requirements that violate the Muslim tradition of modesty or require Muslim students to engage in coed physical education classes. Educators should ensure that girls are not ridiculed for their head covering.”⁶⁴

Muslim students may want to avoid activities such as “dancing, field trips and meetings that involve close contact between men and women.”⁶⁵

“[S]ome Muslims are reluctant to shake hands or hug with the opposite sex, even with teachers or administrators. This should not be taken as an insult, but a sign of personal modesty. Also, Muslims may raise religious objections to coed physical education classes and to school-sponsored dances. Students should not be pressured to participate, or penalized for not taking part in such activities.”⁶⁶

See the section on *Involving Parents* for more suggestions on how to deal with gender-related issues in the classroom.

62 *A Teacher’s Guide to Muslim Students*, 1.

63 *Youth for Understanding USA, Muslim Student Considerations*.

64 ERIC Development Team, “Arab American Students in Public Schools,” 4.

65 Hussain and El-Alami, “Faith Guides for Higher Education,” 17.

66 *A Teacher’s Guide to Muslim Students*, 3.

PE & Swimming

How I can convince my Muslim students to participate in physical education activities like swimming or gym class? How can I address the concerns of their parents if they object?

The Situation

“The concerns that Muslims might express about health and physical education within schools are not to do with a lack of concern for physical wellbeing, but are almost always linked to questions of modesty and morality.”⁶⁷

“Muslim girls may also be left out of certain activities offered by the school, either through an assumption that they would not want to participate or through lack of tailored provisions, such as single-sex swimming.”⁶⁸

Strategies

“Teachers need to listen to concerns of the parents to foster an environment of understanding. Most... can be overcome by offering parents the option for their daughters to wear the modern Islamic swimming costume that has come into the market recently . . . every effort should be made to ensure that these such provisions remain single-sex to encourage Muslim girls to take up swimming.”⁶⁹

On swimming: “Once again, the key is negotiation. The school and the parents need to work together to enable all Muslim girls to learn the potentially life-saving skill of swimming.”⁷⁰

“Gym classes may be scheduled in a late period when possible allowing the students to shower at home, or a private shower may be made available. School administrators may wish to discuss with the student alternative clothing in physical education classes.”⁷¹

Arts in the Curriculum

I’d like to include music and arts in my curriculum, but I’m worried that Muslim students or parents might be uncomfortable with that. How can I avoid offending them?

The Situation

“In visual art, some Muslim students and/or their parents will be uncomfortable with drawing and sculpting animate objects (people and animals).”⁷²

67 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 51.

68 *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, 19.

69 *Advice for schools: Brief guidance for handling Muslim parental concern* (British Muslims for a Secular Democracy 2010), 8.

70 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 52.

71 *A Teacher’s Guide to Muslim Students*, 3.

72 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 42.

“Some parents will inevitably be more open to ideas than others; some will be very strict in their interpretation of religious and cultural edicts...It would appear that in general, many Muslim students have no real problem in producing two-dimensional figurative work, if it is in an educational context and for educational purposes. There is however reluctance amongst some Muslim students to produce three-dimensional figurative work. The principal reasons for this are related to the belief that those who have created figures out of clay are attempting to imitate God and will therefore be asked to breathe life into them on the day of judgement.”⁷³

“Teachers should be aware that some Muslims may have reservations regarding music. Some types of music might not be acceptable to Muslim parents. Although most Muslims have no problems with soft, relaxing music, Islamic teachings prohibit loud, violent, or depressing music (Athar, 2011). More orthodox Muslims, for example, might request that musical activities be conducted with unaccompanied voices.”⁷⁴

Strategies

“Teachers need to be sensitive to such issues, but more to the point, need to be able to explain or defend their choice of topics on educational grounds and modify studio activities to accommodate a range of cultural and religious views. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine fundamental art-educational rationales and to locate the aims of each teaching project within those rationales.”⁷⁵

“In planning art lessons, it is useful to locate specified learning objectives within a broader framework of educational aims.”⁷⁶

“Clearly, there is a need to think carefully about the kinds of activities in which Muslim pupils are asked to engage in art classes. This will necessarily entail thinking about the needs of the students and the nature of the art learning which is intended. It is also clear that meaningful engagement with an eclectic range of cultural visual forms is not easy. Nevertheless, art educators need to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all learners; this will inevitably entail a more critical approach to multi-cultural curricula, with reference to fundamental educational aims.”⁷⁷

Sex Education

The Situation

How do I approach the topic of puberty and sex education in my classroom as part of the curriculum, especially when parents object on religious grounds?

Strategies

“Negotiation is the key. Firstly, the school needs to listen to and acknowledge the concerns of the Muslim, or other, parents and consider their perspectives when implementing the sex education curriculum. Secondly, Muslim parents need to accept that sex education as delivered in [schools]

73 Richard Hickman, “Teaching Art to Muslim Students,” *Visual Arts Research* 30.2 (2004): 59.

74 Md-Yunus, “Muslim Immigrant Children in the United States,” 3.

75 Hickman, “Teaching Art to Muslim Students,” 59.

76 Ibid., 57.

77 Ibid., 7.

is necessary and important for their adolescent children. While Muslim parents might expect their children to abstain from sexual activities, this will not always be the case; in such instances, sex education helps keep their children safe. In addition, some sex education content will be relevant in the context of family planning. Negotiation about sex education will often be difficult and confronting for the school and Muslim parents, but it is important to find a way forward.”⁷⁸

Alternatively, on the subject of sex education, another source recommends: “Close contact with local Islamic centers is essential to encourage input from the Muslim community. Class materials related to this subject should be available for review, and parents should have the option to remove their children from all or part of the program.”⁷⁹

Holidays

The Situation

See section on Understanding Islam for a list of major holidays celebrated in Islam and in Orthodox Christianity, which is practised by many Arab Christians.

Strategies

“Celebrating Eid requires that Muslim students take at least one day off from school. There should be no penalty for this religious obligation.”⁸⁰

“Ramadan and other Muslim holidays belong on the official school calendar (as do the Orthodox Christian holidays). When educators recognize Christmas and Hanukkah through classroom exercises, but there is nothing on Ramadan, Muslim students feel the inequity.”⁸¹

For a more inclusive environment, teachers can have themselves and other students wish their Muslim students a Happy Eid.

78 Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 51.

79 *A Teacher's Guide to Muslim Students*, 3.

80 Ibid. 4.

81 Wingfield, “Arab Americans.”

PARENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Outreach and Engagement

How do I encourage my Muslim students' parents to be more involved in their child's education? And how can I further work with their communities to raise awareness of Muslim culture and establish personal connections?

How do I establish my authority as a female teacher with male Muslim parents, who may be showing opposition, without further deepening the cultural divide?

The Situation

"If families don't respond to traditional engagement strategies, school and health care staff may assume parents aren't interested. The reality is that most immigrant families care deeply about their children's education and health. However, immigrants often show respect for schools by keeping their distance; the unspoken norm in many countries outside of the United States is that it is the teacher's job to educate their children, and thus it is disrespectful to a teacher's expertise for parents to participate."⁸²

"In some circumstances . . . families may consciously choose not to be involved in their children's education. This may not reflect a lack of care; they may believe that it is the school's responsibility to ensure that their children are learning."⁸³

Strategies

Negotiation: A Key Strategy

"Engaging Muslims in [schools] is, ultimately, a matter of negotiation. Sometimes the negotiation is simple and almost implicit. At other times, it can be strained and difficult. It mostly depends on the religious and cultural expectations of the parents and the extent to which their children reflect these at school.

"Negotiation needs to be a two-way street. Often, teachers go out of their way to be sensitive to the needs of Muslim students, without first establishing with the students and their families what these needs are. Such a one-sided approach can reinforce the notion that Muslim students are different or 'alien', and might lead schools to make unnecessary compromises in curricular and extra-curricular areas."⁸⁴

"Parents and educators need to be aware of cultural sensitivities, and there needs to be mutuality and reciprocity of respect."⁸⁵

⁸² *Strategies for Engaging Immigrant and Refugee Families*, 2.

⁸³ Hassim and Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another*, 69.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 63.

⁸⁵ *Advice for schools: Brief guidance for handling Muslim parental concern*, 5.

Other Strategies

"One of the keys to mutual understanding and the transformation of educational practices is through building a multitude of linkages at all levels between the educational community and the Arab American and Muslim communities. This can be brought about in a systemic way by developing ongoing working relationships between educational institutions and Arab American and Muslim leaders and communities."⁸⁶

"Arab Americans and Muslims can be acknowledged as a part of the ordinary life of the school. They should be invited to speak at school staff development programs. Teachers should be given credits for attending workshops organized by Arab-American and Muslim organizations."⁸⁷

"Arab American and Muslim women should be invited to speak about women's issues."⁸⁸

In order to improve participation of Muslim parents, on source provides the following: "...several suggestions were made for ways to improve schooling for Muslim students. These included holding beginning-of-the-year mini-conferences between teachers and Muslim parents, providing written brochures for teachers explaining Muslim students' needs (with additional information available online), celebrating "culture days" in which Islam and its practices are highlighted and explained, and encouraging the participation of Muslim parents on the school board and other school-related bodies."⁸⁹

"Since Muslim parents strongly believed that not enough effort had been made to locate and identify problems related to the schooling of their children, the need to keep records of the different incidents and how they had (or had not) been solved, was a very salient suggestion."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Wingfield, "Arab Americans."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Nermin Sabry and Katherine Bruna, "Learning from the Experience of Muslim Students in American Schools: Towards a Proactive Model of School-Community Cooperation," *Multicultural Perspectives* 9.3 (2007): 47.

⁹⁰ Sabry and Bruna, "Learning from the Experience of Muslim Students in American Schools," 47.

INCLUDING MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTIONS IN CURRICULUM

How do I introduce Islam and Muslim culture into the curriculum to decrease anxieties that non-Muslim students and parents may feel about their Muslim classmates?

The Situation

Some curriculum materials that cover Islam and current events may contain misinformation, stereotypes, and prejudice against Islam and Muslims. In order to build bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim students and community members, the research advocates for “including information in the curriculum about Islam and its followers,” which will “benefit not only Muslim but non-Muslim students, providing them with global perspectives and cross-cultural understanding.”⁹¹

Teachers should be mindful and draw connections to similar scenarios in the past, such as Japanese internment and anti-Catholic sentiment in US history.

Strategies

“...[E]ducators need to evaluate materials in use and discard those with misinformation or biases. Then they can work with school districts and the state to ensure that new books are more accurate (ADC, 1993a; Council on American-Islamic Relations, 1997).”⁹²

“Create an anti-bias learning environment. This means incorporating the experiences, perspective and words of Muslim people into the curriculum through social studies and current events instruction, children’s literature, in order to learn about different cultures.”⁹³

“Review suggested lesson plans and/or materials before assigning to students. Sometimes a passage in a book, or a set of comprehension questions about world events, is framed in a negative way and may impact on how students understand or perceive a culture or religion. Ensure that adequate context is provided. When in doubt, consult with parents and/or staff and colleagues, or a diversity expert.”⁹⁴

“School boards may want to review policies and programs in light of the increasing Muslim population in our public schools. Textbooks that contribute to religious prejudice are not suitable. Books that lack reliable information are usually replete with mistakes about the basic Islamic beliefs. Qualified Muslim educators should participate in the textbook selection process, particularly for history, social studies and geography texts.”⁹⁵

“Teachers can incorporate positive contributions by the Muslim community by creating research projects where students create maps of countries with the largest Muslim populations and a separate

map with the largest Muslim contributions. Students can also research famous Muslim-Americans and their ethnic heritage. As an extension, teachers can have students examine the diversity within the Muslim world, focusing on the numerous languages, dress, and diversity within Islamic celebrations.”⁹⁶

“Arabs and Arab-Americans can be incorporated into the curriculum through map activities, similar to those mentioned of Muslim-Americans, focusing on the diversity of the Arab world from dress, religion, and customs. Map research also allows students to see the number of non-Arab ethnic groups that live within the Arab world, including Kurds, Armenians, and Chaldeans. Arab-American studies can be incorporated within immigration units to represent the many ways that Arab immigrants have assimilated within the United States.”⁹⁷

“A simple matching exercise about “Famous Arab Americans” (Identify the Arab American disk jockey, sports and movie stars, political leaders, and so forth) can help overturn stereotypes. (“I didn’t know Casey Kasem was Arab!”).”⁹⁸

“Social Studies: Government, Civics, and Current Events classes can use Arab Americans and Muslims as a case study to discuss discrimination, racism, anti-immigrant nativism, and post-9/11 civil liberties violations.”⁹⁹

“For example, in Math, students can be engaged in problem-solving that includes calculation of the differences between the lunar calendar and a solar calendar (Muslims follow a lunar calendar, which causes these celebrations not to take place at the same time every year; the dates, however, can be calculated with approximation). In Earth Science, the lunar calendar can be explained with relation to the rotation of the Earth.”¹⁰⁰

“... For some students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, discussion around world events and conflicts can be quite emotive. Many students hold entrenched positions and teachers may need to facilitate class discussions with care. At the same time it is important that Muslim, or other, students are not put in a position where they are expected to justify a ‘Muslim’, or other, position.”¹⁰¹

“Some topics and lessons in science and technology might be conflicting with Islamic teaching and values. For example, according to Islamic principle, human beings were created by God not by evolution (Ismail et al., 2009). Therefore educators need to be sensitive when explaining this topic to Muslim children.”¹⁰²

“It is important to teach about the diversity within the Arab world and Islam.”¹⁰³

Take care when using the word “Islamic” haphazardly, since it “cannot be a catchall adjective to describe everything that any Muslim or Muslim society may have carried out in the 1,400 years since

96 Eraqi, “[Arab-American and Muslim-American Contributions.](#)”

97 Ibid.

98 Wingfield, “[Arab Americans.](#)”

99 Ibid.

100 Sabry and Bruna, “[Learning from the Experience of Muslim Students in American Schools,](#)” 7.

101 [Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims](#), 22-23.

102 Md-Yunus, “[Muslim Immigrant Children in the United States,](#)” 3.

103 Wingfield, “[Arab Americans.](#)”

91 Hassim and Cole-Adams, [Learning from One Another](#), 5-6.

92 ERIC Development Team, “[Arab American Students in Public Schools,](#)” 4.

93 Spiegler, “[Protecting Our Muslim Youth from Bullying.](#)”

94 [Helping Students Deal with Trauma](#), 14.

95 [A Teacher’s Guide to Muslim Students](#), 4.

its inception..... The hallmark of good coverage here is historical accuracy and careful attention to fair and balanced discussion and differentiated terminology.”¹⁰⁴

“Fortunately, the study of Islam can easily be integrated into general education courses that address essential learning outcomes such as civic and intercultural knowledge, as well as into advanced courses in comparative literature, history, political science, art history, religious studies, philosophy, and economics.”¹⁰⁵

In “Effective Teaching to Counter Misinformation and Negative Stereotypes: The Example of Islam” (2009), Jack Meacham describes a course in which he taught students about Islam: “Of course, the student learning goal was not to encourage students to agree with the tenets of Islam or to convert. Instead, the goal was merely for students to become more knowledgeable about Islam, to become familiar with what Muslims believe and do, and to recognize and reject common stereotypes and misunderstandings.”

“The advantage of having students read from original sources is that they can’t dismiss these as biased, inaccurate, or incomplete. Instead, they must move forward to reflect upon what they have read and consider critically what they now think.”

“I organized the sequence of topics to begin with ‘cool,’ neutral topics and delay any ‘hot’ topics until most students had acquired a minimal yet foundational understanding of Islam, a prerequisite for further discussion.”¹⁰⁶

For example, in using this final technique teachers can start with teaching about the central beliefs of Islam, including the five pillars (see the section on Understanding Islam for more of this foundational knowledge). Teachers can then move on to cover topics such as jihad, gender issues, etc.

104 Yvonne Yazbeck-Haddad, Farid Senzai and Jane I. Smith, *Educating the Muslims of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 96-97.

105 Jack Meacham, “Effective Teaching to Counter Misinformation and Negative Stereotypes: The Example of Islam,” *Peer Review* 11.2 (2009).

106 Ibid.

RELIGION IN THE CLASSROOM

The Situation

How do teachers respond to questions regarding the legality or appropriateness of teaching about religion in the classroom?

Strategies

“The FAC guidelines for teaching about religion can be summarized as follows:

- The school’s approach to religion is academic, not devotional.
- The school strives for student awareness of religions, but does not press for student acceptance of any religion
- The school sponsors study about religion, not the practice of religion.
- The school may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not impose any particular view.
- The school educates about all religions; it does not promote or denigrate religion.
- The school informs students about various beliefs; it does not seek to conform students to any particular belief.”¹⁰⁷

“The key to accurate but religiously neutral description is attribution. A phrase ... can be simply attributed to Islamic beliefs, Islamic teachings.... Better, however, from the point of view of teaching history, is to name the exact source from which the belief or practice was conveyed to the religion’s followers. ... Attribution of beliefs to their source, then, is really the key to achieving accurate coverage of any religion that is forthright and honest.”¹⁰⁸

107 Yazbeck-Haddad, Senzai, and Smith, *Educating the Muslims of America*, 92-93.

108 Ibid., 95.

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