

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT: THE CASE OF TWO
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of Islamic education in Canada with an emphasis on how two educational institutions promote and maintain an Islamic worldview and identity in a secular pluralistic society. To achieve this goal, the study explores the nature and meaning of Islamic education in a national context, in which such education is caught between the edict to transmit and promote Islamic values on the one hand, and secular multiculturalism values on the other. This qualitative research uses an instrumental case study to provide an in-depth understanding of two participating Muslim schools in British Columbia, Canada. The case study, however, instrumentally offers understanding for Islamic education in a multicultural context. Findings from this research indicate that while Islamic educational institutions in Canada utilize various tools to nurture Islamic identity and worldview, they still face considerable internal challenges including limited resources and internal diversity. The internal challenges are exacerbated by external pressures in the form of Islamophobic sentiments fueled by poor media coverage. The dissertation recommends that Islamic educational institutions join the multicultural conversation with a genuine Islamic voice. Similarly, in order for these institutions to provide adequate Islamic education, they need to adopt targeted Islamization and embrace multiple identities.

PREFACE

This research was approved by the UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The board issued a certificate of approval for the research with the number HO7-01451.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Research Question	2
Identity and the Role of the Researchers	4
The Muslim Community in Canada	6
Muslim Educational Institutions	8
Definitions of Terms	10
Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	13
Islamic Education, a Unique Worldview	14
Canadian Multiculturalism	20
Chapter Three: Islamic Identity in a Multicultural Context.....	34
Identity	34
Islamic Identity	40
Chapter Four: Research Methodology	51
Qualitative Method	51
Sites and Participants	53
Data Collection Methods	54
Data Analysis	61
Chapter Five: Negotiating an Islamic Worldview	64

Islamic Education: A Profile of Two Islamic Schools	64
Islamic Education: Forming Understanding	77
Islamic Education: Fostering Islamic Values and Lifestyle	81
Finding Suitable Resources	84
Chapter Six: Maintaining Islamic Identity	93
Islamic Identity in a Multicultural Context	93
Islamic Symbols	94
Building a Community	98
Attempting to Integrate	99
Cultural and Religious Celebrations	101
Dealing with Internal Challenges	105
Coping with External Pressures	116
Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations	123
Conclusions	123
Implications	125
Recommendations	137
Bibliography	141
Appendices	150
Appendix (A) Interview Protocol	150
Appendix (B) Letter of Initial Contact	153
Appendix (C) Consent Form	155
Appendix (D) Letter to Parents	157
Appendix (E) Letter of Assent	159

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 <i>Medina Vs Cordova School</i>	76
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1 <i>Medina</i> Islamic School: a Closer look	65
Figure 5.2 <i>Cordova</i> Islamic School: a Closer Look	71

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many Western societies have been grappling with the position of Islam and its symbols in a multicultural public space. As recently as November 29, 2009, 57.5 percent of the Swiss populace voted to ban the building of new minarets in their country. The ban caused a stir around the world. Governments, human rights groups, and individuals around the world condemned the ban. UN human rights chief, Navanethem Pillay labeled this action as discriminatory and deeply divisive (Klapper, 2009). A French parliamentary panel recommended the banning of Niqab or Burqa, (a head to toe outer cover, including the face with an opening for the eyes) in schools, hospitals, public transportation, and all government offices. This followed banning girls from wearing the hijab in the French public school system.

The debate over Islamic norms and symbols, however, is not unique to Switzerland and France. Similar concerns over the tensions between the fundamental tenets of a liberal society and the multicultural demands of minority populations have attracted considerable policy attention (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008). The external challenges are further exacerbated by internal diversity among the Muslim communities in Canada.

In this dissertation, I explore how Islamic educational institutions in Canada attempt to provide a meaningful Islamic education in a national social context which is predominantly secular and multicultural. Through a case study of two Muslim schools in British Columbia, this research intends to contribute to furthering the understanding of how different Islamic educational institutions respond to the tension between the desire to preserve and promote an Islamic worldview and values, and the pressure to conform to the secular, multicultural norms and values of the dominant society. The study is informed by both multicultural and Islamic educational approaches. These two areas constitute a theoretical framework for the dissertation.

Multicultural studies set the context for individual groups' abilities to establish spaces that accommodate their identities and values within the diverse Canadian society. Through the Canadian multicultural context, individuals can maintain meaning through group affiliation to enhance and promote their identity. Islamic educational institutions use the multicultural platform to foster Islamic worldview and identity. Islamic education, on the other hand, provides philosophical and cultural foundations through established goals and values.

1.1 Research Question

The overarching question that guides the research is as follows: How do Islamic educational institutions in Canada negotiate an Islamic worldview and promote Islamic identity within a multicultural society? In other words, how do Islamic educational institutions balance the principles of Islam as a way of life with the pressure to conform to the liberal secular norms and values in the Canadian context? This attempt to explore the meaning of Islamic education in a Canadian context also sheds light on Islamic institutions' approaches to education in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. Underlying this research is the assumption that, although Islamic educational institutions benefit from the pluralistic/multicultural system in Canada, they also face unique challenges that stem from the tensions between sometimes opposing worldviews. The study aims to achieve three objectives. First, it offers a description of Islamic education according to the understanding of Muslim school stakeholders. Ramadan argues that (2004) Islamic education is a comprehensive system that aims to educate both the heart and the mind. Its ultimate goal is to link human consciousness to God. It educates the mind by fostering an understanding of the revealed text (the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*) as well as the context, or the acquired knowledge. By combining the two, Islamic educational institutions cultivate the growth of certain kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Data were collected by asking Muslim school

stakeholders the following questions: What does Islamic education mean to you? Why did you choose to attend, send your children to, or work at an Islamic school? What makes Islamic education different? What do you expect of an Islamic school teacher?

Second, it explores how Islamic schools promote Islamic values and identity within the Canadian multicultural system. Because Islamic educational institutions operate within the provincial independent school system, they are required to meet the same governmental policies as any other independent school. These requirements ensure common standards for all schools in the province. The requirements include expected learning outcomes, teacher qualifications, school governance and reporting system, among others. The institutions attempt to assert their faith-based identity in a Canadian national, secular landscape (Zine, 2008).

The institutions attempt to nurture a sense of community for their students in order to facilitate the formation of a common identity based on the concept of *Ummah*. Through this concept, institutions attempt to transcend ethnic, racial, and territorial boundaries. Questions related to this objective include: How does your school prepare students to be members of the Muslim *Ummah*? How does your school prepare students to be integrated members of the Canadian society? Do you integrate Islamic principles into the regular curriculum? How?

Third, it identifies the challenges facing Islamic educational institutions in Canada. Muslim schools attempt to foster Islamic identity and worldview in a predominantly secular multicultural society. The schools also operate at a time when Islam and Muslims are under tremendous pressure. The news headlines of terrorist attacks in various parts of the world, invasion of Muslim countries, Danish cartoons, Swiss minarets, and the politics of Muslim women's body (*Hijab* and *Niqab*) also affect the sense of self of Muslim schools. To explore this area, the following questions were asked: What kind of challenges do Islamic educational institutions

face in Canada? What types of activities do you allow your students/children to attend? Why? What types of activities do you not allow your children/students to attend? Do you allow your children to celebrate cultural events such as Christmas, Halloween, and Valentine's Day? Which area of the curriculum do you find difficult to teach in an Islamic school?

In sum, the significance of this study lies in its attempt to define what Islamic education means to those practicing it in a Canadian context. It sheds light on how Islamic educational institutions in Canada respond to various internal and external pressures. Further, the study is a general contribution to the ongoing broader discussions about faith-based education systems in the context of Canada's secular, pluralistic society. Both policy-makers and multicultural education researchers may find it interesting, since very few studies have looked at Islamic educational institutions in Canada.

1.2 Identity and the Role of the Researcher

I am a Muslim and a graduate of an Islamic school. I obtained my first university degree from an Islamic university. My children attend an Islamic school in Edmonton, Alberta, where I work as principal. Hence, my interest in the topic of Islamic education in Canada stems from my personal history, my academic training and professional commitment, and my roles as an Islamic educator, administrator, and parent.

I consider myself a product of the Islamic education system. I spent several years studying Islam before enrolling at the Islamic University of *Medina*. I gained a solid knowledge of *Hadith* and general Islamic studies, the university still presented Islam and its educational values in a way that largely suits a homogenous student population in a Muslim country. While we studied Islam's different schools of thought extensively, in reality we experienced only one school of thought, the Hanbaly jurisprudence. Furthermore, there were few or no challenging

ideas drawn from outside of Islam. The university program was decidedly hegemonic and exclusive. This is perhaps because most of the students were from relatively homogenous societies, where Islam is the dominant religion. Being a teacher and a principal in a Canadian Islamic school has provided me with a very different experience serving Muslims who came from all parts of the globe.

In general, Islamic educational institutions serve a highly diverse community that is united by a commitment to the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, though its members come from different races, ethnic and national backgrounds, and social and economic circumstances. Their ways of practicing Islam, their perceptions and attitudes towards education, educators, and leaders are similarly diverse.

There are challenges that stem from certain government policies which limit what a Muslim school can do in the Canadian context. However, for the school administrator, government regulations are easily dealt with in comparison to the challenges of finding proper learning materials, recruiting suitable teaching faculty, and dealing with other external pressures. The media, in particular, seem to call on Muslim schools to comment on, or explain any negative incident that is remotely linked to Muslims around the world.

Conducting research on how Islamic educational institutions meet the needs of Muslim communities in Canada and what could possibly work for them is both complicated and interesting. Being a Muslim educator and principal of an Islamic school is a double-edged sword in my role as a researcher. On the one hand, I have a unique opportunity in terms of accessibility to the institutions, and familiarity with the norms of these particular learning communities. On the other hand, there are potential risks, including my own biases as a Muslim educator. To counter these biases, I have tried to reflect on my own actions and intentions while conducting

this research. I endeavoured to present different points of view about Islamic education and its institutions. Though my efforts do not eliminate my biases, they do help me become aware of them, and, hence, work to reduce any negative impact on the study.

The research question is especially relevant in the Canadian context, particularly given the current debates about ‘reasonable accommodation’, the hijab controversies in Quebec, and the *Shariah* arbitration debates in Ontario (Adams, 2007; Kymlicka, 2006).

Rationale: Islam as a way of life aims to establish an ideological community (*Ummah*) with universal principles based on the teachings of the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah*, which provide guidance for such a community. These sources establish not only the spiritual and ethical guidelines, but situate Islam as a primary source of identity for its followers. This means that though Islam does not require the elimination of all other identities, it clearly places Islamic tenets and identity at the centre. The ideals of Islam in this context provide cohesion and solidarity, which enable its members to establish common institutions such as mosques and schools.

1.3 The Muslim Community in Canada

The overwhelming majority of Canadian Muslims are either immigrants or children of immigrant parents who come from all parts of the world (Azmi, 2001). The bulk of new immigrants come from the Middle East, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, and Somalia. These newcomers join the more established Muslim community that had migrated to Canada starting from about the 1960s onward.

The Muslim community in Canada has grown rapidly over the last two decades, and despite measurable achievements and opportunities, the community faces both external and internal challenges. The 1981 census reported the Muslim population in Canada as 98,000. After ten

years the population had jumped to 253,000. The growth continued to the next census cycle, where, according to the 2001 census (Statistics Canada, 2001), approximately 600,000 Muslims live in Canada. The 2001 census concludes that the number of individuals identifying themselves as Muslims increased by 128.9% between 1991 and 2001. Muslims currently constitute 2.5% of the Canadian population (Adams, 2007). The latest census projected the Muslim population to be 842,200, out of 33,099,000 Canadians.

The recent dramatic increase of the Muslim population in Canada could be linked to two key factors: The Canadian government had a racially discriminatory policy before 1960s (Kymlicka, 2006). This policy was implemented to keep Arabs, Asians, Africans and other non-white groups out of the country. According to Kymlicka (2006), “It was only in the mid-1960s that these non-white `visible minorities` started to immigrate in significant numbers to Canada” (p.4). Further, a large number of refugees came from Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia and the Middle East.

Most Islamic educational institutions in Canada are established primarily to preserve an Islamic worldview and values, while preparing their students to function in the larger, secular society. The importance of exploring how Islamic institutions provide contextualized Islamic education stems from the tremendous challenges these institutions face in coping with the internal elements that pull them towards isolation, and the external elements that pressure them to assimilate into the mainstream culture and norms.

For Canadian Muslims and indeed Muslims in western countries in general, their sense of solidarity has been accentuated by a fear of losing their Islamic values and distinct identity to the mainstream society. Muslim communities across Canada express concerns about the young generation’s ability to maintain Islamic values and beliefs. Therefore, the communities respond

by establishing Islamic educational institutions that teach and promote an Islamic worldview, identity and values. These educational institutions strive to impart the principles of the Islamic faith while promoting the Islamic heritage and providing Islamic atmosphere for their students within the context of liberal multicultural societies.

1.4 Educational Institutions

Most Islamic educational institutions try to provide a contextualized education that aims “to preserve the Islamic identity in an integrative manner within the pluralistic Western society” (Barazangi, 1991:172). However, preserving Islamic identity in an integrative manner poses a monumental challenge in part because Muslim communities “live within societies with norms already determined by the majority culture” (Grant 1997:24). These institutions often conform to certain elements of culture and a lifestyle that is, in some cases, contrary to the faith and lifestyles of the students and their families.

Despite the aforementioned internal and external challenges, Muslim communities across Canada have worked together to establish various religious and educational institutions. According to the Muslim World League’s Canadian office (2006), there are more than 50 full-time Muslim schools in Canada, and almost every major Canadian city has more than one full-time school. British Columbia has six Islamic schools, five of them in the Greater Vancouver area.

These schools make a concerted effort to help students understand and experience their Islamic heritage within the context of the Canadian mosaic while providing an alternative which “must relate to the epistemological, metaphysical, and conceptual elements of both Islamic and Western systems” (Barazangi (1991:172). The schools vary in their approaches and outlook, but

all claim to be agents of preserving the Islamic worldview and identity within the Canadian multicultural framework.

Most of the Islamic institutions in Canada are what Azmi (2001) calls school-type institutions. These institutions aspire to conform to the various norms of the public secular schools. They are primarily satisfied with making minor changes to the available secular sources, rather than creating a distinctive Islamic curriculum. This educational approach is not unique to Muslim schools in Canada. As Nimer (2002) and Merry (2006) find, most Muslim schools in Europe and North America borrow everything from curricula and textbooks to pedagogical concepts and even codes of conduct from surrounding public and private schools.

The school-type institutions often identify themselves as integrating agencies that prepare students to be contributing members of Canadian society. As Azmi (2001) argues, this approach “recognizes the need to educate children in the social tools, technical knowledge and skills common to the wider Canadian society primarily because it identifies with the need to be integrated with it” (270). These types of schools try to emulate the mainstream school system.

The traditional learning institution called Madrasah or Madrasah-like school is another kind of Islamic educational institution in Canada. These kinds of learning institutions do not put a lot of emphasis on preparing their students to integrate into the larger society. They are modeled after traditional Islamic learning institutions (Azmi, 2001), in which the curriculum revolves around the teaching of the *Qur'an*. The personal conduct of individuals in the school is modeled on the detailed practice of the *Sunnah*, the traditional lifestyle of Prophet Mohammed. Both faculty and students are expected to emulate the Prophet and his companions as primary role models. Hence, the institutions are structured to nurture and promote this lifestyle and values.

Most of these institutions are boarding schools in remote areas. One of their primary goals is to serve the needs of the Muslim community by producing locally-trained prayer leaders, or *Imams*.

1.5 Definition of Terms

In this study, pseudonyms are used for the participating institutions and individuals in order to protect their anonymity. Hence, the websites of the two institutions will not appear in the dissertation. Before I proceed, let me begin with brief definitions of some key terms to explain the foundation of the study.

Allah: An Arabic word translated to God, denoting the one who is adored in worship. In the Islamic belief system, the name for the creator of the Universe is *Allah*. He is the Merciful, the Beneficent, the Knowledgeable, the Protector, the Mighty, the God, the Provider, the Exalted, the Lord and the All-Knowing. "He is God, the One God, Independent and Sought by all; He begets not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him." (*Qur'an*: 913: 1-4)

Deen (spelled also as Din): A religious tradition or a way of life.

Imam: The term means a leader, but it particularly refers to a religious leader. Any person who leads a congregational prayer is called an *Imam*. A religious leader who also leads his community in the political affairs may be called an *Imam*.

Islamization of knowledge: An attempt to synthesize teachings and ethics of Islam and integrating them to various fields of modern sciences.

Hadith: See Sunnah

Qiblah: The direction that Muslims face when they perform their regular prayers.

Qur'an: Translated as recitation, the *Qur'an* is, to Muslims, the literal word of God, His final Book, revealed to Prophet Mohammed through the angel Gabriel to guide mankind.

Ramadan: The ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast this month to fulfill their religious obligation and to commemorate the revelation of the *Qur'an*. This is a time to show solidarity with the poor around the world. For all able Muslims, fasting from dawn to dusk is obligatory during this month.

Shahadah: The term means declaration or testimony of faith. To be a Muslim, one must internalize the meaning, and utter the following statement: "I testify that there is no god but *Allah* and I testify that Mohammed is the Messenger of *Allah*."

Shariah: A path, a custom, or a way of life. The term refers to Islam's comprehensive creed, rules, and ordained manners.

Sunnah: The "path" or "example" of the Prophet Muhammad, i.e., what the Prophet did, or said, or agreed to during his life. He is considered by Muslims to be a model for Muslims.

Ummah: A nation or group of people. It refers to the body of the global Muslim community.

To sum up, in this study, I combine multicultural studies with an Islamic educational worldview to analyze how the two educational institutions in British Columbia carry out Islamic education within Canadian multicultural society. The remainder of the dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter Two contains a literature review and theoretical framework. Chapter Three introduces identity and provides an overview of Islamic identity, while Chapter Four provides a summary of my research methodology. Chapter Five presents Part One of the findings into how Islamic educational institutions in Canada negotiate an Islamic worldview within a multicultural society.

Chapter Six presents Part Two of the findings: Islamic educational institutions in Canada and their endeavour to promote and maintain Islamic identity, as well as some of the challenges they

face both internally and externally. Chapter Seven provides a conclusion, which includes a brief summary of the findings, and recommendations for current practice and future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Islamic educational institutions negotiate the tension between the principles of Islam as a way of life and the pressure to conform to the liberal secular norms and values in the Canadian context. The Islamic worldview is promoted through knowledge, values, and attitude, which aim to train one's body and soul in order to attain closeness to *Allah* (God) and establish meaningful relationship with His creation. This worldview is anchored in a revealed way of life that integrates all aspects of life. However, it is located in a "society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their original identity" (Hall, 2000: 207). That is to say that Islamic educational institutions attempt to cultivate Islamic identity and worldview within a primarily secular multicultural context.

This study draws heavily on a blend of Canadian multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2001; Taylor, 1994) as theory and everyday practice on the one hand, and Islamic studies, theory, values, and everyday practice on the other. In addition to Taylor's politics of recognition and Kymlicka's multicultural framework of minority rights, this study is also guided by an Islamic education worldview focused on the nature of man, the concept of *Ummah*, and Islamic education in a multicultural setting (Hamid, 1995; Merry, 2006; Ramadan, 2004 & 2010). The first section of this chapter introduces Islamic education through its unique worldview. It begins with the purpose of life as a point of departure in an attempt to explain Islamic education. It provides an overview of Islamic education, its definition, ultimate goal and some contemporary challenges. The second section of the chapter provides an introduction to the term culture. Then, it presents a brief overview of the Canadian multiculturalism policy. This is followed by a critique of Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism theory of minority rights.

2.1 Islamic Education: a Unique Worldview

Islam provides a comprehensive system which orients its adherents in a foundational manner (Waugh, 1991) through the primary sources of the faith. The *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* constitute two sources of Islam. The *Qur'an* is, for a Muslim, the revealed Word of God while the *Sunnah* contains Prophet Mohammed's statements, actions, and his interpretation of the *Qur'an*. The two sources not only provide religious guidelines for Muslims, but also form the epistemological base for Islamic education.

The purpose of this life is to serve God, as illustrated in the verse from the *Qur'an*, where *Allah* says: "I have not created Jinn and mankind except to serve me" (*Qur'an*, 51:56). This verse clearly indicates that the purpose of life from the Islamic perspective revolves around serving and obeying God. Islamic educational systems and institutions pay careful attention to this fundamental principle of Islam.

According to Islamic sources, God (*Allah*) created man and instilled in him the ability to seek knowledge and learn about himself, his creator, and his surroundings, which gave humanity an unparalleled power to control and benefit from this world. Furthermore, God created man in a pure and naturally good state, free from any kind of inherited sin. Similarly, man was created with the capacity to disobey, transgress, and even harm himself and others. This is so because the ability to choose between good and evil "is closely connected with man's freedom of choice and responsibility for his actions" (Hamid, 1995: 22). In this perspective, the individual's freedom and responsibility are acknowledged, but there is also an underlying emphasis that he or she is a member of a community, *Ummah*.

Ummah literally means a group, a community or a set of beliefs within a group. It refers to an ideological community (Ataman, 2003; Ramadan, 2004) that shares a religious belief system and

ethical values as their primary frame of reference. The concept of *Ummah* presents an essential marker of identity, a connection that goes beyond ethnicity, race, and national boundaries without eliminating these other markers, but certainly limiting their negative impact. A Muslim, like any other individual may maintain certain affinities for a nation, ethnicity or a tribe.

However, his/her prime loyalty is to the members of the believing community wherever they are.

To be a Muslim means feeling and developing a strong affinity and a sense of belonging to the *Ummah*. This is so because the *Qur'an* describes the believing community as “a solid well-knit structure” that supports and protects each other. The members of the *Ummah* are expected to show mutual support and compassion to the extent that the Prophet describes it as an organ in an enormous body: “the *Ummah* is like one body; if one of its organs is sick, the whole body experiences the fever and affliction” (Al-bukhari, 1986: 21. Vol.27). The *Hadith* describes the body of the Muslim nation as a well-knit structure in which its different components rely on each other. These components (individuals, families, groups, and nations) are also important, as the structure cannot stand without them. Thus, while they can be seen as individuals or components on their own, they are, in fact, inextricably linked to other individuals, families, and groups that are part of the *Ummah*; what happens to one organ affects the whole structure in the same way that what happens to the *Ummah* affects its members.

As indicated earlier, people develop an affinity to their nation- state, ethnicity, tribe or any other chosen or natural affiliation. It is also true that people live and function with multiple identities. In fact, “each person has many social identities (such as sexual and class identities) that develop meaning in people’s lives both at the ideological/political and social/cultural levels” (Abdi & Ghosh, 2004:30). Membership in the *Ummah*, therefore, does not require abolishing

other identities (Ataman, 2003). Rather, it establishes a hierarchy for the various identities by placing Islam firmly at the centre.

Education is a main factor in shaping this identity, connecting knowledge and skills to Islamic values and beliefs. The Islamic sources contain hundreds of statements about the importance of learning or acquiring knowledge. These sources provide Muslims with useful knowledge that regulates their relationship with the Creator and with human beings. In this regard, revealed knowledge from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* is an essential requirement for every Muslim, but it does not constitute the whole area of knowledge (Abdullah, 1982). We can acquire knowledge through experience, experimentation, contemplation, or any other way of learning. Regardless of the area of concentration, seeking knowledge is an important aspect of a Muslim's life.

In fact, seeking knowledge is an Islamic obligation. A functioning Muslim therefore should constantly seek knowledge. As Ramadan explains (2004), "to be Muslim entails struggling to increase one's abilities, seeking tirelessly to know more to the extent that one may say in the light of the Islamic sources that, when it comes to the cultural dimension, to be Muslim is to learn" (p.80). The remainder of the section briefly examines? What is the ultimate goal of Islamic education? What are founding principles/roots of the term? What kinds of tension arise from Islamic education's interactions with the secular system?

Islamic education is a term that loosely describes a series of incremental experiences that aims to transmit knowledge and values that promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, emotional, intellectual and physical development of the learner (Al-Attas, 1979; Ashraf, 1985; Thomas, 2004). What is Islamic education? As defined by Cook (1999), Islamic education is "a process which involves the complete person, including the rational, spiritual and the social dimensions of the person" (p.39).

Ultimately, an Islamic education enables students to be conscious of their responsibility to God, then to their fellow human beings. According to Thomas (2004), “Islamic education ideally aims to provide a milieu for the total and balanced development of every student in every sphere of learning--directing all these aspects towards the attainment of a conscious relationship with God, the ultimate purpose of man’s life on earth” (p.4). Essentially, Islamic education revolves around a central goal of enabling the learner to be conscious of his or her responsibility towards his or her Creator. This is to say that idealized Islamic education should direct all aspects of a Muslim’s life towards obedience and submission to *Allah* (God), which is considered the ultimate goal of our life on earth. According to Ashraf (1985), “the ultimate goal of Muslim education lies in the realization of the complete submission to *Allah* on the level of the individual, the community, and the humanity at large” (p.4). This explanation provides one way of defining Islamic education, but it also highlights the underlying worldview that guides different aspects of Islamic education.

According to this view, education entails acquiring knowledge and skills that are necessary to function in society. But equally important, to be educated means to receive guidance and support in order to reach one’s potential. It also means being raised and trained in order to internalize the norms and values of one’s community.

In Islam, education has been described as Ta’lim, Tarbiyah and Ta’dib. These three terms lay the foundation for an Islamic educational framework. Ta’lim comes from the Arabic word ‘Ilm’, meaning knowledge. It means to know, to be aware of, and to perceive. The focus here appears to be on transmission of knowledge and skills. Tarbiyah means to grow, or nourish. In other words, Tarbiyah means to help something or someone grow gradually to a stage of completeness or maturity. As Thomas explains, “Islamic education is concerned not only with

the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge ('Ta'lim') but also with the education of the whole being of men and women (Tarbiyah)" (2004: 4). Thirdly, Ta'dib means to refine, discipline, and train both mind and soul. It is "discipline of body, mind and soul which enables man to recognize and acknowledge his proper place in the human order in relation to his self, his family and his community" (Thomas, 2004: 5). To this end, Islamic education entails transmitting knowledge and values to train, refine, and nurture students mind and soul.

Teaching useful knowledge and skills, refining one's actions and attitudes to match social values, and nurturing the natural development of the learner are important components of a whole system. However, they are not the defining factors of Islamic education. The most important goal of Islamic education, as mentioned earlier, revolves around consciousness of one's responsibility to God. This entails a total submission to His will in addition to learning how to interact with our fellow human beings.

Complete submission to *Allah* has practical implications for Islamic education institutions: To some, it requires a complete Islamization of the curriculum. Leaning towards the definition of Islam as a revealed way of life, Chris Hewer (2001) expands on the concept of Tawhid, or Oneness, and argues that the Islamic school curriculum should be based on revelation. To Hewer, however, revelation is not contained only in the revealed scripture, the *Qur'an*, but also in creation at large. According to Hewer (2001), Muslim schools should not offer a distinct course called Islamic studies or religious education, but rather the entire curriculum in Muslim schools should be an Islam-based, integrated system. Fulfilling this requirement poses challenges to Muslim schools in Canada and other similar societies.

Western secular philosophy tends to rely heavily on rational faculties, scientific procedure, and the process of logic for discovery of truth (Cook, 1999). This over-emphasis on human

reasoning over divine revelation poses a challenge to Islamic educational institutions. It is contrary to the concept of Tawhid in the Islamic education system, where all aspects of life are consolidated into a harmonious whole. Accordingly, as Shamma (1999) and Lemo (2003) contend, a secular-based curriculum does not meet Islamic schools' needs largely because it was developed for secular purposes, and falls short of achieving the ideals and goals of Islamic education.

Examining the role of Islamic school teachers is another important area of this discussion. Are they supposed to be exemplars? That is, should teachers be required to model the teachings of Islam, or are they assumed to be neutral facilitators? To Hewer (2001), an Islamic school teacher must model the teachings of Islam. Hewer draws his argument from a basic principle in Islam that considers Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam, as an example of a balanced and complete human being, and one of the primary goals of Islamic education is to produce individuals who closely resemble Prophet Mohammed in their lifestyle. He builds upon Al-Attas' (1979) groundbreaking work, which maintains the view that the primary objective of Islamic education is "to produce men and women resembling him [Prophet Mohammed] as near as possible" (p.200). While attaining this objective is understandably desirable, one obvious question to which could be raised is: What type of Islamic educational institution would produce these men and women?

Accordingly, Muslim school teachers are expected to exemplify in their personal lives the content of what they teach, rather than act as neutral facilitators. Some researchers are adamant (Kazmi, 1999) about the need to find these exemplary teachers in order to provide an idealized Islamic education. However, they provide no indication of where to find them, or how to train

them. Finding Muslim teachers, let alone idealized ones, poses a serious challenge for Muslim educational institutions, as I will explain in Chapter Six.

2.2 Canadian Multiculturalism

Williams, Bennet & Grosberg (2005) describe the word “culture” as one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. They link the difficulty of the term to the historical development of the word in many European languages and perhaps, more importantly, to the fact that the term is used in different disciplines and systems of thought. Notwithstanding Williams and his team’s assertion, this section of the chapter will begin with a brief introduction to culture, its definition, importance, and connection to religion.

Generally speaking, the term culture denotes habits, traditions and values; it describes something that is honoured, protected, and cultivated, and an element that provides meaning, structure, and connectivity for individuals and groups. As Parekh (2006) defines it, culture is “a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives” (p.143). It encompasses spiritual guidelines, established relationships, deeply rooted values, and a means of expressing all of these dimensions of life. The expressions could take the form of art, lifestyle, or ceremony (Chan, 2006; Parekh, 2006). Culture also provides a platform to interpret values and customs. The combination of the two gives meaning and significance to human life and activities. Canada is a country that attempts to provide a platform for diverse individuals and groups to express their unique lifestyles and values through multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is considered a set of policies and practices that promotes attention to and representation for various groups and communities who want to maintain a certain level of distinction (Cashmore, 1996; Modood, 2007) for their cultures and identities. Multiculturalism in

this sense is a response to multiple systems and communities who share social space but espouse different convictions and values. Ideally, multiculturalism would foster a harmonious coexistence among diverse cultural, racial, ethnic and religious entities in a pluralistic society. Canadian Multicultural policy was founded on liberalism. According to Kymlicka, (2001) and Adams (2007), the policy rests on liberal principles of individual autonomy and a commitment to equality of opportunity. Canadian multicultural policy could be considered as an endeavor to deal with the cultural needs and contributions of all groups and communities while maintaining those basic liberal values.

At the state level, Canada is identified as a country that prides itself with the adoption of multiculturalism as a political ideal for nurturing and maintaining healthy **relationships**, mutual tolerance and respect, and equity between various groups. According to Magsino (2000), Canadian multicultural policy “promotes and supports cultural retention and enhancement, cultural sharing and equality among cultural groups in order to achieve national unity and development through a program of government support” (p.326).

The Canadian multicultural policy was particularly developed to help minority groups integrate into Canadian society. The policy framework, as cited by Adams (2007), had four primary goals:

First, resources permitting, the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance, the small and weak groups no less than the strong and highly organized.

Second, the government will assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society.

Third, the government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.

Fourth, the government will continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society (pp 11—12).

Canadian multiculturalism and multicultural policy in particular, is not without critics. Some of these critics are against the idea of multiculturalism, while others disagree with the type of multiculturalism which Canada adopted. The multiculturalism critics argue (Bibby, 1990; Gairdner, 1990; Bissondooth, 1994) that multiculturalism compromises national unity; it encourages narrow loyalty among ethnic groups, which condemns the minority groups in life of perpetual isolation, which leads only to economic and political disadvantage. Some of the critics (Gairdner, 1990) extend the danger of isolation to argue that multiculturalism will eventually destroy English Canada by undermining the core values and customs, which are the foundations of the nation's stability.

Canadian multiculturalism also faces contestation from within. The critics include Anti-Racism, Feminist perspective, as well as some liberal multiculturalists. Anti-Racism perspective, for example, asserts that Canadian multiculturalism does not address systemic marginalization and inequalities. Accordingly, Canadian multiculturalism falls short of causing real structural change because it does not interrogate power effectively. As Dei (2000) argues, Canadian multiculturalism promotes values such accommodation, appreciation, commonality and goodwill. However, this is based on an assumption that "we start from a relatively level playing field, that we have access to similar resources and we have comparable values,

aspirations and concerns. Nothing could be further from the reality of those racially minoritized in our communities” (p.304).

Some feminist researchers also critique liberal multiculturalism in terms of giving special rights to minority groups. They argue that assigning special rights and privileges to these groups often perpetuates gross gender inequalities. According to Susan Okin (1999), liberal multiculturalism of minority rights has two major downfalls. First, liberal multiculturalism ignores the private sphere, which is an essential base for any culture. She argues that advocates of many cultures may not openly impose their illiberal beliefs and practices on others. In fact, they may appear to respect women and girls’ civil and political rights in public. However, “many cultures do not, especially, in the private sphere, treat them like anything, like the same concern and respect with which men and boys are treated or allow them to enjoy the same freedom” (p.21). Second, multiculturalism treats all multicultural groups as a monolithic entity. It pays little or no attention to the fact that these minority groups are gendered and there is a substantial power inequality between men and women.

Critics of the policy include a longtime multiculturalism advocate, Manoly R. Lupul. In his memoir, *The Politic of Multiculturalism: A Ukrainian-Canadian Memoir*, (2005), he chronicles Canadian multiculturalism through his personal story, highlighting the experiences of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. According to Lupul, French Quebecois initially viewed official multiculturalism as an attempt to assimilate the French. Canadian multiculturalism was also challenged by what he calls the Anglophones’ schizophrenic attitude towards ethnicity; that is, while they tolerated the ethnic groups’ existence, they were not willing to grant ethnicity an official status. As a result, he contends, “few Caucasians, apart from the Ukrainians, showed much interest in exploring the possibilities of official multiculturalism-an approach that only

enervated the will of politicians and denied a strong and permanent base to multicultural policies and programs” (p.480). Hence, multiculturalism suffered serious setbacks right at its inception. Nonetheless, it continues to provide a needed support for minority groups.

Pupul concedes the fact that the initial agenda for multiculturalism was ethnocentric. It was promoted by already integrated Europeans who wanted to maintain their ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness through cultural preservation, language retention, festivals, song-and-dance displays and bilingual education. It had little to do with human rights, race, color or religious diversity. In other words, multiculturalism was not meant to serve what he calls the *Third World Immigrants* from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean countries. In fact, he laments the idea that some of these groups justify their illiberal attitudes, foreign values and fundamentalist ideology on the ground that Canada is a multicultural society. Lupul concludes his memoir with the following warning:

Whatever multiculturalism may mean (and as we have seen the meanings are many) it must not be used by fundamentalists of any racial or ethno cultural background, who see their faith as inseparable from the social governance of their members. Nor must Third World fundamentalists in particular, look to the concept of multiculturalism to fight racism protecting such ways (p.482). Lupul listed some of these ‘ways’, which must not be allowed under the multiculturalism pretext in his book (p.481). The ‘illiberal ways’ include ignoring the line between religion and state; not separating faith from ethnicity, at least publicly; encouraging arranged/forced marriages, invoking Shariah laws, and opposing sexual practices such as contraceptives and sexual orientations such as homosexuality. Unfortunately, Lupul doesn’t sound to me any different from Herouxville’s city council members of Quebec. Both Lupul and the city council members imagine the Canadian society in a very restrictive manner.

Lupul and the city council would probably disagree with each other on many issues, but they have one thing in common: they view non-European, non-Christian cultural values with an apparent contempt.

Conversely, multiculturalism proponents (Kymlicka, 1998; Dion, 2000; Magsino, 2000; Adams, 2007), argue that, contrary to the critics' claims, Canadian multicultural policy encourages integration and healthy cultural encounter rather than isolation and marginalization. They cite the second and the third points of the policy, which states that "the government will assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society"; and "the government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity".

The policy clearly aims to create a platform that accommodates all Canadians. As Dion (2000), argues, the policy meant "to help Canadian citizens to develop and flourish. It in no way weakens the feeling of common Canadian identity. On the contrary, Canadians' acceptance of their plural identity nourishes with them a genuine love for their country" (p.95). Romulo Magsino (2000) agrees with Dion and argues further that Canadians not only diverse in their racial and ethnic backgrounds but also in their beliefs, values and customs. Hence, rather than attempting to assimilate or marginalize minoritized groups, Canadians should seek unity by embracing respect, tolerance and acceptance through multiculturalism. As he states: "the road to unity is paved, not by unbending not resistance, to others but, by mutual understanding and appreciation and accommodation to one another" (p.328).

The multicultural policy framework may seem one-sided; that is to say that though they promised support, the burden of integrating is on the side of the cultural minorities. Some critics contend that the policy does not go far enough in eliminating systemic privileging of the

mainstream culture and values. Nonetheless, the framework remains a significant document that provides a foundation for nurturing and managing diverse identities.

Much of the scholarly research on Canadian multiculturalism is informed by Kymlicka's liberal multicultural theory of minority rights (Parekh, 2006; Modood, 2007; Robson, 2007). The liberal theory of minority rights is grounded in the liberal idea of individual freedom. Will Kymlicka (2001), who is considered to be a leading proponent for this theory, sets his analysis of multiculturalism within the liberal tradition that considers individuals as autonomous free agents who are capable of making free and informed choices. Thus, ethnic minorities' distinctive cultural beliefs and practices are accommodated, but they are also expected to respect the liberal notion of individual autonomy. This conception of liberal multiculturalism places an emphasis on the individual's freedom to choose, but does not go far enough when it comes to group rights. According to Kymlicka (2006), "each individual should be free to decide whether, or to what extent, they wish to maintain an inherited ethnic or religious identity, and to what extent they wish to challenge or reject the practices associated with their inherited group membership" (p.3). Consequently, minority communities are expected to provide a set of options to their members without the ability to restrict the liberty of the individuals.

Despite various contestations and criticism, Kymlicka (2006) argues that his liberal multiculturalism theory provides "a convenient and already-established discourse and institutional infrastructure to negotiate these challenges" (p.3). Through this available venue, minority groups are able to advocate for their rights and establish institutions that serve their distinct needs. The discourse is meant to provide a tool that helps minority groups maintain and celebrate their distinct identities without facing undue pressure to assimilate or risk being marginalized by the mainstream society, and its powerful institutions.

As a decidedly liberal theorist, however, Kymlicka is committed to the principle of individual autonomy and choice regardless of whether or not these ideals run against the community's values. It is not clear, however, how these competing values can be satisfied simultaneously. In other words, if an individual decides to abandon a community's principles and values, will he or she be entitled to the membership privileges, or will the members of the community also have a right to abandon him or her?

Kymlicka's theory of minority rights acknowledges state-imposed/built-in privileging of cultural and religious understandings of the dominant European groups, particularly English and French speaking communities. This includes languages, public holidays, national values, and other symbols. This stance seems helpful because it acknowledges certain inequalities, which the minority groups have no choice but to accept.

Kymlicka proposes (1998 and 2001) the development of what he calls 'group specific rights' to compensate for some of the above-noted inequalities. This initiative is an attempt to support minority groups' demand for fairer terms of integration, which, on the one hand advocates for the recognition and accommodation of the distinctive needs and identities of the minority groups, and on the other hand limits the minority groups' vulnerability to the political, economic, and social pressures of the larger society.

The theory also states that while dominant groups enjoy certain extra privileges that, by default, are sanctioned and protected by the state, they should not enjoy an automatic right to impose their views on minority groups (Kymlicka, 1995). Rather, liberal proponents of multicultural group rights suggest creating a platform that promotes a healthy dialogue in which communities sit together to address differences, and work towards the development of shared understandings based on respect and tolerance.

The liberal theory of minority rights provides a framework for understanding the challenges that minority institutions face, as well as some potential opportunities for both dominant and minority groups in Canada. Situating the study within the liberal theory of minority rights could help me develop a deeper understanding of the various external and internal pressures that have direct or indirect impact on Islamic educational institutions in Canada.

Yet Kymlicka's theory of minority rights faces criticism from both sides of the argument. Some researchers view his theory to be lenient to non-liberal minority groups while some of these groups do away with, curtail, or simply ignore the basic rights of the women and girls in their communities. Others argue that Kymlicka's theory does not go far enough in protecting the cultural rights of non-liberal minorities.

Susan Okin (1999), a feminist writer, takes issue with Kymlicka's relatively mild language in defending women and girls' rights against the covert discrimination that exist in some minority cultures. In a strongly worded response, Okin (pp.20-24) points out that strict control of women and girls is a very common practice that is privately enforced with the complicity and sometimes collaboration of the elder women in some cultures. Okin further argues that the old, oppressive cultures work against women's interest and some young, female members of patriarchal minority cultures have no interest in preserving their old oppressive culture. Rather, they will be better off if the culture in which they were born becomes extinct and they have the opportunity to integrate/assimilate into a less-sexist majority culture. In her concluding remarks, Okin (1999) states that "unless women and more specifically young women are fully represented in negotiations about group rights, their interests may be harmed rather than protected by granting of such rights" (p.24).

Another type of criticism comes from Bhikhu Parekh. In one of his books, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (2006), Parekh acknowledges the valuable contribution of Kymlicka's theory, but raises questions about Kymlicka's classification of minorities into national and ethnic minorities, and the assumptions that he built on these arbitrary classifications.

Kymlicka (1995) groups cultural minorities into different categories: Voluntary immigrants, Refugees, and Aboriginal and Quebecois. He combines Aboriginals and Quebecois into one category he calls national minorities. Kymlicka then places voluntary immigrants and refugees on the other side of the continuum, and calls them ethnic minorities.

A national minority, according to this classification, "is territorially concentrated, was previously self-governing and later incorporated, is institutionally complete, and shares a common language and culture and in general a distinct cultural unit with a strong sense of collective identity" (Parekh, 2006:102). Ethnic minorities (mainly voluntary immigrants) are not territorially concentrated, they are not institutionally complete, and they are cut off from their cultural roots.

According to Kymlicka, the latter groups left their original country voluntarily and came to the host country to better their lives. By this action they waived their right to their culture. Hence, they are expected to embrace and live by the culture of their adopted homeland, while national minorities, according to Kymlicka, have the strongest moral claims for cultural protection (Parekh, 2006). The liberal majority therefore should treat the so-called national minorities as independent entities, and settle all disagreements, cultural or otherwise, by peaceful means. However, they should be required to be internally liberal.

Kymlicka builds and articulates his theory of minority rights on three principles, namely “that human beings have an essential interest in leading the good life, that the latter should be lived from within, and that its ends and projects should be revisable” (Parekh, 2006:105). However, Parekh’s critique of liberal minority rights raises some important questions such as: What is the philosophical status of these three propositions? If culture is a primary good (as Kymlicka rightly mentions elsewhere), how can one abandon his/her right to it any more than one can abandon his/her liberty? How can we assume that one waives the claim to his/her cultural rights by simply immigrating to another country? Is there a monolithic liberal society anywhere in the world? Is there a possibility of living a good life in a non-autonomous culture? If the ends and projects of the good life are revisable, are the ends and projects of liberalism also revisable (Parekh, 2006)?

Canadian multiculturalism is founded on the liberal conception that poses challenges to some communities who do not share the philosophical underpinnings of this theory. This is so because multiculturalism in Canada was initially designed for well-integrated European ethnic groups (Kymlicka, 2006) and the debates about multiculturalism were driven by Ukrainians, Italians, and other European immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s.

Multiculturalism in Canada may not have been intended to facilitate the integration of the Muslim community or accommodate Islamic education and its institutions, nor was multiculturalism meant to eliminate the challenges that Muslims and similar minority groups face. Admittedly, liberal multiculturalism promotes religious freedom, and liberal democratic states protect religious practices. The promotion and the protection are built upon a view that speaks to the issues of minorities from a secular vantage point. As Azmi (2001) argues, it fails to “speak to the issue as viewed from the ideological vantage point of religiously motivated

minority communities” (p.270). Minorities apparently get along with the system as long as they conform to the Western secular understanding of religion, which relegates it to the private, personal realm.

According to Taylor (1994) and Yusuf (2000), liberal multiculturalism adopts and universalizes a Christian perception of religion that separates the sacred from the mundane. In this case, Yusuf further argues that “religious freedom becomes merely the freedom to conform to another society’s perception of what religion entails” (2000, p.32). To Yusuf and others (Meer, 2007; Modood, 2007; Taylor, 1994), religious minorities like Muslims, who offer a different worldview on the nature of religion and education, may have trouble with, and pose a challenge to, the current multicultural system.

There is an ingrained and acknowledged privileging of the majority’s history, values, and language. The Canadian system, as Kymlicka describes (2001), appears neutral on the surface, while favouring the dominant groups. Kymlicka (2001) acknowledges that, “it is the majority language that is used in public institutions; the majority holidays that are recognized in the public calendar, the majority history that is taught in schools” (p.43). The minorities’ request for group-specific rights therefore, is a reasonable demand to mitigate these unfair arrangements.

Kymlicka’s examples present a sample of the built-in privileging of the mainstream ways of life. There are state-imposed integration initiatives (Kymlicka, 1998), which minorities have no choice but to accept because they realize that their lives are bound up by their participation in the dominant institutions. These institutions operate in either French or English, and have deeply rooted elements of the culture and values of these dominant groups. These arrangements tend to marginalize all minority groups, but they particularly place the Muslim community in a position of real disadvantage, largely because liberal multicultural discourse addresses issues that have

some connections to the public institutions, and speak to the needs of secular ethnic minority groups (Azmi, 2001). This discourse hardly accommodates the needs of ideologically-motivated but diverse religious minorities who feel that the current liberal multiculturalism and its educational institutions tend to marginalize their values and beliefs (curtailing the role of religion from public affairs including education, and relegating it to the private and personal realm is considered an example of marginalization from the Islamic perspective). This perhaps explains the rapid growth of Islamic institutions even in the provinces that do not provide any financial support to independent schools. Consequently, some Muslim groups strive to find alternatives that include Islamic educational institutions.

The apparent reluctance of some Muslims to embrace liberal multiculturalism does not mean that Muslims are hostile to multiculturalism, for the Muslim community itself is very diverse and multicultural. However, as Azmi argues (2001), some “Muslims have significant problems with liberal multiculturalism that directs them to marginalize religious values and beliefs in favor of secular inclusiveness. A multiculturalism that includes the outlook of faithful Muslims would need to allow the explicit retention of religious values and beliefs, even when these run contrary to prevailing public norms” (p.271). For these groups, Islam is the standard, against which all other ideas and values must be measured. This is in line with a generally accepted Islamic view that maintains that clear evidence from the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah* overrides all other views, regardless of their source. This is not to say that Muslims and their educational institutions are against multiculturalism, but they may require a kind of multiculturalism that provides adequate space for religious values.

This study is built on an assumption that Canadian multiculturalism allows people to be free to maintain and express their religious and cultural identities without fear of discrimination.

Canadian society, according to Taylor (1994), singles itself out in the way it treats minorities, offering a unique experience of respect, tolerance, and willingness to accommodate diverse ideas and groups. These ideals provide a platform that could be used to foster a healthy multicultural society. Looking into multiculturalism through the concept of selfhood and the politics of recognition will provide the tools to explore how Islamic educational institutions in Canada promote and maintain the Islamic worldview and identity in a multicultural, secular context.

In this dissertation, I combine multicultural theories and the Islamic educational worldview to analyze the case study. I use this multicultural framework to explore how Muslim educational institutions utilize Canadian multiculturalism, which entails building minority groups' capacity to grow and contribute to overcome cultural barriers, promote cultural encounters and exchanges among Canadian communities, and empower minorities to acquire one of the official languages. I will use the Islamic education framework to examine if and how Islamic educational institutions are able to achieve the established goals of Islamic education in a multicultural, predominantly secular society.

This case study looks at two schools, one a school type Muslim institution and the other a Madrasah. The two selected schools are representative of the Islamic educational institutions in Canada. By examining these two institutions, this study attempts to increase our understanding of how Islamic educational institutions in Canada maintain and promote Islamic worldviews and identity in a multicultural and predominantly secular society. The next chapter introduces the research by providing a conceptual analysis of two key terms used in this study, namely identity and Islamic education.

3 ISLAMIC IDENTITIES IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

Transmitting an Islamic identity to their younger generation is a primary concern in almost all Muslim communities, particularly where Muslims are minorities. These communities spend valuable time and resources in establishing various institutions to promote and maintain Islamic identity. The first section of the chapter defines identity and examines its markers, importance and multiplicities. Identity was defined here and explained according to Taylor's concept of essential selfhood. I expanded on the concept using works by Nelson (2001), Merry (2008) and Monshipouri (2009). The second section introduces Islamic identity; it explores its fundamental elements and some of the challenges Muslim communities face in fostering and maintaining this identity.

3.1 Identity

The identities of an individual or a group of people are essentially described as a set of characteristics that an individual or groups of individuals recognizes their own, or what makes them different or unique. The characteristics, which render an individual or group as unique, include their core values, beliefs and convictions that structure their lives. These properties form a core personality that gives meaning to a person's self-understanding in various contexts (Monshipouri 2009; Merry, 2008 Abdi & Ghosh, 2004; Maalouf, 2003). From this viewpoint, a person's identity could be viewed as what the rest of the world is not. To Monshipouri (2009: 4), identities create a measure of inclusion and exclusion, which defines a social 'we' to delineate and mark the boundaries against the 'other'. These unique properties, be they individual's or groups' are what Charles Taylor characterizes as an 'essential self'.

Identities are defined as "the interaction of person's self-conception with how others conceive her: identities are the understandings we have of ourselves and others" (Nelson, 2001: 6). This is

to say that identities combine the personal or the inner world with the collective and cultural realm (Monshipouri, 2009; Merry, 2008). Identities, therefore, relate to self- understanding, self-esteem and self- reflection on the one hand and how others understand, judge and value that self-conception and its manifestations. As Nelson further argues:

Identity is a question of how others understand what I am doing, as well as how I understand what I am doing. If other people perceive my actions to be those of a morally trustworthy person then they will permit me to act freely. In addition, though, I must see myself as a morally trustworthy person if I am to act freely. Both others' recognition that I am a morally responsible person and my own sense of myself as a morally responsible person, then, are required for the free exercise of moral agency (p.22).

Taylor (1989 and 1994) offers an insightful analysis that helps explain the nature of what he calls 'essential self/identity', its formation and politics. He eloquently connects "selfhood" or identity to the definition of the good. Identity, to him, is a moral issue that is embedded in our answers to the essential question: "What makes our lives meaningful?" Alternatively, "What makes life worth living?" To this end, Taylor situates selfhood in the realm of morality. He considers selfhood not only an inner component of our personal characteristics, but a major contributing factor that shapes our perception of both self and the world. As he explains (1989), "Our style of movement expresses how we see ourselves as enjoying respect or lacking it, as commanding it or failing to do so" (p.15). In other words, identity is what constitutes a person's self perception both as an individual and also as a member of a group.

From the standpoint of identity as a moral issue, Taylor introduces the notion of politics of recognition, which could be viewed as both a complement to and consequence of selfhood. That is, if selfhood or identity is a characteristic that uniquely belongs to an individual or a group, and

if this characteristic defines the good life for the individual or the group, then all attempts to eliminate this characteristic and its manifestations are immoral and unacceptable. Instead, unique identities should be recognized, accepted, and celebrated.

This is to say that rather than searching for universal rights for individuals, Taylor's politics of recognition (1994) states that "what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else" (p.82). To Taylor, recognition of the varied identities of individuals and groups is what makes liberal multicultural societies unique, because of the way they treat minorities and the rights they accord to them, including minorities who do not share in the definition of good. Other leading scholars in the area of culture and identity agree with Taylor on the need to empower minorities to protect and celebrate their distinct identities. Iris Marion Young, who is another leading proponent of this multicultural theory (in the American context), argues that "the rejection and devaluation of one's culture should not be a condition of full participation in social life" (1990:166). Rather, minority groups should be free to express their religious and cultural identities without fear of discrimination and marginalization.

Taylor further argues that, first, any culture that provides meaning for diverse individuals with different needs and characteristics over a long period of time deserves admiration and respect even if this culture contains certain elements that others may object to or disagree with. Second, individuals and groups have the potential to form and define their own identities. However, societies also shape identities by the cues they give to individuals and groups.

Our identity is shaped by others because we need the recognition of others in order to be (Butler, 1997). Indeed, our own actions are a reflection of the cues that we receive from others. As Taylor argues (1989), "the very way we walk, move, gesture or speak is shaped, from the

earliest moment, by our awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in a public space, and this space is potentially of respect or contempt, of pride or shame” (p.15). Hence, one’s identity is, in part, subject to the approval of others; to be deprived of others’ approval and /or appreciation is to be denied the chance to function meaningfully in one’s own society. In other words, not recognizing or denying individual and group identity distorts that particular individual or group’s self image and causes real damage.

Max Depree (1992) illustrates this deprivation of recognition by recalling his personal experiences at the Phoenix hotel: Whenever he went to the hotel’s restaurant one of the mannered hostesses took his orders, politely asking him the same question, “How many?” However, on one of his visits to the hotel, his knees gave away and he ended up in a wheelchair. Next morning, he went to the restaurant, but this time his wife was pushing the wheelchair. The hostess came and carefully passed by Mr. Depree and asked his wife politely, “How many?” Then, without looking at him, asked his wife, “Would he like to sit at the window?” Depree (1992) insightfully observes, “I had disappeared. In a twinkling, this polite, well-meaning young woman had stripped me of identity and position. It made me realize that to be oppressed is wrong, but to be overlooked may be even worse” (p.54). Mr. Depree had a considerable power and agency at his disposal. He was the chairman of the board of directors of Herman Miller, a primary innovator in the furniture business and one of the top twenty-five firms on the Fortune list of the most admired companies in the United States of America. Yet, it was a painful experience for him to be ignored even in a trivial setting.

Considering the power of individual groups’ need for, and vulnerability to labelling, “non-recognition and/or misrecognition can inflict harm and literally constitute a form of oppression that incarcerates people in a false, deformed and existentially reduced mode of being” (Abdi &

Ghosh, 2004:27). Hence, Amin Maalouf's (2003) strong language is perhaps understandable in his description of some Muslim communities around the globe when he writes: "They are living in a world which belongs to others, and obey rules made by others, a world where they are orphans, strangers, intruders or pariahs" (P.75). They feel so because almost everything they see belongs to others; history, language, heroes, even what constitutes a good name, belongs to the dominant culture and its beneficiaries. While a particular group may feel excluded, isolated, or targeted, as Maalouf points out, finding pure and exclusive identity is hard, if not impossible. However, identities are neither particularly singular nor fixed and stable.

There are always multiple and overlapping identities. Each individual possesses and remains loyal to multiple identities. From the minute that we come into this world, we are subject to multiple identities, and with the exception of a few physical characteristics that we are born with, our identities continue to be ever incomplete and open to modification or expansion. Over the course of our life we may ignore or abandon certain aspects of what we consider to be important elements of our identity. The elements or markers include religion, nationality, social location, or gender, to name a few.

As mentioned in the first chapter, my multiple identities include being a Muslim, a Canadian, an East African, a teacher, a UBC graduate student, a school principal, and the list goes on. I feel comfortable with all of these labels. I have a certain level of affinity with each of these markers, but I don't consider myself unique in having a long list of identities. Nor do I think that I am out of the ordinary in my loyalty to all of them.

These identity markers often coexist without major problems. The situation may change, however, when these markers come into conflict. As Grant (1997) explains markers of multiple identities "may sometimes conflict, but this is not a necessary feature of multiple identities

except when the forces behind any of the markers demand complete and unconditional loyalty” (p.14). In dealing with multiple identities, experiencing a certain level of tension, and even making some tradeoffs, is expected and considered normal in one’s daily life.

One could ask whether I am a Muslim first, or a Canadian, or East African, etc., Tariq Ramadan (2010) considers this a bad question, and I agree with him. To Ramadan, the question explicitly addresses the person’s identity, but it also implicitly questions the individual’s loyalty. He describes these questions as meaningless because they are based on an oppositional definition of identity. Ramadan further argues that:

There are different orders within which one will have to define oneself differently. Asking whether one is primarily Muslim or American, Australian, Italian, French or Canadian opposes two identities and affiliations that do not belong to the same realm. In the realm of religion and philosophy, that which imparts meaning to life, a human being is first and foremost an atheist, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim: her or his passport or nationality cannot answer the existential question. When an individual must vote for a candidate at an election, she or he is first an American, Italian, French or British citizen involved in national affairs. Depending on the realm or the field of activity, the individual therefore puts forward one identity or another, and that is not contradictory (pp. 36-37).

In other words, every individual carries more than one identity, and he or she gives priority to one of these multiple identities according to the environment or the social setting. To further illustrate this point, Ramadan presents this telling example when he says, “You are a poet and a vegetarian. If you are a dinner guest, this is no time or place to insist on your identity as a poet, while if you attend a poetry circle, you are certainly not going to introduce yourself as a

vegetarian” (p.37). Hence, while defining identity in terms of difference or uniqueness is considered a natural reaction, particularly during upheaval, this approach could lead to a confusing situation in which people’s identities are reduced to a singular element, which opposes other essential components of the individual’s identity.

Identities are multiple, but they are also dynamic and constantly in flux. They are, for the most part, a product of their socio-cultural and political circumstances (Monshipouri, 2009). As Merry Argues (2008), “our identities, far from being and secure, are constantly unfolding, adapting new meaning and appropriating new habits, customs and beliefs according to contextual needs” (p.76). In other words, identities are subject to new reinterpretations as they constantly acquire new meanings. The result is, for most people, hybrid identities that combine the essential self to contextualized and culturally mediated components.

3.2 Islamic Identity

The word “Islam” means both peace and submission. A Muslim, therefore, is a person who submits to his or her Lord peacefully. This submission requires declaring the testimony of the faith, which translates to: There is no God but *Allah*, and that Mohammed is the last messenger of God. Bearing witness to or declaring this testimony is a key to the Islamic faith. It also introduces a worldview and identity that is shaped by Islam. This worldview provides a ground of unity for Muslim communities. At the same time, it may pose challenges in forming and fostering a Muslim identity in multicultural, predominantly secular societies.

The concept of *Shahadah* (testimony of faith) is a fundamental principle of Islam. The *Shahadah* is a declaration of faith that is not only a personal issue but also has a social implication for accepting the teachings of Islam, which means joining the *Ummah*, the nation or community, of Islam. The *Shahadah* constitutes the purest expression of Islamic identity.

The *Shahadah* both forms and informs Muslim identity (Ramadan, 2004). It regulates not only the spiritual, but also the social aspects of the believer's life, regardless of which sect he or she may belong to, or which attitude of practice he or she may adapt. As Ramadan (2004) explains, "Muslim identity at the central pivot is... faith, practice and spirituality" (p.79). This means that a Muslim identity is founded on faith and the practices of certain teachings. However, manifestations of this faith-based identity can also be found in the cultural expressions of Muslim communities.

Expressions such as: "Assalamu Alaikum," a greeting meaning "Peace be upon you," are universal among Muslims. "Bismillah," or "In the name of God," when starting anything, is a common preface to any declaration. "Alhamdulillah," means "thanks to God," a phrase used if someone is responding to a greeting or whenever one accomplishes a task. "Insha *Allah*", or "God willing", is said when referring to a future undertaking. These terms and many others go beyond race, ethnicity, nationality and even one's level of faith, practice, or tendencies towards traditionalism, fundamentalism, and modernism. These phrases are all in Arabic. However, they are now part of the Muslim lexicon and generally are used by Muslims all over the world irrespective of what language they speak. Some may use the Arabic version while others may translate to their local languages. However, they all understand what is meant by the terms.

As principal of an Islamic school, I serve students whose parents come from more than 30 different countries, and in this capacity I meet with many newcomers. The new immigrants often come to my school with interpreters. I listen to them through interpreters, yet I hear these phrases and others, equally familiar, punctuating their speech. They may speak Mandarin, Hausa, Turkish or Serbo-Croatian, but in addition to the faith and common practice they share a

common vocabulary that expresses the faith and collective practices. This collectivity constitutes an essential self for Muslims regardless of race, ethnicity, or national boundaries.

Ramadan (2004) explains identity by introducing the concept of *Ummah* as a basic identity marker for a transnational community of believers. *Ummah* literally means a group, a community, or a set of belief within a group. It refers to an ideological community (Ataman, 2003; Ramadan, 2004) that shares religious beliefs and ethical values as their primary frames of reference. *Ideally*, the concept of *Ummah* presents a connection that goes beyond ethnicity, race, or national boundaries without eliminating these other markers.

Islam offers a common vocabulary and collective practice. However, it is not and has never been a culture of its own, but it has fostered and given rise to a range of cultures (Hellyer, 2006; Al-Ashqar, 1994). It provided guiding principles and ethical parameters. Islam influenced these cultures immensely, but it was also enriched by them. As Abd Allah argues (2006), “sustained cultural relevance to distinct peoples, diverse places and different times underlay Islam’s long success as a global civilization” (p.357). The adaptability to changing times and places enabled Islam to preserve principles while still showing flexibility to the ever-changing contexts. To this end, Islam’s fundamental principles were likened to a crystal clear river with pure, life-giving waters that have no color of their own, but reflect the bedrocks over which they flow. The flowing waters connect different parts of the land (the *Ummah*). The (waters) also provide sustenance (spiritual and ethical guidelines).

The flowing waters may change certain aspects of the landscape, but will never eliminate the basic foundation of the land. To give an example, Islam has spread and still spreads across the globe. However, the culture of the first generation of Muslim has not. Islam has become an indigenous/local religion for the Indians who accepted as the case has been for the Senegalese

and the Bosnians. This is to say that rather than exporting a particular culture, Islam provided “a process by which cultures were filtered or adjusted but never entirely banished by Islam” (Hellyer, 2006:336). Even though Islam eradicated certain aspects of the Arabian culture, which in turn, contradicted or went against the Islamic principles, it also adapted, and actually encouraged, various practices and traditions of the Arabian people.

By filtering or adjusting cultures, Islam paves the way for integrated cultures and identities that are governed by its principles but rooted in the indigenous ways of doing things. As Abd Allah explains (2006), “a culture is successful when it imparts an operative identity, produces social cohesion and gives its members knowledge and skills that empower them to meet their individual and social requirements effectively” (p.360). Consequently, a key measure for a successful culture is the capacity to impart a sense of self, where individuals are comfortable with their own personal identities. Equally important, culture also satisfies the sense of belonging to a social unit. Adjusting cultures and integrating them to Islamic values is one way of satisfying this need.

As mentioned earlier, Islam provides a collective sense for its followers through the membership to the *Ummah*. This (at times) imaginary community is not bound by geographical location, historical chapter or ethnic attachment. *Ummah*, in this context is a diasporic construct that psychologically binds Muslims to an ideal community of believers. Having affinity towards the *Ummah* is part of the Islamic faith as mentioned earlier. However, this feeling has been accentuated by a number of reasons, including improved worldwide communications, major international incidents in around the ‘Muslim world’ and an overall disillusionment with post colonial national states. Hence, the number of contemporary Muslims and particularly the youth, no longer feel connected to a national state or an ethnic group (Abd-Allah, 2006; Hellyer,

2006). Instead, they strive to strengthen their ties to the larger Muslim communities around the world while endeavoring to cultivate a healthy relationship with the local context.

The emphasis on *Ummah* has its foundations in the Islamic sources (the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*). However, and perhaps equally important, the concept is often employed in response to both internal and external pressures, which face Muslim communities. *Ummah* in this context is used as a resource to combat prejudice, stereotypes and other forms of maltreatments against the Muslim individuals and communities (Merry, 2008). The concept is also used to overcome internal conflicts within the Muslim community. As Monshipouri argues (2009), many Muslim organizations see in the concept “an opportunity to bypass their ethnic and national cleavages and to create something closer to what an *Ummah* (community) should be. This perceived rather than real community, demonstrates that global Muslim identity has meant delinking Islam from any given culture in favor of a transnational and universal set of specific patterns (p.24). Organizations such Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and Islamic Circles of North America (ICNA), among many others, illustrate this trend.

While it is true that Islam provides Muslims with a unique system that caters to all aspects of life, it is also true that followers of the faith are highly diverse individuals and groups that sometimes appear to be very different in all aspects of their beliefs and behavior. In addition to their racial, national and ethnic differences, Muslims also belong to different theological sects. Even if they identify themselves as belonging to one sect (i.e. *Sunnah* or Shi'ah), followers within that sect may differ in the jurisprudential school of thought that they follow.

Muslims also differ in the ways they practice Islam and how they respond to modernity. Some researchers (e.g. Lawson, 2005) classify Muslims into three tendencies, namely fundamentalist, traditionalist, and modernist. The fundamentalist approach attempts to keep Islam in its purest

form. This group makes a concerted effort to protect Islamic teachings from external corruptions (such as celebrating Christmas or other religious practices) and internal corruptions (such as introducing new acts of worship or performance of Islamic rituals in a new way) by eliminating all alien or innovative practices in Islamic rituals. Their goal is to ensure that Islam is taught and lived in its purest form without much consideration for the larger society's cultural norms or local customs. They attempt to stop, or at least minimize, outside influences on Islamic practices.

The traditionalist approach allows a slow process of change and adaptation. This process is generally guided by Islamic principles, but tends to mix Islam with ethnic, national, or traditional cultures. This form of Islam, according to Saeed (2009), "is largely ethnically based, coloured by Islam from 'back home'. Its focus is, primarily, on basic rituals such as prayer and fasting as well as Islamic practices brought from places of origin" (p.209). In fact, some of these communities are connected to their original homeland more than they are connected to the Muslim community of Canada. They often send their children back home, and import religious leaders and religious learning resources from their countries of origin.

The third group, modernists, adopts a loose interpretation of Islam. Their goal is to establish indigenous Islam within the secular multicultural society. While loyal to the basic tenets of the faith, modernists give themselves a large margin of freedom to reinterpret certain aspects of Islam. They are not often attached to a particular school of thought, theological group, or any transnational Islamic movement (Saeed, 2009). In general, they do not subscribe to the notion that Islam is a comprehensive way of life. Rather, they view Islam as a spiritual and ethical source that provides guidance in how one should relate to *Allah* and His creation.

It is important to note, however, that these tendencies do not constitute theological sects or jurisprudential schools of thought. In fact, a "Muslim may hold all three types of attitude,

depending on different situations in life” (Lawson, 2005:7). Further, the internal diversity among Muslim communities may negatively affect but it does not eliminate the unified Islamic identity. As Monshipouri argues (2009), “whether Muslims identify themselves as Wahabis, Tablighis or Salafis, Militants or reformists, they all are part of a process to recast Muslim identity in a different light, one that is not attached necessarily to a particular culture or territory” (p.17). Therefore, despite their variations or tendencies, they all have a claim to the Islamic identity in their own ways.

Muslims in Canada come from a set of diverse racial, linguistic, ethnic and national origins. They experience Islam in different settings and circumstances, and some of them bring with them practices and interpretations that are sometimes unique to their particular background. These diverse experiences and interpretations often lead to fragmentation and sometimes internal conflicts within a diverse Islamic community, posing challenges to the community’s collective efforts. While the communities show various levels of commitment to Islam and its universal principles, most of them, nevertheless come from postcolonial nation states, bringing with them their national and regional cultures, which in some cases conflict. These internal diversities are not as challenging as the external pressures, which face Muslim individuals and institutions in Canada.

Pressure on the Muslim community and its educational institutions has increased since September 11, 2001. Muslim communities and their institutions around the world became the focus of the media and law enforcement agencies after what is now commonly referred to as 9/11. The global war on terror, in many cases, put Islamic institutions under constant scrutiny and confines a large number of Muslim communities to live under what could be described as psychological incarceration.

Muslim individuals and institutions experience various degrees of difficulty in preserving their traditions and practicing certain aspects of their religion. Without minimizing some of the positive indications about how the Canadian population views its Muslim members, there are segments in the Canadian population that view Islamic educational institutions as a potential threat to national security.

Muslim schools have been blamed for teaching extremism, religious intolerance, militant theology, and even serving as a potential training ground for terrorism. Opponents of Islamic education in Canada express concerns about the possibility of these educational institutions becoming training grounds or recruiting centers for future terrorists who may collaborate with Canada's enemies, or plan attacks, targeting Canadians (Kymlicka, 2003). Some of the opponents of Islamic educational institutions actually urge Canadian law enforcement agencies to thoroughly review the Islamic Studies curricula of Canadian Muslim schools.

The poor and, at times, misguided, presentation of Islam and Islamic institutions in the media both accentuates and perpetuates general anxiety about the way of life of Muslims who outwardly express or practice their religion, as two recent controversies in Quebec illustrate. One example of these increased tensions involves Asmahan Mansour, an 11-year-old Muslim girl who was ejected from a soccer tournament simply for wearing a hijab. In another example, a group of girls in Montreal were stopped from practicing Taekwondo while wearing the headscarf. Like Asmahan, these girls were members of a club, training and competing like the rest of the members (Adams, 2007). However, the girls were expelled from the competitions citing safety concerns. Further, despite allowing hijabi girls to past competitions, the Quebec Federation of Taekwondo insisted on the ban citing rules banning headscarves, jewelry or any other accessories worn by the competitor under the helmet.

In addition to the struggle to cope with internal fragmentation and external pressures, Muslim communities and their institutions face serious challenges in finding a clear and cohesive system for educating their children. Young Muslims in non-Muslim societies bring different experiences and practices of their faith than the older generation. Muslim youth often attempt to retain some of their parents' ethnic and Islamic values while living in non-Muslim societies that sometimes espouse values and practices that are not acceptable to Islam. However, because the youth need the acceptance of the dominant society (Zine, 2001: 404), they constantly struggle to negotiate multiple layers of identity within three often-conflicting cultural frames of references. The conflict stems from a pressure from the dominant culture, the resistance from their ethnic or national tradition, and the teaching of Islam that may or may not agree with the two cultures.

These conflicting forces put young Muslims in a challenging position. They integrate, and sometimes assimilate, into the dominant society's cultural values in ways that may create tension between them and their elders. These kinds of tensions are common in most marginalized youth from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly second-generation immigrants who experience culture differently from their mainstream counterparts. The former produces a hybrid culture in a framework that belongs to the dominant society. Hence, what the second generation creates cannot resemble what their parents or grandparents either left behind or brought with them (Abdi and Ghosh 2004). The dissonance between the home values and school culture leads to a generational conflict.

As indicated earlier, Muslim youth grow up and live in predominantly non-Muslim societies that espouse norms and practices that often conflict with the rules and norms of Islamic teachings. This generation will adapt, modify, and sometimes completely embrace the norms of the dominant culture. Because of the current political climate, some may succumb to the

pressure and distance themselves from their Islamic identity. As Hussain (2009) argues, “it is quite possible that these later generations might start to pick and choose what aspects of Islam they wish to hold to. One approach, which they might choose is the path of the least resistance, or the least differentiation, so they can look and live just like any of the other Westerners” (p.5).

For many of these youth, Islam would be a marker of identity among other markers, but it might not be the primary one. In fact, most Muslim youth, as Barazangi (1991) hypothesizes, “identify primarily with the American [Western] values and secondarily with Islamic value system” (p.169). While it is a fact that some ‘disoriented’ and ‘frustrated’ youth, as Charles Taylor (2009) calls them, may have developed some radicalized counter-identity; Barazangi’s preceding statement could apply to some Muslim youth in North America and elsewhere, even after 9/11 and 7/7. However, adapting to, or embracing the dominant culture doesn’t necessarily mean abandoning Islamic identity. This may be particularly true when the youth receive an adequate Islamic education.

In summary, this chapter introduces identity as an essential self that has a moral foundation, which is, at the same time, open and expandable. In this chapter, the concept of *Ummah* is presented as a primary marker for Muslim identity. Through the concept of *Ummah*, Muslims aspire to establish a transnational community of believers that transcends race, ethnicity, and nationality. Without minimizing the external pressures, poor resources, and diverse approaches, an effort has been made to establish institutions that reflect Islamic ideology in a secular, multicultural context. These institutions, as Abd-Allah (2006) put it, attempt to “foster sound cultural expression, while being designed to meet all our educational needs” (p.370). In general, Muslim communities aim to establish institutions, which are able to produce

individuals who live and function in non-Muslim societies, but structure their lives according to the principles of Islam.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a good fit for this study, which aims to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic educational institutions in Canada. By interacting with the participants of the research in their natural settings, I was able to form a detailed understanding of the setting and context of the study as well as the participants' frame of reference (Creswell, 2007; Marshal & Rossman, 1999) in order to gain an understanding of the participants' worldview and identities within the socio-cultural context in which they live. The case study employs various data collection methods. Interviewing the participants, observing them in their natural settings, and reviewing related documents helped to answer the research question: How do Islamic educational institutions in Canada sustain an Islamic worldview and promote Islamic identity within a multicultural society? To put it differently, how do these institutions negotiate the tension between the principles of Islam as a way of life, and the pressure to conform to liberal secular norms and values in the Canadian context?

4.1 Qualitative Method

Qualitative researchers from a broad range of disciplines and fields use a variety of approaches and techniques. They often conduct their studies within the subjects' natural settings to understand the participants' world. According to Marshall & Rossman (1995), "one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions--their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive world" (p.57). Qualitative research involves the use of data such as texts, documents, interviews, and observations to understand and explain a social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Through this case study, I endeavour to capture and analyze people's feelings, and values within their social cultural context.

As Robert Yin (2003) defines it, a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context” (p.13). It involves an in-depth study of an individual, group, phenomenon or an issue through a bounded system (Bell, 1999; Creswell, 2007). It is often conducted in a natural setting where the researcher spends extended time (Stake, 1995), observing, interviewing and reviewing documents.

The case study method has been classified into different types (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). One way of grouping the case study method is to classify it as intrinsic or instrumental. An intrinsic case study is conducted when one has an interest in a case for its own sake. In this situation, the goal is to develop a rich understanding of the particularities of a specific case without forming generalizations about similar cases or issues.

The instrumental case study examines a particular case in order to understand other cases with similar conditions and experiences. In other words, the case is instrumentally used to accomplish something else other than understanding the particularity of that case`s specific situation. A successful instrumental case study, therefore, should provide an in-depth understanding of both the particularities of a case and the various interactive processes that are at work. These particularities are used to provide an explanation for a phenomenon in the general population.

This study uses the instrumental model, looking at two schools, both located in British Columbia. The schools I selected are representative of Islamic educational institutions in Canada. Lessons learned from cases like these often provide information about the wider population (Bassegy, 1999; Yin, 2003). This case study, therefore, can contribute to a greater understanding of Islamic education institutions in Canada and other similar social contexts. The selected schools constitute a representative sample of Muslim educational institutions in Canada because they include the school type that conforms to the norms of the public school system and

Madrasah type that conforms to the traditional Muslim learning ways. The institutions were instrumentally (Stake, 1995) examined to understand each one of them as a case but, more importantly, to provide insights into how Islamic educational institutions in Canada sustain an Islamic worldview and promote Islamic identity within a multicultural society.

4.2 Sites and Participants

Access: I was granted full access to both schools without major problems. Being a Muslim and a fellow educator helped me gain access to these institutions. One of the principals and some members of his teaching staff knew me personally and were able to make all the necessary arrangements before I arrived at the site. The principal explained my visits to the staff and asked them to cooperate.

In the post 9/11 era, this is important because, in general, Muslim educational institutions are hesitant in granting free access to researchers and media personnel. There is a concern about the possibility of misinterpreting or misusing certain events or aspects of the institutions. I was fortunate that both schools accommodated my needs very well. They provided me with a work station, located in the libraries. I used these work stations as bases to write my notes, read school documents, and in some cases just talk with staff members.

Participants: A total of fifteen individuals participated in interviews. The interviewees consisted of two principals, six students, five teachers and two parents.

Participants from Cordova School (pseudo name) consisted of one administrator (the principal), four teachers, four students and two parents. The adult participants at Cordova include two males (including the principal) and five females. This is in addition to four student participants, of whom two were boys from Grade Six and two were girls from Grades Six and

Nine. In the *Medina* Islamic school (pseudo name), the principal, one teacher and two students, one in Grade Seven and the other in Grade Nine, participated in the interviews.

The sample was relatively diverse in terms of religion, gender and ethnicity. The participants were all Muslims, except for two teachers; they all spent more than three years in the Muslim schools. Eight interviewees were female. This included two students, three teachers and two parents from Cordova and one teacher from *Medina* school. The sample also included seven male participants, a teacher, a principal and two students from Cordova. The principal and two students from *Medina* school participated in the study. Further, nine participants were from Indian subcontinent backgrounds (Pakistan, Fiji, Guyana), two from Arabic-speaking countries (Iraq and Libya), two Caucasians (Irish and Ukrainian). The participants also included one person of Japanese background and another participant from Ethiopia.

Each interview took between an hour and an hour and a half. Except for one participant who requested to be interviewed outside of the school, all interviews took place in the schools. At *Medina* School, all interviews were conducted in the school library. At Cordova School, the principal was interviewed outside of the school. Two teachers asked to be interviewed in their own classrooms. One parent was interviewed in the library, while the rest of the interviews were conducted in the school's science lab.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

The primary method for collecting data for this study was the interviews. This method offers an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of students, teachers, principals and parents in concerning Islamic education and schools in Canada. Observations and document reviews are used as secondary methods to supplement the interviews.

Interview: This method is a form of a conversation in which two or more parties exchange information and insights. In an interview the information is expected to be formal, in-depth, and recorded in one way or another (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Unlike most other data collection methods, interviews produce high participation rates. In fact, as Palys (2003) reports, “participating rates among people approached for face-to-face interviews are often around 80% or even 90%” (p.59).

Face-to-face interviews may enhance the quality of data gathering (Palys, 2003) by ensuring that only the intended person/persons will provide information or complete the interview. This is in comparison with mailed survey questionnaires, where one needs to depend on the good will of the subjects in providing reliable information. From my experience, people often ignore mailed surveys. As a school administrator, I receive numerous survey questionnaires, but I complete very few of them, and I don’t think I am an exception in this regard.

As a research method, the interview is adaptable (Bell, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interviewers can follow up ideas, ask for explanations, steer the conversation to focus on the topic, and investigate motives and feelings. Interviewing also enables the researcher to clarify any confusion, fill information gaps, and encourage hesitant participants to offer more information. Interviewing is about collecting relevant information, and interviewers attempt to facilitate conversations that motivate respondents to share their knowledge and experiences. To achieve that goal, researchers prepare questions (Merriam, 1988) that translate the objectives of their research into an easily understandable language, encouraging respondents to share their knowledge, experiences, and ideas.

One area of concern, particularly with face-to-face interviews, is the absence of anonymity. No matter how many guarantees one offers, most of the participants will not feel as secure as

they feel when they complete impersonal questionnaires. “Considerable effort must, therefore, be made to ensure that rapport is created and that the interviewee legitimately believes there is no reason to feel threatened” (Palys, 2003: 161). This pitfall has the potential to affect the data. While explaining the external pressures Muslims face 9/11 one of the parents asked me to stop recording and sought my advice about the issue. When I asked why she was worried, she said “life became complicated and confusing. Sometimes, I don’t know what to say and what to avoid saying”. I dealt with her fears by explaining again the goals of the study and the reassuring her that all data extracted from her interviews will be kept secure and confidential, to be used only for the research. However, if conducted properly, interviewing, as a data collection method, has many advantages.

In this study, all interviews were audio-taped. Prior to this research, I tried to take notes while conducting some interviews, which was not easy for me. Because of this difficulty, I decided to record all my interviews. Using Dragon Naturally Speaking software, I transcribed most of the interviews into a Word document. Because the software was not always helpful, despite my training sessions, I transcribed some interviews manually.

Document review: According to Marshal and Rossman (1999), document review is “a method for describing and interpreting the artifacts of a society or social group” (p.117). The reviews provide an insight into the values, beliefs, and aspirations of the participants in their natural settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It provides support to the data collected through interviews.

In this secondary method, I endeavoured to collect various kinds of documents including handbooks, brochures, reports, monthly newsletters, and information from school websites. These various sources may corroborate, clarify, or even contradict what various individuals

claim in the interviews or what the researcher may observe. Document review can be conducted without disturbing the setting, which is a unique advantage for this data collection method. Some documents may provide misleading information that gives a distorted image of the institution. Hence, as Judith Bell explains (1999), “the guiding principle in document analysis is ... that everything should be questioned. Qualities of skepticism as well as empathy need to be developed” (p 116). This is to say that while it is important to show understanding, one should always look at the documents critically.

I have spent a considerable time reading various documents, and forming a general understanding about the two participating schools and their operations. However, the primary goal of the document review is to find data that are relevant to the Islamic worldview and identity. In this endeavour, the document review was limited to what was available and accessible.

The official websites of the schools provided insights about the two schools’ history, mission, and vision, as well as various instructional programs. Cordova Islamic school maintains a neatly developed website, which is frequently updated. The *Medina* website, on the other hand, contained only some basic information about the school, its location, philosophy, and educational programs. The website disappeared some time before the winter of 2009, though one may find scattered information about the school from the Internet.

School policy manuals provided valuable information about the two institutions. Cordova has a large document, called the *Teacher’s Binder*, which contains the staff handbook, the parents and students’ handbook, and general information about the school and the community. The staff handbook covers areas such school’s mission and philosophy, admission policies, parents and school communications, principles of good practice, teachers’ job descriptions, teacher

evaluation policy, operational procedures, dress codes, emergency plans, and other school-related issues.

In addition to school mission, philosophy, and goals, the handbook focuses on areas such as discipline, attendance, homework guidelines, grading guidelines, and general school operations. The rest of the binder provides information about bussing and bus rules, first day of school procedures, health guidelines, and fieldtrips and supervision policies, as well as a section for official forms.

Included in the document review was Cordova School's newsletter, *Cordova News*. The review was limited to issues from 2007-2009. The monthly newsletter disseminates school information to various stakeholders. It showcases the students' achievements and activities, and promotes the school's values and goals. To give an example, December 2007's cover story of the newsletter read: *CORDOVA SCHOOL 2007-2008 FUNDRAISER*. This was followed by the principal's message, which reinforced the school's achievements and goals and thanked the school community for the successful fundraising dinner. On the same page there is a quotation from the *Qur'an* regarding respect and gratitude to parents. The quote reads:

“--- and we enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and years twin was his weaning: (hear the command) show gratitude to me and to your parents ---” *Qur'an*: 567: 14. Under the title ‘*CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM*’ the newsletter depicts various student activities which include a day in a Grade One classroom, Grade Two's fieldtrip to Grouse Mountain, and the students' subsequent project. The pages also show Grade Six students' project, changing the World. Other editions of the newsletter follow a similar format.

As for *Medina* school, two manuals were reviewed: the *Employee Handbook*, and the *Parent Handbook*. The employee handbook is geared towards the teaching faculty, and covers topics such as mission, vision, goals and objectives as well as the school philosophy. It contains policies about the code of conduct and dress code, parent- teacher conferences and communications, teacher hiring and duties, reporting physical and sexual abuse, emergency plans and procedures, and other school-related guidelines.

Similarly, *Medina*'s Parent Handbook starts with the mission statement, goals and objectives, and school philosophy. The remainder of the handbook provides information geared towards parents. It covers issues such as admission policy, school days, holidays and absences, discipline policy, homework policy, hostel discipline policy, students' evaluation policy, and an appeal clause and various official forms.

The handbooks provide important information about the schools, their espoused values, and expected operations. However, one may wonder how much of the information in the handbooks reflects the reality in the two schools. How much of the information is original information about the school or just inserted fill? The two schools seem to be borrowing documents from each other. Though one of the principals told me that the schools have no formal relationship, some of their documents are identical. For instance, the principles of good practice as well as teachers' job description are the same. One may argue that principles of good practice are almost universal. However, the story does not end there; the two schools have the same mission statement, philosophy, and goals and objectives. Yet, as I will explain in Chapter Five, the two institutions have significant difference that makes their shared mission statement hard to comprehend.

Observation: Marshall and Rossman (1999) define observation as a “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and artefacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 107). Through observation, the researcher documents and describes complex actions and interactions. Observation provides valuable data to qualitative researchers. It helps the researcher learn aspects and characteristics of individuals and groups that no other method of data collection can reveal (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It provides an opportunity for the researcher to view the links and gaps between espoused ideals and lived realities.

Researchers use this data collection method assuming that behaviour is purposeful (Stake, 1995), that it indicates underlying beliefs and values that motivate individuals and groups to conduct themselves in a certain way. By observing human interactions researchers attempt to form a deeper understanding of the setting and its actors.

As I have mentioned earlier, I did not face considerable challenges in getting permission and finding my way around the two schools. Having secured that permission, I decided to spend most of my time around the students and teachers. In fact, five teachers at Cordova Islamic school allowed me to enter their classrooms and attend their teaching sessions. I spent two periods in each of Grades One and Two, two Grades Six and Seven classes, as well as a Grade Four Islamic Studies class. I also spent two blocks in a Grade Five Social Studies class at *Medina*.

To focus research on the relevant behaviour, the observations were semi-structured. Rather than attempting to record everything, my observations focused on activities that directly or indirectly helped to answer the research question. The observed activities fell under three major themes: worldview, identity, and miscellaneous, which refers to the relevant activities that do

not fit the first two categories. Interestingly, most of my notes ended up in the miscellaneous box.

My classroom visits focused on checking bulletin boards and other display areas, inside and outside of the classes. I also went through classroom library materials. More importantly, I was able to observe teaching and learning and all the related interaction. Both teachers and students seemed to be cautious in the first few minutes; however they soon conducted their business normally.

In addition to the classroom interactions, I tried to capture the schools' overall atmosphere, and interactions among members of school communities. Hence, I decided to observe the participants in their other roles in the institution. To achieve that, I attended one school-wide assembly and staff appreciation ceremony at Cordova School. I also sat in various locations, and followed the students to the playgrounds, and the schools' gymnasias, libraries, and the soccer field.

At *Medina*, I visited only one Grade Five Social Studies class and one *Qur'an* class. However, I joined the students in their afternoon prayers had lunch with them three times, and accompanied them while playing in the field several times.

4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis provides a process for making general statements about categories and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This process reduces the collected data to manageable size, and often helps the researcher interpret the insights, words, and experiences of the participants (pp.152-59). The analysis of my qualitative data falls into the following six phases. (1) Organizing the data: After transcribing interviews, I read the data several times to become familiar with it. Similarly, I reread my observation notes and did minor editing. (2) Generating

categories, themes and patterns: This phase aims to “identify salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link People and settings together” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.154). This is where I combined the primary data (interviews), with the secondary data (observation and document reviews). Reading the combined data sets facilitated the process of identifying patterns, recurring themes and even diverging and contradicting ideas.

(3) Coding the data: Careful reading of the data led to the identification of some common themes. Then the data were coded with abbreviated titles to better organize the information. (4)

Testing emergent understandings: This is the time to take another critical look at the data and determine its usefulness and centrality. This phase seemed to be the most challenging one. My understanding of what I thought to be emerging themes kept changing. Subsequently, the organization and the coding system of the data changed several times. (5) Searching for

alternative explanations: To present a reasonable argument for the study, I decided to reexamine the categories and themes of phase two. Following Marshall and Rossman (1999), I made serious attempts to find other plausible explanations.

(6) Writing the dissertation: After spending time in different phases of data analysis, and after revisiting the outline of the study and its different chapters, and making all necessary changes, I start drafting, using different writing strategies.

In conclusion, qualitative research methods are used to form a deeper understanding of the setting, the context, and the participants’ frame of reference (Creswell, 2007). I used interviews, observations, and document reviews to gather sufficient information for the study. I adopted Marshal and Rossman’s (1999) analytic procedures to generate themes and categories for the study.

The first part of the dissertation set the context for the study. It provided an introduction, literature review, conceptual analysis of two key terms, and a summary of my research methodology. After introducing both myself and the research, the first chapter presented a report on the Canadian Muslim community and its educational institutions. The second chapter provided a brief literature review through which I developed my theoretical framework for the dissertation. To further expand on the review, Chapter Three presented a conceptual analysis of two key terms of the dissertation, Islamic education and Islamic identity. The last chapter summarized this dissertation's research methodology. Chapters Five and Six will present the analysis and the findings of the data. Chapter Seven will conclude the study with a summary, implications and recommendations.

5 NEGOTIATING ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW

Islamic institutions help students to acquire knowledge and skills through experience based on the principles of Islam. This chapter profiles two Muslim schools in British Columbia, and presents the perception of key stakeholders in defining Islamic education. The chapter also briefly presents some of the challenges the two Muslim educational institutions face in maintaining Islamic worldview.

5.1 Islamic Education: A Profile of Two Schools

The following vignette provides a brief description of the two educational institutions selected for this study. The schools are both full-time, and have been in operation for more than five years. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudo names will be used for the two institutions. One of them will be called *Medina* Islamic school, while the other will be named Cordova Islamic School. These schools represent the dominant types of Islamic educational institutions in Canada. This profile introduces the two institutions as they represent themselves in terms of educational facility, demographics, instructional programs, and dominant values.

Figure 5.1 Medina Islamic School: a Closer Look

An Islamic Centered Approach to Education

Our Faculty and staff are dedicated to forming young men both spiritually and academically, as to provide morally sound leaders to both the Islamic and secular society.

The foundation of an Islamic education must be based on the pursuit of Divine knowledge. At Medina school, we strive to provide a safe environment, free of drugs and other social evils. Our goal is to cultivate academically advanced as well as morally and spiritually balanced educational program in order to produce Muslim leaders. Our academic program integrates British and Alberta approved curricula. We believe that divine knowledge is a fundamental element of Islamic education. Hence, our students spend a considerable portion of their time memorizing the Qur'an and studying the Sunnah of Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him). Our Islamic studies program is delivered by a highly qualified Islamic Studies instructors.

Taken from Medina School website

Medina school is an independent residential institution accredited by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. In accordance with the BC Independent School Act, Medina School is (formally) governed by an appointed education board. However, the board has little or no influence in the school. All decisions are made by the proprietor of school who is also the principal.

The school is a Madrasah-type educational institution with an adequate facility in a unique location. The school was initially established as a Category 2 full-time school, which housed around fifty students. However, it eventually evolved into an institution that primarily focuses on *Qur'an* memorization and Islamic Sciences. As mentioned in Chapter One, a Madrasah-type institution places primary importance on the traditional learning ways of Muslims. It particularly puts an emphasis on adherence to the details of the *Sunnah*, Prophet Mohammed's traditions and lifestyle.

At the time of the study the school had 26 students (all boys) from Grades Five to Nine, with three teachers, of whom one was responsible for academics and two for religious studies. The principal/coordinator is also the proprietor. The majority of the students are Canadian citizens from British Columbia and Alberta. However, the school also accepts students from the USA. I realized this when I met three students in the mosque while the rest of the boys were attending academic classes. When I asked why they were not attending the session, they responded that they were not Canadians and they came here to memorize the *Qur'an*. They told me that they would finish the *Qur'an* first, and then go back to secular schools in California. Interestingly, two of the three told me that they are planning to be medical doctors when they grow up.

Medina School is located on a beautiful farmland. Few houses and farms are close to the school. Surrounding towns and cities are 30 to 60 minutes away. This limits students' access to, and interaction with, the larger society except when they are off for the holidays or if their parents take them out on weekends. Students have no access to radio, television, or any other type of entertainment. They do have access to the Internet, but this is monitored and limited.

The facility seems spacious for such a small population of students. The complex occupies twelve and a half acres of land. It includes six classrooms, a library, a computer lab, the mosque, a large open field, as well as two small residential buildings.

Medina school is located in a rather isolated area. The isolation is deliberate and important for the stakeholders. There seems to be an assumption that the mainstream school system is fraught with distractions. Consequently, isolating students not only protects them from negative influences but it also provides them with a quiet environment for learning. Hence, the remote location of the school is repeatedly presented as a positive component of students' learning experience (Staff Handbook & Parent Handbook, 2008).

The principal of *Medina* Islamic School describes his institution as a uniquely safe and quiet educational facility. Looking over the school field, where some of his students are resting while others are individually studying, he proudly says:

Our students are here to stay away from bad influences and when they graduate from here, they will grow up to be good society members and good citizens who will not be involved in drugs, theft and damaging properties. They will be very polite, very helpful....We get good reports from the community when the students go back home that these boys are completely different from other boys in their age group. They pray on time, they are helpful; they are respectful and good listeners. It is within this context that *Medina* school administrators promise to "create a safe environment in which one can be assured the influence of drugs and gang violence will in no way affect their children" (*Medina* school Website).

Medina Islamic School aims to provide students with the opportunity to acquire basic knowledge of the Arabic language, as well as an enriched Islamic Studies program in an

atmosphere described as conducive to building Muslim character and personality (*Staff Handbook*, 2008). *Medina* School brands its physical isolation as an advantage and a key component for its unique Islamic atmosphere. The other component is the focus on Islamic Sciences, a highly concentrated program of studies. The school offers the minimum required by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. One female teacher is currently responsible for teaching Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. As for Arts, Health and Career (what used to be called CAP), they are integrated into various subjects.

The school's primary focus is on teaching Islamic knowledge. *Medina* School's programs include courses such as *Qur'an* memorization, Islamic fundamentals, and general Islamic Studies, in addition to a specialized program called the Alim (scholar) Training Course for senior students. The school uses a collection of materials from Pakistan and England as textbooks.

The official website of the school asserts that North American Muslims need educational institutions that provide Islamic knowledge that leads to practice (school website). Hence, students spend most of their time learning about Islam. Their goal is particularly to memorize the *Qur'an*, which is what the *Medina* school community values the most.

Although the school strictly enforces a certain Islamic etiquette and dress code, it does not provide a documented description of the required dress code. However, an observation of what students wear in the school indicates that only two types of outfits are acceptable here. The first and the most common is Sharwal-Kamis: a variety of loose, long-sleeved Indian (sub continent) shirt often extended to the knee with equally baggy pants often the same color. The second type of attire worn at this school is the Arabian, mostly, white *thawb* (a long sleeve robe that extends to the ankle). In addition, students are expected to wear headgear, either a simple turban or a special cap. The dress code and the general demeanor of the student population make up an

aspect of their group identity. Male teachers in the school also wear similar outfits. The only female teacher (non-Muslim) in *Medina* School is fully veiled.

The school presents itself as purely Islamic and different from the public school system and even other types of Islamic educational institutions in the province. In addition to its unique instructional program, the school highlights its isolated location and overall operations which are meant to provide a distinctive Islamic education. According to the school's Parent Handbook (2008), *Medina* School provides "a distinctive education for children of Muslim parents" (p.1). The distinctive education entails fostering devotion to God through particular acts of worship, promoting a sense of brotherhood among the students. According to the handbook, the goal of the school is to "create a learning environment that challenges each student to discover and develop his God-given abilities and gifts so that they may honour God by serving Him, loving each other and being stewards of His creation" (Parent Handbook, 2008:1). The three objectives also seem to define the type of educational institution the school aspires to be. They also delineate ideal graduates of the school, as well as the appropriate teaching faculty.

There is an attempt to train the students in a Muslim community outreach through Da`wah (preaching) and community service skills. In this regard, the school appears to be following the Tabligh movement's approach. This is originally an East Indian (subcontinent), but transnational, apolitical Islamic movement that encourages Muslims to practice and preach the basic tenets and manners of Islam.

The primary goal of the group is to convey the practice of Islam to the Muslim communities around the world. Members of this group often travel in teams. Local members of the group often act as hosts and provide logistic support for incoming groups. Accordingly, students are prepared to assume their responsibility as teachers, preachers, and guides with the *Tabligh*

movement. “We are committed to the establishment of this Holy Din (religion) in the hearts of all mankind. Insha *Allah* (God willing), all of our students will go on to be leaders in the international efforts of Da’wa” (*Medina* School website). The school not only adopts this group’s approach but also hosts some of the group’s conferences.

The type of teaching faculty is equally important to this schooling approach; teachers of this institution are expected to model what they teach. Their job is not merely passing on their knowledge and skills; they are also expected to exemplify the teachings of Islam both in and outside of the school. This perhaps explains why the school’s website listed the names and the titles of the Islamic Studies teachers, describing them as leading scholars, but never mentioned the subject teacher anywhere in the website.

Medina school follows a unique annual calendar and a daily schedule. Students do not have summer, winter or spring breaks. Instead, they have 45 days of vacation during and around the month of *Ramadan* (*Ramadan* is the month during which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk). Students also have ten days off during the month of *Thul-hijjah* (This is the month of the pilgrimage to *Makkah*). The school is in session Sunday to Thursday instead of Monday to Friday. Hence, the weekend for this institution falls on Fridays and Saturdays. Accordingly, parents are allowed to pick up their children on Thursdays after 6:00 pm and they are expected to return them to the school on Saturdays before sunset.

The uniqueness of the school’s operations is manifested in how the students’ time is organized. The emphasis is clear not only from the amount of time allotted for the Islamic Studies, but also the time of the day given to these subjects. The instructional time of the school is divided into three segments:

- 8:00 am-11:30 am *Qur’an* memorization/Islamic Studies

- 11:30 am-1:30 pm recess, lunch & Salah (prayers)

- 1:30 pm-6:00 pm academics.

Medina is a Madrasah type Islamic educational institution that provides the basic British Columbia curriculum for its students. However, the focus of the institution is to impart Islamic knowledge and instill an Islamic outlook and manners. The school does not explicitly compare itself with the public or other private schools, but it certainly offers an alternative approach to both the public and other Islamic institutions in British Columbia.

Figure 5.2 Cordova Islamic School: a Closer Look

Vision

Cordova aims to integrate the revealed and the synthetic knowledge into a cohesive and holistic educational system. Through great respect for learning and open spirit of inquiry, the school strives to provide a superior academic program intertwined with moral and spiritual values of Islam. Inspired by the rich history of Islam, Cordova Islamic School intends to foster a rigorous and integrated academic program to serve the needs of the modern world.

Taken from Cordova School website

Cordova Islamic School is a private independent Islamic school that is accredited and partially funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. The school is governed by an education board (volunteers). Members of this board are appointed by the president of the association (mother organization), and they usually number between five and seven men. The

principal reports to this board. In consultation with the principal, the board sets the policies, procedures and overall direction of the school. The board also prepares and approves the budget of the school.

Currently in its 11th academic year, the school enrolls about 350 students from Kindergarten to Grade Nine (2007-2008). Cordova School was first opened in September 1998 offering a Kindergarten to Grade-Two program. The school operates in an adequate facility. In addition to a midsize office area, classrooms and a small library, Cordova owns recreational facilities such as a gymnasium, an outdoor field, basketball courts, and two separate playgrounds, one for the primary students and the other one for the intermediate and junior high, which provide students with a variety of activities.

The school's mission is to "provide quality education and personal excellence". The school further aspires to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide quality, educational programs that integrate academic, Islamic and Arabic studies.
- Promote excellent personal manners, high moral values, and strong leadership skills.
- Prepare students to become good citizens and contributing members of society.
- Empower students to seek and succeed in post secondary education.
- Guide students to develop life skills and interests. (Cordova school website).

Official documents and school artifacts repeatedly promote three central themes: Islamic values, identity and academic excellence. The artifacts inside the school give an indication about the school's values as an Islamic educational institution with a mission to "provide quality education & personal excellence". A visitor to the school can easily notice carefully displayed

pictures of students performing various tasks on the walls and corridors of the school. The pictures show some of the students receiving medals while others are conducting science experiments. The pictures also include students learning in their classrooms, singing in school ceremonies or simply playing outdoors and having fun.

The second group of artifacts displays important Islamic sites such the grand mosques in *Makkah* and *Medina* in Saudi Arabia, Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Palestine. The pictures also include various other mosques and Islamic centers around the world. The third group in the school's artifacts depicts important Islamic values. These types of posters take up the largest space on the school's bulletin boards. These posters contain certain quotes from the *Qur'an* and from the sayings of Prophet Mohammed (*Hadith*). They cover topics such as kindness to parents, friendship, cleanliness and many others. In addition, certain areas of the school corridors are decorated with large posters with slogans such as "all Muslims are brothers & sisters; Islam is a creed and a culture; Islam is a way of living". The display of carefully selected statements and phrases beside the images of important Islamic sites seems to be used as a tool to help negotiate the Islamic worldview, promote Islamic identity and reinforce Islamic values.

Cordova Islamic School represents a school-type institution providing an Islamic education that conforms to the norms and requirements of the dominant educational system in British Columbia. The school's various methods of communications such as newsletters, brochures, assemblies and even the school letterhead put a great emphasis on the fact that Cordova is accredited by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. There is a concerted effort to present the school as an institution with high academic standards that espouses mainstream school values.

The school is often compared with the public system in terms of Foundation Skills Assessment results (FSA). This is how the school's website depicts Cordova's academic achievements in comparison to the provincial achievements:

For the fourth year in a row, our Grade Four students, and for the second year in a row our Grade Seven students have surpassed the results of the entire district of Surrey in the provincial governments' province-wide Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA). During the year 2003-2004, again, our students exceeded, by a wide margin, the other school districts in the province. We also exceeded the results of most of the other independent schools as well (School website).

The emphasis on academic achievement is evident in school documents, posters and official speeches. The following statement is repeated in various documents: "we do not just meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education; rather we aim to surpass and exceed them" (School website). Similar statements are made about the fact that all teachers are British Columbia certified, and the school fulfills all provincial requirements.

All students, starting from Kindergarten, receive one period of Arabic language and one period of Islamic studies daily. Islamic Studies curriculum resources come from Islamic Book Service, Florida, USA and Iqra International Educational Foundation, Chicago, USA. The Arabic program comes from a publisher in Saudi Arabia. These two subjects are taught by teachers who were trained outside of Canada but obtained Subject Restricted certifications from the office of the Independent School Branch. These teachers do not have classrooms of their own; they go to homerooms to teach their subjects. They share one room as a work station, which has become an unofficial staffroom for this department. Their group is somewhat isolated from the rest of the teaching faculty. This physical segregation seems to be not only a challenge

for developing an integrated curriculum, but also contributes to the tensions between Islamic Studies teachers and the rest of the teaching faculty.

This is how one academic teacher described Cordova's teachers' relationships:

I think we are segregated. You know the Arabic and Islamic department is kind of separated from the academic department. There is no cohesive group working together. This has been a challenge in our community since I started working in the Muslim school. It is not that integrated, so it is very separate and even if you notice staff sits separately. The Arabic department is separate from the academic teachers. It is not that the academic teachers have not invited them or anything; they have chosen to be alone, and, you know, chosen to speak their language with each other.

In summary, Cordova is a school-type Islamic educational institution that provides basic Islamic knowledge and an Islamic atmosphere. However, the school's primary focus is to achieve academic excellence.

What I have mentioned in the vignettes illustrates two different approaches to Islamic education in Canada. Despite the apparent differences, the two institutions have many overlapping similarities. The two institutions share a commitment to provide educational programs that are Islamically centered. Each of the schools teaches some aspects of Islam, particularly the fundamentals of the faith and the basic rituals. Though *Medina* School allocates more time for Islamic subjects, Cordova also allocates a considerable amount of instructional time for Islamic Studies and Arabic language. Similarly, a visitor to both schools would hear the same phrases such as *insha Allah* (God willing); *Alhamdulillah* (all praise/thanks are due to Allah) and other commonly used phrases. These are often used to create an awareness of Allah (God) and to anchor a Muslim's life in a solid ground of submission to Him.

Further, both schools strive to encourage students not only to learn, but to practice the pillars of Islam, such as prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan. They offer congregational prayers for the Muslim staff and students at least once every day. In addition, students have access to a specially designed ablution facility (*wudu*, which is an act of physical purification before praying), where students clean themselves before praying. As soon as the month of Ramadan approaches, both schools start talking about the rules and manners of fasting. They may even alter the daily routine and the school schedule.

These similarities are noticed in other Muslim schools in Europe and North America (Merry, 2006). Without minimizing the differences between the two institutions, most of the differences seem to anchor on priorities, allocating values or responding to the desires of certain segments of the Muslim communities (market demands). To give an example, both schools teach core academic subjects. However, Cordova considers this a priority, while *Medina* places Islamic Studies at the centre of its instructional programs. While both schools teach Islamic Studies, Cordova tends to offer basic knowledge and practices of Islam and *Medina* appears to aspire to producing *Imams* or prayer leaders and preachers.

The following table summarizes the differences between the two institutions:

Table 5.1 *Medina* Vs *Cordova* School

<i>Medina</i> School	Cordova School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boarding school • Boys only (n=26) • Focuses on Islamic Sciences, but offers secular subjects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day school • Coeducational (n=350) • Focuses on academic subjects but offers Islamic Studies and Arabic

Tables 5.1 Medina Vs Cordova School

<i>Medina</i> School	Cordova School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to isolate from the larger society • Aims to graduate mainly <i>Imams</i> and preachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to integrate with the larger society. • Aims to graduate students who will pursue post secondary education.

5.2 Islamic Education: Forming Understanding

Muslim educational institutions strive to provide educational programs that meet the needs of their communities. The primary stakeholders of these institutions hold different perceptions about Islamic education and its meaning. This section explores how the stakeholders of the two participating schools define Islamic education, how they foster Islamic values and lifestyles in the schools, and what challenges and tensions they experience in the process.

Some participants equate Islamic education to learning about the principles of Islam as a religion. To this group, Islamic schools may provide the so-called secular subjects, but their primary focus should remain on teaching the fundamentals of the Islamic creed, training the students on performing Islamic rituals correctly, and instilling Islamic manners and etiquette.

Most of the participants from *Medina* Islamic School view Islamic education as synonymous with teaching and learning about the tenets of Islam. These participants view Islamic education to mean learning about Islamic rituals and manners in order to lead a distinctive Islamic life. This kind of understanding, however, is not unique to *Medina* stakeholders; some participants from Cordova also hold similar views. For example, a teacher from Cordova School defines Islamic

education as “learning about the pillars of Islam and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed”. In this view, seeking Islamic knowledge that is founded in the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah* is a central focus for Islamic education. Similarly, a Grade Six student in *Medina* School defines Islamic education as “basically learning about the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith/Sunnah*”.

In this approach, the emphasis is on learning, practicing, and propagating Islam’s religious knowledge and values. Integrating with the larger society seems to be a secondary goal for this group. This understanding perhaps explains why some students choose to attend traditional Islamic institutions or the Madrasah type learning centers. *Medina* School students who participated in this study stated the reason behind their attendance is either to memorize the *Qur’an*, or memorize the *Qur’an* and learn about Islam.

Learning about the fundamentals of Islam is important for all participants, an experience that leads to practicing Islam. In other words, Islamic education should provide an opportunity to model the principles of the faith. As one of the Muslim teachers explains, Islamic education means “the basic teachings of *Allah* and what He asked us to do as citizens to in a global society. Islamic education is also teaching and following our Prophet’s teachings and trying to gear everyday life around those teachings”. In other words, in addition to the personal dimension of the faith, Islamic teachings should have an impact on the individual at the societal and global level.

When a parent was asked why she sends her children to the Muslim school, she responded: “So they can be better Muslims, that is because when you follow Islam or practice your religion, you could be a better person”. Again, the emphasis is on the link between knowledge and practice. A Grade Five student supports this view when he says that he attends Islamic school because he “wants to learn how to be a good Muslim or to learn what is good from what is bad”.

The second group presents Islamic education as a system or an approach that prepares students to become productive members of the society through Islamic faith and values. To them, a Muslim school should provide an education that encompasses Islamic teachings as well as the so-called secular subjects. Islamic educational institutions, according to this understanding, impart knowledge, provide an environment that is conducive to Islamic practices, and promote Islamic manners and etiquette.

As explained by one of the participating teachers, “Islamic education encompasses not just the academic part but also the Islamic faith, and also the manners and the pillars that go with the faith”. This understanding is in agreement with a widely accepted definition for Islamic education, which is defined as a system that aims to “produce a good, well-rounded person through training man’s spirit, intellect, rational self, feeling and bodily sense” (Cook, 1999:345). This understanding entails a comprehensive educational approach that combines the spiritual and the material world within an integrated learning experience.

According to these participants, the concept of Islamic education is broader than merely training in certain rituals or teaching and transmitting Islamic knowledge. It entails educating the whole person through the transmission of knowledge, skills and attitude; it means providing an experience that nourishes the learner’s physical and spiritual needs. In other words, Islamic education means to train and refine a person’s mind and soul in order to foster a conscious relationship with God, the ultimate goal of man’s life. This understanding is in agreement with Meir Hatina (2006), who maintains that Islamic education aims at “moulding individual conduct, purifying both soul and body, entrenching faith and righteous thinking, stimulating communal activism and benefiting others” (p.182). This is to say that Islamic education system provides a platform that transmits knowledge and skills. Both mind and soul are to be nourished through

this experience. Similarly, Islamic education aims to nurture personal growth as well as social skills and responsibility.

To this end, a primary objective of learning is education of the heart and mind, and to become fully aware of personal, communal and societal responsibilities (Ramadan, 2004). It includes forming a clear understanding of the text, the revealed scripture, and at the same time, understanding the context or the environment in which the text operates.

Connecting text to the context entails providing an education system that fully embraces Islamization of knowledge. This approach, as Merry (2006) explains, requires that:

All learning must be *islamicized*, that is, brought into conformity with the foundation, theory, and principles set forth in the *Qur'an*---. This is the idea behind Tarbiya, the goal-orientedness of an education, the nourishing of the whole person, in which no aspect of the individual is untouched by faith (iman) (p. 49).

The literature on Islamic education by and large holds a conception of education that is based on total Islamization, summarized above (Al-Attas, 1979; Ashraf, 1985, Hewer, 2001 and Thomas, 2004). This perspective speaks about, and often seems to present Islamic education as if it is only meant to serve Muslim societies with dominant Islamic values and norms. However, as Cook (1999) argues it is not clear “how such a system would operate in a pluralistic society with the sentiments and needs of religious minority” (p.351). Yet researchers in Islamic educational philosophy (Al-attas, 1979 and Merry, 2006) theorize an ideal conception of Islamic education that is comprehensive and universal. They often present Islamic education as a continuous process of transmitting knowledge and values, which promotes the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical development of the learners.

This is to say that Islamic education should endeavor to transmitting knowledge and skills that include both secular and religious knowledge. The process also includes nurturing the learners' various needs according to their age and level of maturity. The objective is to gradually nourish, refine and discipline the learner and train both of his or mind and soul to prepare the individual for complete potential.

Muslim educational institutions in British Columbia and other Canadian provinces do not have the capacity to provide this type of education at this time. Providing this kind of education requires human and financial resources, as well as organizational structures yet to be found. Still, these institutions strive, or claim to be striving to achieve this goal, to bring all levels of knowledge into compliance with the teachings of Islam. The two types of Muslim educational institutions mentioned earlier both aspire to this ideal definition of Islamic education, but do not have adequate resources to implement this approach to education. Hence, each group focuses on what its key stakeholders think is an essential component of the idealized Islamic education.

5.3 Islamic Education: Fostering Islamic Values and Lifestyle

Providing a safe and comfortable learning space is a major objective of both of the participating educational institutions. Islamic educators teach and promote the practice of Islamic rituals at their schools; parents see that as a support in their endeavour to instill Islamic values. A parent at Cordova School says that “public schools do not celebrate the month of Ramadan. For here (Cordova), kids know that they are fasting the whole month and they are learning what they have to do when they are fasting. During *Hajj* also they are learning about *Hajj*”. This means that Islamic educational institutions are expected to teach Islamic values, but also provide a safe and supportive environment for practicing Islamic rituals.

Some students also share similar feelings about these institutions. In addition to learning about his religion, a Grade Six student at Cordova says that he attends the school because, “In

the public school, people will ask: Why are you fasting? And why are you not at school during *Eid*?” Attending the Muslim school will not only make it easy for him to practice Islam, but he will also get support and encouragement from the school community. The institution, in this case, creates consistency between home and the school. To put it differently, Muslim schools attempt to reinforce home values and facilitate the practice of religious duties in a safe environment.

According to McCreery and others (2007):

Muslim schools could maintain consistency between the child’s home life and that of school. Besides providing *Halal* food, they could ensure that *Eid* celebrations follow traditional patterns, models of fasting were both supported and appreciated, regulatory dress codes were followed and Muslim artefacts were displayed. Such practices, it was argued, both mirrored and supported the home community and as a consequence engendered security in the young child. Moreover, because it was a Muslim institution, it had a capacity to tolerate customs that were specific to Muslim culture” (p. 27).

Some of these customs are specific to the Muslim’s daily life. It includes manners and etiquette of talking, eating, greeting, and even socializing. Islamic educational institutions not only tolerate these customs; they teach, promote, and reward those who adhere to them.

Developing and maintaining Islamic manners is another objective for Islamic educational institutions. As one teacher at Cordova School explains, “Islamic education emphasizes Islamic conduct; there is an attempt to practice Islamic etiquette in the school. Our students feel that they are different from other students in the public system. Even the language they use is different, so is the relationship between the boys and the girls”.

Again, some Muslim school stakeholders put an emphasis on how their school is different from, and perhaps better than the public school system. They do not compare themselves to other private schools, perhaps because the public school system is the dominant system that sets the standards and norms. The public schools are the only relevant contenders to pose a challenge to the Muslim schools. This is because most of the Muslim school students come from, and go to public schools. As Cordova school principal indicates, other religious schools could equally make the same claim of uniqueness. The principal provides his observation to make a connection between Islamic values and being conscious of God. He says: “What make our school different are the values. Our school teaches students honesty, sincerity, and support for one another in order to get [their] reward from God. It prepares students to develop all these good qualities knowing that they will be accountable to God”.

Islamic educational institutions are also considered to be a safe haven by students, parents and administrators. The institutions position themselves as protectors of the Muslim students from presumed social evils. A student at *Medina* says that, “there is no bad stuff in the school like drugs, alcohol and other things that are forbidden in Islam. The school will keep me away from this bad stuff”. Other students in both schools as well as the principal of *Medina* School made similar statements.

Islamic educational institutions strive to provide a comprehensive education that caters to all aspects of learning and the learner. They aspire to foster an Islamic-based lifestyle through which they provide a safe space for practicing Islamic rituals. These goals require specially trained teachers who model Islamic teachings, and appropriate learning resources. However, as I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter, achieving this goal poses some challenges.

5.4 Islamic Education: Finding Suitable Resources

Providing Islamic-centered education and fostering Islamic values and lifestyle requires specially-trained teachers, as well as a curriculum that embodies Islamic values. In addition to subject and pedagogical knowledge, Islamic school teachers are expected to model and show respect for Islamic values. They are also expected to demonstrate an understanding of Islamic culture, which would help integrate Islam into the mainstream curricula.

Teachers: According to the data collected for this study, modeling an Islamic personality is a basic requirement for all Muslim school teachers. A Grade Six student in *Medina* School explains his expectations in the following statement: “I expected my teachers to behave the way they are teaching, not to become hypocrites. If they don’t follow what they are teaching, no one else will follow. So they should practice what they are teaching us”. A senior Muslim teacher at Cordova School also says, “I try to see myself as a positive role model. I consider myself as someone who can pass on knowledge. In this school, I want to represent myself as a member of the Muslim community. There are students who are looking up to me and I do not want to misguide them”.

As Mandeville (2007) explains: “The Islamic ethos enters the classroom through being a role model and exemplifying Islamic values rather than through direct teaching of Islam” (p.231). Islamic teachers, the *Medina* School principal remarked, “should preach Islam through their actions”. That is to say, they should demonstrate an exemplary practice of the teachings of the faith.

Showing respect to Islamic values is another expectation. “We expect them to show respect, tolerance and understanding to Islamic values” confirms one of the participating principals. A Grade Seven student from Cordova School also views respecting Islamic values as a basic requirement for a Muslim school teacher. “I expect teachers to show respect to Islamic rules by

not wearing something improper”. One way of showing respect to schools is by making an effort to learn about Islam and Muslim cultures.

Teachers are expected to show a basic understanding of Islamic culture and values. The principal of Cordova Islamic School insists that “we expect in addition to teaching, a clear understanding of Islamic values and culture”. As admirable as an understanding of Islam and its cultural expressions is, it requires effective professional development, including ongoing programs and systematic mentorship.

Islamic schools strive to induct, develop, and retain a teaching team that not only delivers the curriculum but integrates Islamic values and acts as a role model. Achieving this goal appears to be a difficult one. Cordova School’s principal notes that, “finding proper learning resources and retaining teachers are two major issues for Muslim schools in Canada because many of these teachers, after they get their experience and spend two to three years in these schools, apply to the public system and as soon as they get an opportunity, they move to the public system”. The principal attributes the problem to the fact that Muslim schools pay less than the public school system.

In addition to the relatively low salaries, lack of effective orientation and professional development seem to be key contributing factors to the problem of finding and retaining teachers for Islamic schools. This is how a Muslim senior teacher describes the situation in her school, “There is a little course about Islam (more like a 30 minutes session) in the beginning of the school year. To be honest with you, I don’t think that is enough. We need an ongoing learning process; especially for the non-Muslim teachers because when they are in a situation that they have to deal with a religious issue they don’t know how to handle it properly”.

Complaints about the lack of, or poor orientation, as well as limited professional development opportunities are common in Muslim schools. As the following examples illustrate, teachers and even students notice this deficiency. A non-Muslim teacher who was employed by a Muslim school for three years made the following comment: “When I came here I thought that I was going to learn a lot about Islam. I thought that I was going to make myself acquainted with Islam and its culture. However, the academic side was so much and so overwhelming that I haven’t had the time. The guy who was supposed to be teaching me had also left”.

This lack of orientation is even observed by one of the students. A Grade Six student at Cordova explains how teachers struggle in understanding the school’s culture and values:

Some teachers don’t know much about Islam, like my Math teacher Ms (...), who came in the third term; she wanted the boys and the girls all to be mixed. We told her: no, we are not allowed. She said: who makes that rule? We said: it is the office. She asked the girls: Why are they wearing hijab, it is hot? We said: it is a part of our religion. When my mom was speaking to her she said: I feel sorry for the girls. They have to wear hijab and it is very hot for them”.

The poor orientation, or the lack of it and the absence of effective professional development programs negatively affect the schools’ endeavour to attract suitable teachers. A Muslim teacher at Cordova adds, “People are coming to our system and discovering that it is hard for them to adopt. It is hard for them to get used to the ways we do things, the way we look at things and how we educate our children”.

Muslim school teachers are expected to demonstrate knowledge of Islam, Islamic education philosophy, and Islamic values. They are also expected to model the teachings of Islam. However, in the absence of appropriate teacher training institutions, Muslim schools’ limited,

and at times poor, professional development initiatives fail to prepare teachers for meeting these expectations and delivering a comprehensive integrated curriculum according to the goals of Islamic education.

Integrated Curriculum: Providing an integrated learning opportunity is one of the major goals of Islamic educational institutions. It is an ideal that almost every Muslim school aspires for. The following examples illustrate this aspiration. These three mission statements are from three different schools, located in Mississauga, Ontario, Edmonton, Alberta and Richmond, BC, respectively:

1. The school is committed to:
 - provide students with an environment that promotes Islamic values and their integration into all aspects of life;
 - enable all students to reach their full potential and to become responsible and contributing members of both the Islamic community and the global society;
 - maintain high academic standards and promote life-long learning;
 - offer a supportive environment that builds self-esteem and confidence;
2. The Mission of the academy is to produce generations of well-adjusted Muslim, able to face with pride, dignity and confidence, the challenges of modern life whilst preserving their Islamic identity.
3. Islamic Academy strives to offer [a] superior education in an environment rich with Islamic morals and values. The mandate of the school encompasses greater responsibility than only quality curricular education. It includes the spiritual and moral intelligence of every child. Our aim is to meet our children's religious, academic, emotional, social, cultural, and physical needs.

The above mission statements have a common value: providing a comprehensive and integrated educational program that is anchored on Islam. Grade Six student at Cordova says, “What I expect from my teachers is to connect Geography, Science and stuff like that to *Allah*, to connect how *Allah* made the First Nations and how *Allah* made different nations”.

Some teachers, particularly Muslim teachers, may incorporate certain Islamic or universal values to their lessons or discussions in the class. However, when asked about integrating Islam, most participating teachers either said that they do not have time to work on curriculum integration or did not think that was their job. One teacher at Cordova Islamic School responded: “I leave that for the Islamic Studies Department”. However, another teacher in the same school says, “I try to integrate depending on what I am teaching and what I feel comfortable with. You know there really hasn’t been any kind of Islamic materials that I can actually pull from that much. But, in my mind, I always think that they [students] are going to get it from the Islamic studies course”. When asked, “What are you comfortable with?”, she responded: “World issues, poverty, and I tell the students that it is not only Muslims that need help but also other people around the world, and it is our duty to provide for them whatever we can”.

Both participating Islamic schools claim that they either engage in, or attempt to engage in, some sort of curriculum integration. However, due to various obstacles, these schools offer two segregated programs, Islamic Studies and academic subjects. The principal of Cordova Islamic School strongly argues for the importance of providing an integrated curriculum in Islamic educational institutions. Yet, he concedes the gap between the aspirations of his school and the reality on the ground when he states:

In reality, the Islamic program is not integrated to the academic program. The academic subjects are taught independently. They look as if they have nothing to do with Islamic subjects, which is contrary to the goals and objectives of Islamic education philosophy.

The aim of Islamic education is, no matter what subject you teach, you integrate Islam to it.

In fact, some teachers deliberately avoid injecting Islam into their lessons. This is how one of the participating teachers describes her role in the school: “I always felt that I was there to teach them (students) academics and all other kinds of social stuff weren’t really my business. I should avoid that sort of thing”. She continues to further justify her practice by saying that, “I am responsible for the academic side, and as far as the Islam side is concerned, as long as I show respect to the school then that was enough”.

In addition to the challenges these institutions face in terms of finding suitable teaching staff and an integrated curriculum, delivering certain areas of the provincial curriculum also poses an additional source of tension. The following examples, one in Physical Education and the other one on some contested creation stories in Social Studies textbooks, will illustrate this point:

Physical Education (P.E.) is a mandatory subject in British Columbia schools. It is one subject that both teachers and students have raised concerns about. Some Muslim schools struggle with what and how to teach. At the upper elementary level and even junior high, in the public system, boys and girls are often mixed in public in the P.E classes. Co-ed Muslim schools often struggle with this issue. As some Grade Six and Seven students whom I talked to admit, they have no problem playing with each other (boys and girls), but the school doesn’t allow that, which forces the classroom teacher to run simultaneous games or ask boys and girls to take turns. Here is how a Grade Six boy from Cordova School explained the situation:

This school doesn't allow us to compete with other schools, which I don't like. I believe the reason is the fact that other schools have the boys and girls mixed. My dad doesn't care; neither does my mom. Some boys and some girls in my school do not care either. In fact, some girls challenged us for a soccer game but we were not allowed to play with them.

In addition to the problems with the co-ed P.E., Muslim schools struggle with how to handle the dance component in the curriculum. There are no guidelines or written policies regarding this matter. However, one of the participating schools asked teachers not to teach any form of dance: "All I know is that as a teacher, I was warned about something to avoid. I was told to avoid dancing; in the British Columbia curriculum, there is a dancing component in P.E., but I was warned against any sort of dance or music".

Cordova School also discourages music and dancing. There seems to be a gap between the assumed policy and the desire of the teachers. Here is how a non-Muslim teacher described her encounter with the unwritten policy:

When I was teaching Physical Education, there was something that had to be omitted. I was little uncomfortable with; it was dance! When I was teaching Grade Seven, Eight & Nine P.E, I attended a professional development to learn step- by-step dance. It was simply with the feet step forward and step back, but it was turned down. I was little upset with that. Music is not something we have here and that is something I totally promote because what could be done in an Islamic school is already there. There are so many songs that could be sung.

The confusion about the permissibility of music and dance was also noticed by a Grade Eight student. When asked about an activity she might enjoy, but the school will not allow, she responded:

We have separate P.E. classes for boys and girls. Some of the girls suggested that we should have a dance, but the school doesn't like that. You know if it is just between the girls it's okay, but it just gives a bad example of how we want to be seen by the outside people. I just think that it is not right. If you dance in front of other girls it is okay (she corrected herself quickly and said), but you have this feeling, like I am going to look weird and you feel wrong. 'I am in an Islamic school and I want to learn dance, doesn't sound right'.

Dealing with contested creation stories is another area of tension in Muslim schools. Many areas of the social studies curriculum contain certain kinds of myth, be it from the Greeks, Aboriginal groups, or other cultures. One teacher told me of an incident regarding creation stories, where a parent filed a complaint against a Grade Five teacher that had gone all the way to the Board of Education. The teacher was not fired but was asked to modify the unit and skip some of its content. However, some participating teachers seem to be comfortable teaching these stories. Here is how a Grade Six teacher remembers her experience in teaching creation stories in Grade Five:

I remember there was whole bunch of native issues and native cultures. Some natives believe this is how the earth formed and their beliefs about God and that sort of thing. And I was thinking: would teaching these get me into trouble? But when I thought about it, I said: This is what these people believe, not that this is the word of God or anything like that: No problem! But I was still concerned about teaching Aboriginal religion and

spirituality, which could be a touchy subject. How do I teach the native or Aboriginal spirituality and their perspective when I am in an Islamic school? Well, I teach it. This is a fact. If this table was red and red is forbidden in the religion, I would still say: this is a red table. It is not a table that you would use in your school, but it is red nonetheless!

Providing a comprehensive and harmonious system of Islamic education is an ideal that most, if not all, Muslim educators are willing to embrace. However, finding an integrated curriculum and a suitable teaching faculty for this kind of system is not an easy task. It requires time, expertise, and resources, all of which are not available for Muslim schools at this time. Geoffrey Walford (2002), who studied evangelical Christian and Muslim schools in England and the Netherlands, argues that the Islamic-based curriculum is not feasible, at least for now. This is due to a number of factors, which include a low number of fully-trained Muslim teachers, the fact that the most of the Muslim schools are relatively new, and the fact that there is little money to develop or translate integrated materials. A good number of Islamic schools in British Columbia and similar contexts are satisfied with making minor changes to the available sources rather than creating a new curriculum. Still, the existence of separate Muslim schools is considered by many as a great and important achievement in itself.

6 MAINTAINING ISLAMIC IDENTITY

We are teaching our students how to be good people. We are teaching them what any caring person would teach his or her children even if they are not Muslims. The only difference is that the Muslims link this teaching and learning to the hereafter and reward from *Allah* (Islamic Studies Teacher at Cordova School).

Fostering Islamic identity within the multicultural Canadian context is important for Islamic educational institutions in British Columbia. Interviews conducted in 2008 reveal that Muslim identity tops all other identities for individual teachers, students and parents who participated in this study. This is so, in part, because Muslim educational institutions employ various tools that foster this identity. These tools include creating a sense of community membership, promoting Islamic values and lifestyle, as well as, striving to integrate students into the larger society without compromising their essential identity, Islam.

6.1 Islamic Identity in a Multicultural Context

Despite their affinities to their ethnic and national identities, Islamic identity is very important for many participants. When asked to put in order Islam, ethnic background, and nationality, all Muslim participants put Islam first. A Grade Five student at Cordova explains, “I feel like I am a Muslim first, then a Pakistani then a Canadian. I feel that way because Canada and Pakistan are places we live. Islam is my religion, my main identity”. A Grade Nine student from the same school agrees when she says, “I am a Muslim first because I am from a Muslim family and that is more important than being an American which is a place. Yes, I was born in America but that is not more important than being Muslim”.

Nimat Barazangi (1991) hypothesized that Muslim youth in North America identify with Western values more than they identify with Muslim values. While there is a possibility that this generalization is still true, it is equally important to note that the term ‘Muslim youth’, like many other categories is not one entity that can be captured under one generalization, and the participants of this study are an example of this diversity. Rather than making generalizations, perhaps one should look at some contributing factors that cause a change of attitude from time to time.

Barazangi’s study was published nearly two decades ago, and the world has changed significantly since then. Since September 11, 2001, the Muslim communities in Canada and in many other parts of the world have experienced an enormous external pressure. Some of the community’s institutions were subjected to intense investigations. Members of the community became a target for security agencies and media outlets in a way that the community’s collective identity came to the surface under these difficult times. Hence, it is not surprising if Muslim identity currently overrides other markers of identity. As some researchers argue (Grant, 1997; Maalouf, 2003), when communities face external challenges they tend to put their internal difference aside at least temporarily.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the population of the Muslim community in Canada has increased significantly in the past two decades. With this increase came resources, both human and financial, which led to institution building. To give an example, at the time of Barazangi’s study, Toronto had only one fulltime Muslim school. In this year (2009-2010), there are nearly 40 fulltime Muslim schools in the greater Toronto area alone. In fact, every major city in Canada has a minimum of one fulltime Muslim school, which is often the focal point of the community. The schools unite the community and minimize the effects of personal, political,

national, racial, and theological differences. It could be argued, therefore, that Muslim educational institutions not only foster Islamic identity for students, but they also create a common purpose for the Muslim community.

6.2 Islamic Symbols

Spreading Islamic symbols, values and lifestyle is an important form of developing and maintaining Islamic identity. As indicated in Chapter Five, a visitor to Cordova School can easily notice different symbols and messages positioned in various locations. The school corridors are highly decorated with different artefacts that display important Islamic sites such as the Grand Mosques in *Makkah* and *Medina* (Saudi Arabia), Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Palestine.

Displaying images of the sacred places is an attempt to connect students to other people, other places, and times. It is one way of reinforcing the concept of *Ummah*. The picture of the Grand Mosque in *Makkah* reminds students of the birth place of Islam as well as the *Qiblah* or the direction of the prayers, where every Muslim faces at least five times a day. The artefacts from *Medina* connect students to the ideal Muslim community and state, as well as the burial place of Prophet Mohammed.

The depiction of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock reminds students about the story of Israa, in which Muslims believe that Prophet Mohammed experienced a nightly journey from *Makkah* to Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem to the heavens. In addition to these sacred places, the images also include other mosques and Islamic centers around the globe, as well as images of current political conflict in the Middle East... The idea behind these posters, according to a Grade One teacher, “is to inform, inspire and assist students to connect with people and places around the world. It is for them to feel that they are a part of an *Ummah*.”

Other artefacts depict important Islamic values. These types of posters take up the largest space on the school's bulletin boards. They contain certain quotes from the *Qur'an* and from the sayings of Prophet Mohammed (*Hadith*). The quotes cover topics such as kindness to parents, friendship, cleanliness, and many other virtues. To give an example, certain areas of the school's corridors are decorated with large and attractive posters that read: "All Muslims are brothers and sisters", "Islam is a creed and a culture", and "Islam is a way of living". These messages are positioned in all corners of the building to remind the school community, as well as visitors, of the espoused values of this educational institution.

Two observations worth recording, before proceeding to the next section, are as follows: First, despite the prevalence of Islamic symbols and messages in Cordova School's entrances and hallways, one can hardly see these messages in the classrooms. Of the six teachers who invited me to visit their classrooms, only one of them used some of the available display area for Islamic messages or symbols. This teacher placed a large poster on the door of her classroom that reads "I love Islam". This is the first thing one notices upon entering the classroom. There are also other posters in the back of the classroom. One of the posters displays a quote from a famous Sufi scholar that reads "For those who have come to know *Allah* and His Messenger, the whole world is a prayer mat..." There are also various quotes from the *Qur'an* in different areas of the classroom. The rest of the classrooms seemed like any other generic public school.

The differences between the school's hallways and classrooms, in terms of displaying Islamic symbols and messages, are very noticeable. There could be more than one cause of the apparent discrepancies. Interviews indicated that most of the teachers, who participated in this study either were not comfortable with their level of Islamic knowledge, or were of the opinion that teaching and promoting Islamic values is the job of the Islamic Studies teachers. For example,

the academic teacher at *Medina* School argues, “I was hired to teach academic subjects, not to teach Islam. I leave that for the Islamic Studies teacher” was the answer of a Grade Six teacher in Cordova Islamic School. Regardless of the source, this observation raises a question about one of the most important values of this school, namely integrating Islamic values to all aspects of the learning experience.

The second observation is that *Medina* School does not have posters, or even bulletin boards. There are no pictures on any of the walls in or out of the classroom. One possible explanation is that perhaps the school follows an Islamic view that forbids depicting images of living beings. It is important to note, however, that there is nothing in the school’s policy handbook pertaining to this interpretation. However, in a response to the question “What is an area of the curriculum that you find difficult teaching in your school and why?”, one of the teachers responded that she is very careful when teaching certain subjects, such as art, because she says, “I was warned against drawing faces or figures of any living beings”. However, this answer does not explain the absence of posters or other visual materials that do not represent human or animal figures. As already mentioned, the majority of displayed materials in Cordova School were verses from the *Qur’an*, *Hadith*, and pictures of important Islamic sites. Therefore, it seems that in addition to religious explanations there are also practical explanations for this absence. *Medina* School has only one academic teacher who comes to teach her courses, and then leaves the premises immediately. This is an all-boys’ boarding school. She does not have time, a flexible schedule, or a favourable environment for staying and decorating the school. Furthermore, she does not want to get involved in sensitive, religious or cultural matters. The Islamic Studies teachers, on the other hand, use a very traditional, Madrasah style of teaching. In this method, students sit in a circle, on the floor, while reciting verses of the *Qur’an*. The teacher’s job is to listen, guide,

and facilitate this recitation on an individual basis. Using posters as visual aids or as a means of creating school culture, does not seem to be a matter of interest for Islamic Studies teachers at the *Medina* School.

6.3 Building a Community

Muslim educational institutions foster identity through building a sense of community. They provide a collective practice of Islamic duties such as prayers, fasting, and paying charity. Hence, students, teachers and parents, who participated in this study, expressed a sense of belonging to the school community. “It feels like home” is a common statement they all share. Some of them described their school as a nucleus for establishing the *Ummah*. As one parent explains, “practicing Islam together leads towards a stronger membership of the *Ummah*”.

It is true that some participating students sometimes expressed their disagreement with certain school policies. Two students from *Medina* School expressed their frustration with the school rule that forbids listening to music. When asked why, one of the students responded: “it is fun. I enjoy listening to music. It makes my mind relaxed”. Students from Cordova School complained about the school uniform. When asked to give an example of something, which her parents allow but the school doesn’t, one of the participating girls from Cordova School responded: “the uniform. I don’t like wearing hijab. It is hot and my head gets itchy”.

Despite some complaints about their schools, students in both schools generally expressed strong affinity with the school and its community. This is how a Grade Nine student, at Cordova School, describes her experience: “It feels like home and all teachers are very nice. You feel like they are your parents. I like the way they teach. They want me to learn. They want me to benefit from what they are teaching”. Other participants also expressed similar feelings. A teacher at Cordova School, states “I feel a lot better when I am in an Islamic environment. I feel I am more

fulfilled, that I am actually being an example, and am practicing my faith, and that I can be reminded daily that I am a Muslim. That is very important to me.”

6.4 Attempting to Integrate

Islamic identity is nurtured and promoted within the Canadian multicultural context. The institutions strive to integrate students into the mainstream society. “They prepare students who are faithful to their religion, and at the same time are good citizens. In other words, the schools prepare good citizens who have a strong faith in Islam as a way of life”, remarks the principal of Cordova School. This is in agreement with Merry (2006), who argues that “Islamic school teachers frequently discuss civil rights, civic responsibilities and encourage their students to engage actively in the democratic process, although da’wa is usually the motive” (p. 47). This is evident particularly in school-type institutions, where the administration and the staff often articulate how they promote Islamic identity within the Canadian, multicultural setting.

Using the provincial curriculum effectively offers a good opportunity that helps Islamic schools integrate into Canadian multicultural society. As one of the Grade Six teachers explains:

Students explore everything, down from the vary soils we stand on to the wider geography of Canada and British Columbia. This includes the history, politics, the borders and how we became a country, history of the Aboriginal people of this land, and so on. So, like any other school in British Columbia, we will be learning those important things. Students also live in communities in our society whether in Surrey, Burnaby, Vancouver, or wherever they do live. They see what is going on.

Employing non-Muslim teaching staff and inviting public agencies to the school is another way of promoting Islamic identity within a multicultural context. To achieve this goal Muslim schools use provincial curricula, extracurricular activities, organized intramurals and friendly

games with public and private schools as a way of engaging with others. They also invite agencies, such as nurses and fire marshals, to come to their schools. According to the principal of Cordova School, his school prepares students to integrate in a multicultural society in the following manner:

This school employs many teachers who are not Muslims. So by default, the students get a firsthand experience of dealing with other people who are coming from different faith groups. In addition, we try to give our students opportunities to meet other people. We arrange friendly games with other schools so the students can interact with other students in their age group. Also we invite many professionals from different fields such as the Fire Marshall, the RCMP, public health nurses and others to share their professional experience with our students.

Facilitating discussions in the classrooms about other cultures and encouraging students to learn about other ways of living is a third way of promoting this identity. Some teachers facilitate discussions and encourage students to integrate positively into the larger society.

According to a Grade Six teacher:

Students should be aware that there are other religions and other cultures that exist with us. So I tell students to go out and spend time in a church or spend time in a Christian school and interact with the students there and see how they are behaving and how they are learning. I think that it is important because we live in a multicultural society.

A Grade Three teacher echoes the need for deliberately putting an emphasis on students' Canadian identity. She states that:

These students are also part of this society, so when we discuss things, I always tell them: yes, remember you are Muslims and there is a difference between you and non-Muslims,

but at the same time we are together and we have to be together because we live in the same environment and we face the same challenges. I try with my children and tell them that they are very good Muslims, at the same time they are good Canadians. They have grandparents who are not Muslims, and from an early age they have been able to see the difference. Further, they will leave the elementary school and they will not be in an Islamic school when they reach the high school level. So they need to prepare for what is ahead of them.

Developing and maintaining an integrated Islamic identity is important for both teachers and administrators. Parents also share similar values. A parent who is also an employee, at Cordova School states that:

In this school, we are teaching students how to be practicing Muslims. We also are teaching them the BC curriculum. The students live in Canada and they are Canadians. This is their country because Canada does not belong to one religion; it is for everyone who lives here and everyone who lives here must work for the country. Therefore, we celebrate Canada Day, and whenever we have a function such as graduation, fundraising, and similar programs, we sing the Canadian national anthem. Similarly, we organize the Terry Fox run every year. In short, we appreciate everything Canada has given to us and we want our kids to be nice Muslims and good Canadians.

Muslim educational institutions make a concerted effort in promoting and maintaining Islamic identity. They create a platform for the collective practice of Islam to foster a sense of belonging. The schools also strive to nurture this identity within Canada's multicultural context. Still, these institutions face some challenges, or experience tensions which include dealing with

religious and cultural celebrations, Muslim communities' internal diversities, as well as external pressures.

6.5 Cultural and Religious Celebrations

Muslims around the world agree upon the celebrations of two events, *Eidul-Fitr* (festival of breaking the fast) at the end of Ramadan, and *Eidul-Adha* (festival of the sacrifice) at the end of *Hajj* or pilgrimage to *Makkah*. Any other celebration will face a challenge from an individual or a group that will object to it on a religious ground. Muslim schools, therefore, often restrict their celebrations to these two festivals. The problem is that certain personal and public celebrations are very much ingrained in the Canadian culture, which makes them difficult to avoid. In addition to celebrating individual birthdays, some students and teachers in the Muslim schools also celebrate other occasions such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day. There are no written policies (at least in the schools handbooks) banning these celebrations in any of the schools. However, these institutions openly discourage these cultural and religious celebrations.

Birthday celebrations are considered by some Muslims as a colonial tradition that has nothing to do with the Islamic faith and culture. In fact, some religious leaders describe it as a negative innovation that Muslims should avoid. The practice, however, is considered by others as an innocent celebration that does not contradict any religious rule. Both participating schools discourage holding birthday parties in the school for staff and students alike.

Despite the official discouragement of the practice, some parents, students and even teachers discreetly celebrate birthdays at Cordova Islamic School. In general, teachers of this school do not encourage or organize birthday parties in their classes. However, some of them accommodate the parents who request some sort of diluted party for their children. This is how a non-Muslim teacher at this school describes her approach to this issue:

There have been times where a parent has brought in a birthday cake (unannounced) and I was aware of the fact that this girl was having a birthday party. I said “that is very nice and congratulations”. But then her mother brought in a tray of cup cakes or a cake. Now, in my first year at the school, we were much smaller and we allowed that kind of activity. We didn’t have gifts. We didn’t have a big stop and happy birthday song, but when parents wanted to share some food we accepted. I was aware of the fact that we don’t celebrate birthdays, so I said that ‘this was nice for marking the day. We are acknowledging that it is your birthday and happy birthday. We can share greetings privately, but we are going to share this cake and it is very nice that the mother shared that with us’, but then it has got to the point even if the parents brings in, you have got to say: NO [laughing]. Honestly, it is hard. I said to myself, ‘the parent has this beautiful cake. He or she spent time and money to make the cake for their children and I can’t say: No’. I tell them look! I am really not supposed to do this in our school. We don’t celebrate these events. There is nothing wrong if you do it in your home. And that is another thing because if I say that this is the school policy: We don’t do that. The children look a little worried “oh, I do that in my home”. I don’t want anyone to think that what they do in the family home is wrong or bad.

The so called `gate keepers` (Islamic Studies teachers and school administrators) of the Islamic values concede the challenges of stopping birthday parties in their school. The principal of this school shares his frustration regarding this issue:

Our policy is clear: No birthday parties in the school, but it is almost impossible to stop or police. I sent letters to parents. I warned the teachers on more than one occasion. Yet, the practice continues. It appears that teachers and parents are

somewhat collaborating: parents sneak in birthday cakes and teachers look the other way. It is really frustrating.

A senior Islamic Studies teacher at Cordova admits that while they discourage these celebrations, they show some understanding if they see individuals celebrating birthdays. He says: “Our approach is that we don’t make fuss about it if we find out someone is celebrating. However, if we are asked, our answer is always: no, but we explain to the teachers and parents and tell them that the school policy doesn’t allow these kinds of celebrations”.

In answering the question of whether she celebrates Valentine’s Day, Christmas and Halloween with her students, a senior non-Muslim teacher said:

No, because that is the school policy, so we do not celebrate Valentine’s Day in our school because I think, according to what I understand, there are certain celebrations that are allowed and they have to do with *Eid*. There are two *Eids*, right? So I’m thinking: why should I sneak in Valentine’s Day when I know that it is against what these people believe? Similarly, we do not celebrate Christmas. The kids are bombarded with the commercial aspects of Christmas. It is over the top. It is too much even for the Christians. As for Halloween, there is a brochure that the school hands out every year, and I guess that is our policy. I do not think that Halloween is an evil time or anything like that. There is nothing bad; it’s just a time to celebrate the people who passed on and their lives. I do not promote teaching about it and I do not have the time for it. I have a curriculum to follow.

Considering the fact that some students celebrate these events in their homes, handling these situations in their school is a sensitive matter. It requires coming up with reasonable responses, without alienating these students, and following the school’s [unwritten] policies at the same

time. All participating teachers at Cordova School, regardless of their faith, said that while they do not promote or celebrate these events in the school, they know that their students do celebrate, outside the school, and are okay with that. A Grade Three Muslim teacher says that “Halloween is something that I do not respond to because that is a very personal thing. You do have kids who go out for trick-or-treating and others who do not. So, it is a personal thing and it is up to the parents”. Another Muslim teacher says “that is one of the personal things with me. I might not encourage it; it is definitely not one of our celebrations; it comes up every year and I do hear kids talking about it and saying that they went out and it does not bother me”. Yes, the school keeps a brochure that warns parents and students about Halloween. The brochure provides an historical perspective and an Islamic ruling that forbids celebrating this event; however, teachers quietly ignore the policy as long as the students celebrate the event outside of the school.

6.6 Dealing with Internal Challenges

The Muslim term *Ummah* denotes a tightly knit community that shares a belief system, values, or political aspirations. The use of the term, however, masks internal diversity and plurality of the *Ummah* (Modood, 2007; Nimer, 2002; Saeed, 2009). The *Ummah* contains within itself different political, social, racial, and denominational enclaves. These elements may collaborate and show solidarity. However, it is also very common for them to compete, undermine each other, or openly fight.

A Diverse Community: Certain ethnic or racial minorities may seem to be dominating these two Islamic schools in terms of the student population or the governing body. However, ethnic and racial tensions appear to be either ignored or contained with minimum public controversy. While at Cordova Islamic School, I met a group of Grade Seven boys and girls who came back to the building before the end of the lunch recesses. They followed me to the school’s Science Lab, telling me how long each one of them had been enrolled in this school and how much they

enjoyed being with their friends. After listening to their jokes and friendship stories, I asked them: “How do you often identify yourselves by ethnicity, citizenship or faith?” The group put an emphasis on their Islamic identity. They competed to answer the question, often interrupting each other, and strived to show their bond as brothers and sisters in Islam. “We are Muslims before anything else. We were together since Kindergarten and we are like a family”. Similar statements were repeated by other members.

I asked them “Not necessarily from your friends but has anyone of you experienced or witnessed a conflict because of his or her race and ethnicity in the school?” There was a moment of silence. The students looked at each other and then one of the boys said: “Well, there is nothing serious but some of the boys in my grade sometimes brag about their ethnic background”. “How so?” I asked him. Looking at the other boys, he said: “Guys, remember how Tariq, Hassam and them [names changed] used to say “we rule the school and the school belongs to us and other kids were saying no. Yeah, there was a fight at the lunch recess but not very serious. Teachers came and stopped the fight”.

I interviewed the Grade Seven teacher the next day and asked her if she found the diversity challenging, which she responded:

Oh, no. I LOVE IT! I just find it so enriching. I don't find that challenging in any way, shape or form. My challenge is because I have students building their own type of hierarchy, if you will, that has been going on in Grade Seven. And these boys who have Fijian background, they are the kings. Now, I have some nephews of my late brother and his wife from Eretria and remember Moses telling me: Oh Aunty Linda (name changed), boys of the school are all coming together and you know the Fijians are the number one, and this is number two, and that is number three, and everything was built as a hierarchy.

This was long time ago in public school. I see it here right now. What these boys are doing is banding together with other students from their ethnic background for being really cool.

These kinds of tensions are not unique to the Grade Seven boys at Cordova School. Some parents also show anxiety about the fact that their children interact with students from other ethnic backgrounds. When talking to the principal of *Medina* School, I asked him the following: “Your school serves a diverse Muslim community. Is that a challenge or an opportunity?” The principal responded:

Actually it's both. It is an opportunity and at the same time, it is a challenge for us because it is a boarding school and our students are coming from different cultures. Every parent and child follows their own way in their own culture not only in education but in living standards, so we are working very hard to bring everyone under the culture of Islam. Look at it from this way, it is a great opportunity but it's a big challenge when a parent comes to you and says “Put my son with so and so. I don't want my son to share a room with so and so backgrounds”. It seems not easy! However, when you pull all families under the umbrella of Islam it creates a new opportunity for us. We tell them that we are not looking that much into their cars, languages, backgrounds, or anything else. We are not interested in particular ethnic or racial backgrounds. We welcome all students. We have to explain to them that the school is a multicultural school and we are bringing everyone who agrees with our policies and expectations.

The Muslim community includes groups of devout Muslims who advocate only for perfecting the acts of worship. The group focuses on purifying the soul and the inner dimension of the Muslim individual, but distance themselves from politics and political involvement. Some

members of the community are openly secular, who may see a place for religion only in the realm of personal moral conducts and some social functions. However, their overall worldview may or may not agree with the basic tenets of Islam. This is in addition to multiple shades and colors of political Islamists groups. Some of these Islamist are labelled as radicals or extremists; others are classified as traditionalist, while a third group brands itself as moderate or modernist.

Members of the community also differ in where they position themselves in terms of self-identification. Some prefer to identify with their country of origin, racial background, or country of citizenship. Other groups consider Islam their primary identification. Some elements in the latter group self-identify themselves as belonging to the Islamic movement. They often lead the campaign to establish Islamic educational institutions. According to Cook (1999), however, “Islamic movement generally fails to address how an Islamic education with universal applications will overcome the formidable barriers of political, cultural and linguistic diversity of the *Ummah*” (p. 351). Islamic educational institutions serve very diverse communities. Members of these communities bring different, and in some cases, opposing understandings and expectations of what constitutes education, Islam, and life in general, which poses a challenge to these institutions.

Parents bring their children to Muslim schools for various reasons, and since they pay fees, they expect the schools to accommodate their conception of education and choices of schooling experience for their children. Within the Islamic school communities, there is a segment among the parents, which advocates for elite Islamic schools. They often talk about establishing small, quality schools with high academic standards instead of inclusive community schools. “I am worried about my daughter’s future. She should not be at a disadvantage because of her attendance at the Islamic school” says a Grade Six parent at Cordova Islamic School. I

personally know three different families who unsuccessfully tried to change two Islamic schools in the Lower Mainland to purely academic schools. The families finally gave up, withdrew their children, and enrolled them in non-Muslim private schools. To attract and keep these kinds of parents, Muslim educational institutions present themselves as academic institutions that prepare students to post-secondary education opportunities.

Other parents' main goal is for their children to learn the basics of Islam. "I sent my son to this school in order for him to learn Islam, practice it and teach others. I want him to be an *Imam* for the community", says one parent of a Grade Six boy at Cordova Islamic school.

Some parents bring their children to the Muslim schools to `safe-keep them`. One parent declares, "I do not worry about academics. I want to save my son from the danger of drugs, alcohol and other social evils". The primary objective of this group appears to be preservation of faith and culture. Both academic achievement and religious knowledge are secondary to preservation of the parents' culture and traditions.

These competing interests, values, and goals often cause tensions in the operations of the Islamic educational institutions in Canada. As one of the participating principals admits, "different groups request or demand different ways of teaching, treating students and even running the institution. We have to explain to each one of them that this school serves a multicultural community and that our school brings together Muslims who came from all over the globe".

To cope with the community's internal diversity, educational institutions tend to avoid controversial issues and focus on simple and agreed upon principles of Islam and traditional social norms of the Muslim communities. One can hardly see Muslim school students celebrating their parents' traditional/national festivals in their schools. There are no written

policies about these issues. However, school administrators are often concerned about importing overseas ethnic and national tensions to their schools. Hence, they eliminate or minimize these events.

Similarly, religious celebrations are restricted to the essential, agreed upon festivals. Muslims in many parts of the world celebrate the birthday of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him). Other Muslims consider this celebration as a baseless innovation that should not be allowed in a Muslim community. Again, school principals often choose to stay away from this and similar religious events to keep the peace in the institution.

These restrictions may appear as confining and, at times, as an essentialist approach to Islamic culture. However, it provides other benefits, not least of which is a search for a harmony in a rather diverse community. In addition, as Nimer (2002) explains, “The religious and ethnic diversity among Muslims has prompted a growing tendency to express Islam in its simple and essential form, away from dogmatic discourse that characterized postcolonial experience of the Muslim world in the twentieth century” (p.2). In other words, the internal diversity among the members of the Muslim community forces institutions to distinguish cultural practices from Islamic basic principles.

Other researchers (Sayyid, 2009, and Schmidt, 2004) also noted that the Muslim communities in the diaspora, and the young generation in particular, tend to transcend ethnicity, geography, class, and other categories. This is to say that Islam can adapt to all times and places, but cultural practices may interrupt and slow down the process of adaptation. The Islamic educational institutions minimize ethnic and cultural celebrations to focus on what is common and meaningful for this generation, Islam. Some of these institutions view racial, ethnic, and national affiliations as confining labels that cannot satisfy human needs.

There is also a practical reason for favouring this arguably essentialist approach: these institutions do not have the capacity to accommodate all these customs and traditions. The principal of *Medina* School argues that “It is impossible to implement all of these ideas, and the only way we can accommodate these people is to put them all under our *deen*”.

Gender is another area of tension in Islamic schools. The debate about Islam and women is somewhat old, but it continues to generate heated discussions which take place in educational institutions, mosques, and online chat rooms, as well as at Muslim families’ dinner tables. Core to these debates is the conception of Muslim women’s identity. Ideological groups define it through different lenses according to their orientation. Tariq Ramadan (2010) argues that while Islam has no problem with women, literalistic interpretations of the religion do. To Ramadan, literalist forces freeze the text (the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah*), integrating the patriarchal context of the revelation time without critically looking into the relevant social and historical contexts.

After critiquing the literalist approach, Ramadan (2010) proposes “a discourse that speaks of women as beings before addressing only their functions in the family or society, a discourse that protects their autonomy and freedom of being and of action” (p.66). This approach is promoted by individuals and groups who self-identify as reformist. It is an approach that aims to be faithful to the text on the one hand, but strives to reach beyond the historical context on the other.

Regardless of the discourse, much of the debate about the position of women in Islam revolves around the politics of body and space. In other words, the discussion is reduced to how much of Muslim women’s body ought to be covered or uncovered and what kind of interactions are allowed or forbidden between Muslim women and men.

To the first question, the discussion stems from the meaning of the following verses from the *Qur'an*:

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their chastity, which is better for them. And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their chastity; and do not display their beauty except what appears thereof and let them wear their head covering over their bosoms (*Qur'an*: 24:30-31).

O Prophet! Say to your wives and your daughters and the believing women that they let down upon them their over-garments; this will be more proper for them that they may be known and thus will not be molested (*Qur'an*: 33:59).

There is well documented disagreement among traditional Muslim scholars about the meaning of the cover in these verses. What does the term 'displaying beauty' entail? To some conservative interpretations women must cover themselves from head to toe (Ibn Kathir, 1979). This opinion, though it is a minority opinion, goes back to the time of the companions of Prophet Mohammed. It has been there for over fifteen hundred years, but it was limited to the scholarly discussions.

A majority of the scholars, however, are of the opinion that mature women are required to cover all the body except the face and the hands. Some contemporary reformist scholars on the one hand question both interpretations and offer an alternative meaning of the verses (Zine, 2008). These reformist thinkers view hijab as historically and socially specific. They argue that the hijab was used as a social signifier for early Muslim women to show status or avoid harassment and molestation. This view is also anchored in the general objectives of hijab, which

is to preserve modesty rather than strictly enforcing a certain kind of dress code. According to Zine (2008),

These normative standards form the basis for what I term ‘the public performance of piety’. For example, maintaining specific dress codes such as the *hijab* or the *jilbab* from the time of puberty, shying away from make-up and nail polish and avoiding unnecessary contacts with boys are all hallmarks of the notion of piety ascribed to Muslim girls (p.190). These are not all religious edicts, but they all symbolize the constructed image of a practicing Muslim girl.

The Physical Education (P.E.) story mentioned in Chapter Five illustrates the challenges Cordova and similar Muslim educational institutions face. The tension stems from an attempt on the school’s part to provide adequate physical education within the accepted Islamic framework. The school authorities set the expectations and the norms that regulate the behaviour of the students and teachers. Within this framework, the girls of the school are socialized to project themselves in a way that they develop particular religious and social habits.

The Grade nine student from Cordova School wanted to dance with her classmates; she did not do anything Islamically wrong with this activity. Yet, she corrects herself by pointing out the kind of impression the activity may give to the public when she says “--- it just gives a bad example of how we want to be seen by the outside people--- I am in an Islamic school and I want to dance, doesn’t sound right”. The issue, therefore, is not only what Islam dictates. What is socially acceptable is also given some consideration. Muslim school students constantly negotiate maintaining a public performance of piety and benefiting from available leisure and athletic resources.

Like the female students, Muslim school female teachers also follow both the written as well as unwritten social norms. The only female faculty at *Medina* School, who is a non-Muslim, is totally veiled. Cordova School on the other hand, does not enforce the veil on non-Muslim teachers, but prescribes a dress code, which includes a baggy pair of pants, long sleeve shirt and a loosely-fitting lab coat that extends to the knees. Explaining her responsibilities in the school, a teacher at Cordova School reflects:

Well, starting with dress code that is just a basic everyday thing. Over the years, I heard people complaining about things, this or that, but that doesn't bother me because of my experience overseas and 'doing things as the Romans do'. I am here and I respect that and I am not going to overstep my boundaries with things such as dress code. I am aware, unlike my first day here for the interview when I extended my hand to the principal, Mr. Adam [name changed] and he was very uncomfortable [laughing], and as he was shaking my hand explained: 'well, you know we do not shake hand with the opposite sex'. And because I have learned, I will not extend my hand very often. The father or the teacher or whatever will extend their hand to me and I will follow the lead.

Islamically, physical interactions between the genders are largely confined to marriage. The discomfort about the handshake illustrates what Jasmin Zine (2008) calls a genderized space in Islamic educational institutions. According to Zine (2008), "the social construction of genderized space is instituted early on in Islamic schools settings as a precautionary measure to avoid possibilities for inappropriate encounters or distractions caused by members of the opposite sex" (p.195). Though Cordova Islamic School is a co-ed institution, one could easily observe signs of segregation between the students. In the classrooms, boys and girls sit in separate rows. Similarly, one can hardly observe them playing together in the field. In fact, most

of the organized games are dominated by the boys. The girls are either spectators or often socializing in small groups walking around the school building.

The gender issues in the Islamic educational institutions are part of larger and sometimes intense discussions about the position of women in Islam. In their defensive mode, conservative elements among the Muslim community often put emphasis on the fact that men and women have the same moral and religious and responsibilities. They select verses from the *Qur'an* that support their claim that:

Men and women have an equal claim to salvation: For Muslim and for Muslim women; for men who believe and for women who believe; for men who obey and for women who obey; for men who speak the truth and for the women who speak the truth --- for all of them, God has prepared forgiveness and a vast reward (*Qur'an*: 33: 35)

I shall not let the deeds of anyone go to waste, male or female; both are the same in this respect (Quran: 3:195).

Islamic marriage aims to mutual respect, support and care: They (your wives) are garments for you while you (husbands) are garments for them (*Qur'an*: 2:187).

Domestic conflicts are to be resolved in a civil and amicable manner: If you fear a breach between the two, then appoint an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people; if they both desire agreement (negotiate in good faith), *Allah* affects harmony between them (*Qur'an*: 4:35).

Hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness (*Qur'an*:2:229).

The selection of the verses and similar quotes provides a rather positive portrayal of gender relationships in Islam. But it does not go further to expose abuses that some women in the

Muslim societies experience in the name of Islam. Instead, the proponents of this approach tend to be either defensive or hide behind the shield of cultural differences.

The overly positive approach is opposed by an equally strong spin, which exposes gross abuses that women experience in the Muslim communities across the globe. The negative spin often relies on exaggerated written reports; media images as well as personal stories. In addition to the real abuses, these images are filled with colonial stereotypes of Muslim societies. Further, some despicable customs, which have nothing to do with Islam, are added to the mix. To give an example, honour killing and genital mutilation practices are traditional practices or customs that are inaccurately linked to Islam.

6.7 Coping with External Pressures

The town of Herouxville, QC proposed a so-called code of conduct for new arrivals. As the Toronto Star and other media outlets reported on February 5, 2007 Herouxville's city council unanimously approved a bylaw that places unusual conditions on would-be residents of the town, particularly those who look or act differently. While the city council made attempts to package the code as a generally applicable bylaw, the high degree of Muslim stereotypes in the code reveals that Muslims are the specific targets of this arbitrary code of conduct.

As mentioned in the beginning of this dissertation, Herouxville's city council is an example of an overall fear and anxiety about Islam and Muslims in the Western countries and the desire to control and relegate Muslims and similar minorities to the margins of the mainstream societies. Herouxville's code of conduct shares some similarities with the ban of building new minarets in Switzerland as well as the ban of the niqab in France's public institutions.

The forces behind the negative campaign appear to aim at curtailing Islamic symbols and values from spreading to the mainstream society. As Mayer (2009) argues, "far from being limited to the issue of the minaret itself, the campaign debates dealt with Islam in general. The

supporters of the ban have made the minaret into a symbol of what they see as the Islamization of Switzerland and Europe” (p.3). The minaret has become a symbol which various groups used to rally around. It was depicted as an expression of a movement, which aims to peacefully invade Europe (Mayer, 2009), spread the Islamic values and ultimately dominate the continent’s legal system.

This discourse treats the Muslims as a foreign entity that either should be tamed through assimilation or denied settlement in the civilized world. Commenting on the minaret ban, an Italian cabinet minister, Roberto Calderoli (from Northern League) was quoted as saying that “respect for other religions is important, but we have got to put the brakes on the Muslim propaganda or else we will end up with an Islamic political party” (Mayer, 2009: 4). This minister’s statement may sound extreme and intolerant but these kinds of ideas are not uncommon. Ten days after the Swiss referendum (December 10, 2009) a debate was held in central London (England): Islamification of UK: Reality or Myth! Jeffrey Marshal, a senior member of the British National Party (BNP) was one of the invited speakers. After presenting an exaggerated statistics of the increasing number of the Muslim population in the UK, he declared (Kani, 2010):

We would ban the burqa. To us, the English, the hidden face symbolizes sinister and reminds us of terrorists and highway men. The Swiss vote in favour of banning the minarets is something that we would replicate. The skyline should not be dominated by mosques; it should be a smaller construction appropriate to a foreign faith (p.2).

The French president, Nicholas Sarkozy also makes similar statement as quoted by Zakaria (2009) “the burqa is not a religious sign; it’s a sign of subservience” and that “it would not be welcome in the French Republic” (p.1).

The politicians are not calling for the elimination of the Muslim population in Europe nor are they asking the Muslims to totally abandon their faith. Rather, they are positioning the Muslims as alien entities that have no entitlement to the European public space. To these politicians, like many Swiss voters, Muslims have a right to live and function in the society as long as they do not acquire visibility in the public space. This is so because “in an idealized Swiss landscape, there is simply no place in Islam, unless it is willing to remain invisible” (Mayer, 2009: 8). This was apparent in the pre-referendum campaign of the anti-minaret forces.

The incidents also have signs of power imbalance. The dominant groups decide what is public and what is private. They also decide whose values and symbols should dominate the public space and whose symbols should be given a smaller space appropriate to a foreign ideology as Mr. Marshal argued. To Marshal and others, as Ramadan argues (2010) “Islam and Muslims do not symbolize settled citizens but eternal immigrants who are to be integrated or stigmatized” (p.76). The French president, the members of the city council in Quebec and the British politician seem to have similar assumptions; they definitely display similar attitudes towards the Muslim citizens in their respective countries.

The dominant groups (Modood, 2007) often allow marginalized groups to practice their religion and wear their distinct cultural attire, provided that all of that is done privately at homes or community functions. This way of structuring space and controlling symbols of identity can be a huge source of power that often leads to gross inequalities. Modood (2007) argues that these marginalized groups assert themselves to stand up and claim their share of the public space. By so doing they reject marginalization and oppression. Hence, the niqab or burqa could be looked at as an assertion of power or an attempt to share the public space. They promote real

multiculturalism by dismantling and remaking the public identity. Remaking the public identity is what the dominant groups are struggling to accept.

The Swiss vote indicates that the anti-Muslim sentiment is not an issue that is exclusive to an extremist group and some fringe elements in the society. That is why it is both inaccurate and unfair to label 57.5 percent of the Swiss society as racist, xenophobic or intolerant. The popular vote system may be unique to Switzerland. However, “there is no doubt that the outcome would be quite similar should citizens in other European countries be given the opportunity to vote on such or similar issues” (Mayer, 2009: 9). Islamic educational institutions belong to a religious minority in a multicultural, predominantly secular society.

The institutions also operate in an era of conflicts and political violence that are often linked to Islam. As an Islamic Studies teacher at Cordova complains:

We live in a world that is covered with clashes and problems. And we feel that there is a constant attack on Islam and its institutions that sometimes goes too far, so as Islamic studies teachers, we end up defending Islam, which really became a ‘defendant in a very unjust court system’.

To this teacher, not only are Muslims blamed for violence and terrorism but Islam itself is now under attack or, as he described, has become a ‘defendant’. The attack on Islam and its institutions takes different forms, and, significantly, Muslim educational institutions.

The institutions serve a stigmatized community. An area of tension in the Muslim community in general and the educational institutions in particular is the issue of naming. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a concerted effort was made to create some kind of good Muslim versus bad Muslim categories (Lawson, 2005 & Siddiqui, 2006). Some labels denote either a neutral or a positive image. The terms include traditionalist, moderate,

modernist, and progressive Muslim. Other terms indicate rather negative connotations. These terms include: radical, jihadist, fundamentalist and wahabist. In fact, some reputed scholars argued for the appropriate use of these forced labels (Modood & Ahmad, 2007). However, they did not provide an answer to the following questions: Who is making these labels? Who has the power or is empowered to participate in the labelling exercise? Is there an individual, a group or an institution that will opt to the second category, if given a voice?

Muslim educational institutions try to portray themselves as moderate, tolerant and a positive contribution to the larger society. Cordova and other school-like institutions present themselves as modern, integrated schools. In fact, they often exaggerate when they are marketing their openness to the mainstream values. However, under this positive spin, one can easily observe signs of fear and general uneasiness in these institutions. They are cautious about the possibility of being negatively labeled. They are afraid of being labeled as terrorist training grounds, but with milder yet negative attributes such as extremist, fundamentalist, radical, and similar negative labels.

Months after the September 11 attack, one of the participating school`s principal asked a senior Islamic Studies teacher to review the Islamic Studies curriculum. The teacher was instructed to make sure that the curriculum and other learning resources in the school were free of any material which could be interpreted as a source of intolerance or violence or extremism. To operate in British Columbia and receive funds from the government, schools must make sure that they do not teach, promote, or tolerate radical or intolerant literature. The school went through all regular ministry inspections, yet, “the principal wanted to double check everything to protect the school” said the Islamic Studies teacher smiling.

The principal's response is natural in the current political atmosphere. There seems to be a persisting collective fear caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The collective anxiety could be linked to the way some governmental agencies treated some members of the Muslim community. According to Siddiqui (2006), Muslims have been victims of racial profiling, arbitrary airport and boarder searches, frequent identity mix ups, and public harassments. Siddiqui further argues that Muslims are constantly monitored by the secret services and the media. Hence, "they must be careful about what they say in email, phone conversation and in public" (p.11). Further, as the infamous soccer and martial arts incidents reveal, individual Muslims also need to be careful about their outlook, such as wearing a hijab and other outwardly forms of expressing Islamic identity. This collective anxiety seems to have created what Siddiqui (2006) called 'psychological interment'.

In addition to the general anxiety, Muslim educational institutions are particularly under scrutiny. Like other independent schools Islamic educational institutions are accused of depriving students of socializing with the larger society (Zine, 2007). Muslim schools face additional and more serious challenges, to prove that they are not a threat to society. As Kymlicka, (2003) and Mandeville (2007) argue, Muslim schools are accused of being a potential threat to the larger society or a training ground for terrorists. These accusations not only create doubts about the institutions and their communities, but they also foster a sense of insecurity and overall anxiety in these institutions. Talking to Muslim school educators, one feels the uneasiness about external pressures, particularly about the media. One of the principals shares this concern about the external forces and how they portray Islamic institutions when he states that:

One major challenge for Islamic institutions is the media, which often focuses on negative issues in the Muslim community. For example, if something happens in the Muslim world, the focus would be on the Muslims here immediately, particularly, the Muslim educational institutions. That is why I believe that we are unfairly treated by the media.

To summarize, Islamic educational institutions make a concerted effort to maintain and promote Islamic identity. They use Islamic symbols and artifacts to nurture this identity. Furthermore, they provide a platform that encourages Islamic conduct and manners. The institutions also provide a safe space for practicing Islamic rituals. However, they face serious challenges that stem from internal diversities as well as external pressures.

7 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

The goal of the research was to describe how two Muslim educational institutions in British Columbia negotiate the tension that stems from implementing Islam-based educational programs in a predominantly secular, multicultural context. To establish both significance and relevance, the study provided a summary of the Canadian Muslim community and its educational institutions. To illustrate the Muslim community's fast-growing population, evidence from census data indicates the number of the Muslims in Canada increased from 98,000 people in 1981 to 842, 200 people in 2007.

The literature review presented a summary of Islamic education's unique worldview, which includes goals, sources, and essential elements as well as forming identity through the concept of *Ummah*. The literature review also explored Canadian multiculturalism. The review paid attention particularly to Charles Taylor's *Politics of Recognition* and Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Theory of Minority Rights*. The review also noted that the initial intent of Canada's multicultural policy was to help minority groups integrate into, and contribute to Canadian society. The policy also aimed at providing support to these groups to overcome, or at least mitigate cultural barriers. Without minimizing the policy's various benefits for all Canadians, the literature review noted that Canadian multiculturalism was originally initiated to accommodate European ethnic groups that already shared many religious and cultural aspects with the mainstream Anglo and Francophone communities. While it is true that the Canadian multicultural system provides some needed support to all minorities, it hardly speaks to religiously-motivated minorities who do not conform to the secular understanding of religion and religious values.

As a case study of two schools in British Columbia, this research focused on Islamic educational institutions' attempts to negotiate the Islamic worldview and maintain their Islamic identity. The study profiled two schools, Cordova School and *Medina* Islamic School, and concluded that:

1. The two institutions have some commonalities. However, they differ in their tendencies.

While Cordova tends to conform to the public systems, Median Schools tries to conform to the traditional Islamic learning heritage.

2. Primary stakeholders in this study, including parents, teachers, students, and administrators tend to define Islamic education according to the school-type they are affiliated with; most of *Medina* School participants, and a few from Cordova School defined Islamic education as teaching and learning the principles of Islam. Most of the participants from Cordova School, defined Islamic education as an encompassing system that nurtures learners' physical, spiritual, intellectual, and moral needs and growth.
3. Islamic educational institutions in this study strive to provide a safe and comfortable space of learning through enabling students to practice and live in a supportive environment. This requires integrating Islam into the provincial curriculum. However, these institutions face two serious challenges that often impede achieving these goals, namely finding suitable teachers, and locating proper learning materials.
4. Islamic educational institutions, which participated in this study promote and maintain Islamic identity by facilitating a collective practice of Islamic duties. The schools' daily schedules accommodate prayer times. They also teach and provide some sort of practice to the other pillars of Islam. The institutions also use Islamic artefacts and symbols to promote

Islamic identity. These artefacts and other identity-promoting tools are particularly prevalent in Cordova Islamic School.

5. The institutions, particularly the school-type one, promote an Islamic identity which takes into consideration the students' Canadian identity. In addition to offering the provincial curriculum to their students, the school organizes intramurals and other friendly sports with some other public and private schools. It also solicits the services of various public agencies such as the RCMP, fire marshals, public nurses, and other health service agencies.
6. The institutions face both internal and external challenges. The internal challenges include finding appropriate resources, responding to non-Islamic cultural and religious celebrations as well as serving a diverse Muslim community. External pressures, on the other hand include negative media coverage and global anxiety about Islam and Muslims.

7.2 Implications

I began this study by stating my identity and role as a Muslim school principal, a parent of Muslim school students, and a product of an Islamic school. To conclude the research, I want to revisit some key concepts in this study. To this end, I re-examine terms such as multiculturalism, Islamic education, and identity, through which I put forward the implications of the study.

Joining the Multicultural Conversation: Multiculturalism is a reality. Whether one likes it or not, Canadian Muslims, like many societies around the world, live in a multicultural setting (Abdi & Ghosh, 2004; Parekh, 2006; Ramadan, 2010). Multicultural institutions, therefore, should aim to help individuals and groups to develop and maintain identities that nurture a positive self-concept, and enable individuals to think critically as contributing members of a multicultural society.

Joining the multicultural conversation entails accepting multiple definitions for the meaning of the “good life”. Rather than pre-packaging values around the mainstream conceptions, multicultural societies need to promote and cherish their own unique identities (Abdi & Ghosh, 2004; Taylor, 1994). Celebrating distinctive cultures and identities is a way of encouraging the meaningful expression of these cultures and identities. This requires challenging the understanding of the dominant groups, which often tends to “put the onus on those who are different to cross the distance between their realities and dominant consciousness, while those who represent the norm avoid their responsibility” (Abdi & Ghosh, 2004:26). Rather, joining the multicultural conversation requires two-way communications: talking and listening, in which cultures and values are not only reasonably accommodated, but actively encouraged and celebrated.

In this context, tensions, and sometimes clashes of cultures and values are inevitable. If managed effectively, however, these tensions could lead to rich and robust cultures that are not only able to correct but to complement each other. Through this experience, cultures would expand each other’s horizon and create new possibilities.

Islamic educational institutions need to join the multicultural conversation and make distinctive contributions rather than reacting to cultural and political actions of the dominant society’s secular institutions. They need to promote an Islamic approach to multiculturalism that is based on learning from others, as well as, teaching others to create new possibilities. This approach acknowledges the common values, but it also urges people to recognize differences through mutual respect and spirit of “knowing to be known”. The approach is rooted on a verse in the *Qur’an* that reads: “O mankind! Indeed, we have created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another---“(Qur’an: 49:13).

Knowing one another entails joining the conversation without fear or hesitation. It requires being loud enough so the other can hear, but at the same time it requires being attentive enough to listen to other voices, and to respond appropriately. As Tariq Ramadan (2010) succinctly put it, multicultural reality requires:

Voicing one's own needs while listening to and hearing the other, accepting compromises without yielding on essentials, challenging deeply-set beliefs and rigid or dogmatic minds on all sides and particularly within one's cultural and religious family: that is not easy and it requires time, patience, empathy and determination (p.14).

Islamic educational institutions, therefore, need to join the multicultural conversation by leading initiatives that can have an impact on the larger society. This requires internal flexibility as well as external openness. It requires leading the effort to give religious values a space in the public arena.

Accommodating Faith Communities: As I have mentioned in chapter two, Will Kymlicka classifies Canadian minority groups into two categories, to which he assigns different moral claims. He labels first category 'national minorities', which consists of the French Quebecois and the First Nations. And he calls the second category 'ethnic minorities', which includes voluntary immigrants and refugees. Aside from the arbitrary nature of the division, one would notice an apparent emphasis on ethnicity in the liberal multiculturalism theory of minority rights.

Consequently, multiculturalism is largely reduced to superficial activities such as sharing ethnic food, exotic fashion fairs, and dance festivals et cetera. As a side effect, religious communities, particularly those who do not participate in these activities, are often marginalized.

Religious diversity is a reality in Canada and many other countries. This reality should bring about incorporating both cultural and religious resources of minority groups to the national

fabric. That is to say, rather than camouflaging certain groups' values as universal and relegating the rest (ethnic minorities) to occasional dances and food exchanges; multiculturalism should attempt to accommodate faith communities and their values meaningfully.

Faith communities do not merely inculcate cultural heritage for their members, but they could also provide rich values that need to be honored and accommodated to find proper space in the larger society. Honoring the values of minority groups, in part, means empowering them and giving them the opportunity to contribute to the public affairs of the society. As Hellyer argues (2006), "without equal access for all sectors of the society to contribute, the search for 'civic values' becomes a public relations exercise of the dominant segment of the society; each sector of the society must have the power to contribute to the discussion in order for it to be authentic" (p.348). As I have discussed earlier, a primary goal of the Canadian multicultural policy is to promote civic participation in the larger society and to increase mutual respect and appreciation (Kymlicka, 1998; Magsino 2000). A genuinely inclusive approach to incorporate the values and contributions of all communities will enhance the stability and cohesiveness of the Canadian society. This would only take a place in an environment where both minorities and the mainstream groups respect difference and celebrate diversity.

As mentioned earlier, some researchers raised concerns about the unity and cohesiveness of the nation. However, people will mostly likely protect and care about institutions, including nation state, when they feel that they are included as stakeholders. In the end, Members of these communities are also citizens of this nation. They should enjoy all privileges and immunities like the rest of the citizens, but they are also members of cultural and faith communities; they should not be asked to privatize their values and aspirations in order to join the public. Rather, multiculturalism should pave the way for a society where "there is both unity and diversity in

both public and private life, but a single public sphere that nevertheless drown from a consensus of societies' many communities" (Hellyer, 2006:348). A good point of departure would be opening a meaningful dialogue (and not merely a disguised monologue) about what is public and what is private? What is the role of religious teachings in both spheres? Who decides?

Canadian Muslim Community: I quoted Manoley Lupul in chapter two to argue that the contestation to the Canadian multiculturalism is not only from outside critics but also from within the liberal multiculturalism proponents. However, I would like to revisit Mr. Lupul's comments for he seemed to be utterly concerned, not about the nature or the direction of the Canadian multiculturalism, but about the 'Newcomers' who may divert multiculturalism policy to defend their illiberal values and unacceptable ways of life. Indeed, Mr. Lupul's alarmist position regarding what he calls the Third World Immigrants needs further discussion.

To his credit, Mr. Lupul (2005) admits his ignorance about non-European immigrants because, as he mentioned (p.481), he was preoccupied with the Ukrainian-Canadian cultural agenda. As a result, he did not pay attention to the newcomers and their issues except what he gets from the media in the form of occasional controversies such as wearing the Kirpal to school or the turban to the Canadian police force. In other words, Lupul spent decades of his life advocating for Canadian multiculturalism without interacting with other minorities or at least learning about them.

After September 11's terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, Mr. Lupul decided to understand Islam and Muslims or as claims, he wanted to immerse himself with the history, culture and religious teachings of the people from the Middle East (p.481). Then, he declares the result of his journey: "I was amazed to discover how thin was the line between the mosque and the state for some Islamists, and how illiberal were the cultural prescriptions of Islam" (p.481).

Lupul's ominous conclusion in chapter two, hence, stems from this discovery. His use of Third World Immigrants, Newcomers and similar terms rather than Muslims is deliberate. They are not polite terms used out of political correctness; they are an extension to a colonial discourse.

I suspect that Mr. Lupul immersed himself with a collection of orientalist literature, mixed with post September 11 media spills and, of course, his own fears. This is apparent from the way he recycled a selection of old, and often erroneous, stereotypes about Islam and Muslims to justify his agenda. His assumption about Muslims as Middle Easterners is another indicator of attachment to this discourse, which was employed by the European colonial system and popularized by Hollywood movies.

In her chapter, *Where the Heck is the "Muslim World" Anyway?* Ozlem Sensoy (2009) succinctly analyzes the binaries such as East/West, Muslim World/West. She raises questions, which include: What is the meaning of the "Muslim World"? More importantly, what is the function of the "Muslim World" discourse? She links this discourse to the Orientalism, which she defines as "a set of institutional practices that produce and normalize knowledge about the Orient (Arabia/Africa/Asia) often in contrast to the Occident (Europe/the New World)" (Sensoy, 2009: 80). She further argues that these practices and knowledge were developed in nineteenth century Europe, during the European global expansion and colonization.

This discourse reinforced the colonial stance, which viewed and continually views people in terms of superiors and inferiors; civilized and savages; Christians and Muslims; developed and backwards.etc. According to Sensoy, this institutionalized understanding was later support by the eugenics' movement, which through 'scientific experiments' claimed to confirmed the genetic inferiority of the Africans and Asians. This gave a momentum and subtly justified the colonization efforts of these continents and their indigenous peoples.

The Orientalist discourse manifests itself in various ways and forms. One persisting strategy has been repeatedly positioning Islam and Muslims outside of the regular world (Sensoy, 2009: 74), and excluding non-Middle Eastern Muslims who are the majority from the count. Regrettably, Lupul's alarmist conclusion perpetuates both of them.

Mr. Lupul was born and raised in Edmonton, the home of the first mosque built in North America, and where one of the oldest Muslim communities settled, some of them decades before his grandfather immigrated to Canada. He had an ample opportunity to interact with, exchange ideas and observe their traditions, values and aspirations before he repeats colonial stereotypes without examination.

Worse, Lupul is not an ordinary citizen; he is a scholar, a well-known multiculturalism advocate and a recipient of the Order of Canada. Rather than resorting to essentialist stereotypes, he could have learned about Islam and Muslim in Canada in his own backyard. It is fine to disagree with some aspects of Islam's religious teachings or cultural practices. Many disagree with them. However, he doesn't have the right to declare who should or should be allowed to be part of the Canadian multiculturalism.

As I mentioned in chapters one and three, Canadian Muslim are diverse in terms race, ethnicity, theological sects, schools of thought as well as their tendencies and degree of practice. Some are extremely conservative while others are highly liberal, but this is hardly unique to any community. Some Muslims may establish private educational institutions, but most of them send their children to the public system. However, they share common threads, which constitute unifying elements of global Muslim community. These elements include the *Shahadah* (testimony of faith), their view of the nature of mankind and the concept of *Ummah*.

Muslims are not concerned with territorial separation; they are not isolationist either. While some may shy away from holding a public office or enroll in political parties, they still want to function within the larger society. Further, like the rest of minority communities, Muslims accept state-imposed forms of integration (Kymlicka, 1998; Hellyer, 2006); for they realize that their chances to succeed depend on their participation in the mainstream institutions with their embedded historical, cultural and religious values. However, they “are demanding fair terms of integration” (Kymlicka, 1998:39). They are demanding an integration that allows them to fully participate without being required to compromise their beliefs and values to conform to what they perceive to be a set of arbitrary norms and regulations.

According Adams (2007), Canadian Muslims constitute 2.5% of the Canadian population. They are generally highly educated: forty five percent (45%) of them hold a university degree as compared with twenty three percent (23%) of all Canadians. They are not only diverse, but they are dynamic and proud Canadians. Ninety four percent (94%) of them are proud to be Canadian. This is in comparison to the national average, which is ninety three (93%). When Canadian Muslims were asked:

What characteristics of this country make them proud to be Canadians? Their answers mirror the responses of the population at large. Muslim Canadians tell us that they’re proud of Canadian freedom and democracy, multiculturalism and the fact that Canada is a safe place to live (Adams, 2007: 95).

Clearly, Canadian Muslims are not that much different from the rest of the population in terms of their love for their country. They equally cherish values such as freedom, democracy and multiculturalism. What else do they need to do in order for them to join Mr. Lupul’s First World?

Implementing targeted Islamization: Following Al-Attas (1979), many Islamic education researchers took Tarbiya, Ta'lim, and Ta'dib as basic ingredients for any Islamic-centered education endeavour; that is to say, educational institutions need to ensure that learners are nurtured in an integrated and holistic manner (Tarbiya). Similarly, these institutions should strive to impart knowledge and skills that are necessary for an individual to be a functioning Muslim and a productive member of a larger society (Ta'lim). More importantly, the process of nurturing the learner and imparting knowledge is sought to refine and discipline both body and soul (Ta'dib). The combination of the three constitutes a complete Islamic education system.

Educational institutions in this study express a commitment to an integrated Islamic education. However, they seem to be primarily focusing on Ta'lim, or transmitting knowledge and skills, and to a lesser degree the other components. Muslim educational institutions need to make an effort to create an environment that fosters an Islamic-friendly culture while being relevant to the lives of students in secular, pluralistic societies. Lemo (2003) suggests the development of an Islamic component for each area of study in the curriculum, or what she calls the "Islamic perspective". This initiative aims to bridge the gap between the revealed and synthetic knowledge.

In this approach, specially- trained teachers expose students to selected concepts and materials, and stimulate their thinking in a way that enables them to relate what they have learned in other subjects to their understanding of the *Qur'an* and the teachings of Islam in general. The component should present Islam not as disjointed pieces of information, as is the case in most Islamic schools, but as a worldview and complete way of living, in addition to a system that satisfies local needs. The intent is to establish institutions (Khan, 1990) that not only

deliver the teaching of Islam as a course, but more importantly, foster an environment that reflects a genuine Islamic ideology in a non-Muslim dominated society. In other words, Islamic institutions need to aspire to produce good, righteous people who structure their lives according to the ideals of Islam. As Lemo (2003) argues, these kinds of institutions aim to “equip them [students] to think and live as Muslims fully engaged with the contemporary world” (p.2), that is, to prepare students to actively participate in their secular, multicultural societies while preserving their Islamic values and identities.

This approach seems more realistic than total Islamization. However, it requires a high level of commitment and a great deal of coordination and teamwork. It requires mapping both Islamic and secular curricula, and starting a conversation about what is important in the local context. This can only take place through purposeful and well-crafted professional development programs for Islamic school teachers.

Professional development includes processes and activities that are designed to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the teachers (Guskey, 2000). The ultimate goal of these processes and activities is to improve students’ learning. For a Muslim school, imparting the Islamic worldview and fostering Islamic identity is a central goal. Data collected from teachers of the two participating schools, reveal a poor or total lack of understanding for this goal. I observed a clear gap between the schools’ espoused values and the teachers’ attitudes and practice in their classrooms.

One way of narrowing or closing this gap is to develop systematic, ongoing, and specially-designed professional activities for Muslim schools. In addition to providing regular professional development activities, Muslim school teachers need to acquire a basic

understanding of topics such as Islam's belief system, Muslim civilization and culture, Islam's philosophy of education, the aims and objectives of Islamic education, and so on.

Embracing Multiple Identities: Much of what has been said about identity revolves around what makes an individual or a group different from the rest of the world. It refers to the person or group's unique characteristics and essential qualities. These qualities often surface at times of social or political changes (Ramadan, 2010). The quest for differentiation of one's unique characteristics grows stronger when the individual or the group loses, or fears to lose some elements of their identity. Such changes force many people to question their values and redefine their identity. In these circumstances, the desire to redefine oneself in opposition to what one is not is natural according to Ramadan, who calls it a 'reactive identity'.

The reactive identity is a natural response to tensions when people within a society no longer resemble the others, or espouse their values (Parekh, 2006). The tension often turns into fear when the community is in danger of losing its culture due to external threats. Fear of losing identity and values, however, can also create or strengthen the community's commitment to its collective identity.

Ramadan's reactive identity may explain the Muslim community's renewed commitment to reassert Islamic identity in the post-September 11 era. In this era, various external pressures pose challenges to Muslims and Islamic institutions, but they also offer an opportunity to focus on the shared values of Islam. This new focus, according to Bowlby (2001), subsumes ethnic, linguistic, and cultural difference in an effort to rally the community to protect the threatened values. As he explains, "a shared religious and liturgical practice provides a common ground for building and sustaining religious communities and institutions (...) The accent is placed on what is shared within the religion" (p.18). Hence, while it is true that Muslim communities and their

educational institutions face considerable challenges to maintaining their Islamic identity, this pressure helps the community to rally around its shared values.

The reaction to the challenges seems somewhat positive, and has resulted in a diasporic Islamic culture and identity. The establishment of Islamic centers and educational institutions has increased rapidly in the last ten years, creating a sense of place and settlement, and a renewed Islamic identity (Bowlby, 2001). These efforts aim to find an appropriate place for Islamic identity with the Canadian diversity.

As reassuring as these initiatives may look, external pressures seem to put Islamic educational institutions off balance. School-type institutions make a concerted effort to conform to the norms of the mainstream educational system. One can easily observe a strong desire and effort for acceptance. Moderate Muslim educational institutions like Cordova, for example, want to be seen as part of the mainstream school system, though with an Islamic flavour.

Madrasah-type institutions, like *Medina*, on the other hand, tend to isolate themselves from the larger society. Their marketing strategies include statements about saving Muslim children from social evils, providing a safe environment, imparting authentic Islamic knowledge, and similar claims.

As illustrated in Chapter Five, school-type and Madrasah-type schools have clear distinctions. Despite these differences, the schools have similar experiences; they operate with certain level of tension and anxiety in which they grapple with how to prioritize multiple identities. In responding to these tensions, one type seems to give priority to its Canadian identity, while the other attempts to focus on its Muslim identity. Embracing multiple identities, as Ramadan was quoted in Chapter Two, may offer one way of reducing these tensions.

Embracing multiple identities is not easy. However, it is an attempt to offset negative tendencies such as rejecting others, racism, rigidly protecting harmful practices, or abandoning one's values in favour of the acceptance of others. As Ramadan (2010) illustrates in the following example, embracing multiple identities is not only desirable, it is also both natural and practical:

Each one of us has multiple identities that he/she must accept, nurture and develop. I have long been repeating to Muslims and to my fellow-citizens that I am Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by memory, Muslim by religion, European by culture, universalistic by principle, Moroccan and Mauritanian by adoption. This is no problem whatsoever: I live with those identities, and one or the other may take the lead depending on the context or the occasion (p.38).

Understanding identity according to this view may help Islamic educational institutions cope with the relentless pressure to assimilate. It may also offer a comfort to some elements in the Muslim community, who (out of fear) tend to pull educational institutions towards total isolation in the name of protecting Islamic values and norms.

7.3 Recommendations

While investigating the topic of Islamic educational institutions in British Columbia, many questions came to my mind. Some of the questions seemed very interesting. In fact, I seriously considered changing the focus of my study several times. I believe that further research in the following issues will be useful for both scholarly interests as well as educational practices.

Possible research questions would include: Islam and secular multiculturalism: Are they compatible? Are Muslim schools making any difference? Comparing Muslim school graduates to other Muslim youths in their age group in terms of social adjustment, retention of faith, and

maintaining identity. Who is making the grade? Comparing Muslim school students to other students in their provinces in academic performance. Integrating Islam to the mainstream secular subjects: What is possible?

In terms of educational practices, Muslim educational institutions offer unique educational programs; the schools are different from the public school system as well as the other private schools. As I have mentioned in chapter one, Canadian Muslims operate more than 50 schools. These schools face similar challenges, some of which were mentioned in this dissertation. Further, the schools lack any common organizational structure, which can establish shared standards and effective systems. Hence, I propose the following:

Establishing a governing body for the Muslim schools in Canada: Individual Muslim schools are owned by local communities and do not belong to a common governing umbrella. This umbrella organization is needed for more than one reason. Forming an effective Muslim school council would set standards for Muslim schools at the national level to ensure that member schools meet certain requirements. The council also would offer a support to the schools both internally and externally; it would provide a platform in which member schools share resources and experiences. The council also would advocate for Muslim schools and Islamic education in general. Further, without a governing body, Muslim communities risk wasting time and resources on educational institutions that do not meet basic requirements.

Designing a national Islamic Studies curriculum for Muslim schools in Canada: Despite some sporadic efforts, there is no common Islamic studies curriculum designed for Muslim schools at the national or provincial level. In fact, one could argue that most of them do not have a curriculum for this subject. *Medina* School imports its learning materials from overseas (Pakistan) while *Cordova* uses resources from Chicago. There are no accompanying curriculum

guides or clear learning outcomes for either resources. Hence, these institutions need to put their resources together and work collectively to establish a common curriculum. The new curriculum would require qualified teachers who understand and are able to teach it. To ensure a successful implementation, a national certification system for Islamic school teachers would hopefully be part of this initiative.

Recognizing and celebrating Muslim community`s internal diversity: Rather than viewing internal diversity as a sign of fragmentation, Muslim educational institutions need to promote and celebrate Islam`s history of fostering unity within diversity. Historically, Islam provided to its adherents universal principles, fundamental acts of worship and flexible rules that govern social interactions. In this way, Islam struck a balance between the preservation of its basic tenets on the one hand and providing flexible space for indigenous cultures on the other hand to establish continuity, relevance and stability. According to *Abd-Allah* (2006), Islam “became not only functional and familiar at the local level but dynamically engaging, fostering stable indigenous Muslim identities and allowing Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions whenever they went” (p.357). Hence, Islamic schools` educational initiatives should be presented from the platform of unity within diversity.

Responding to the negative image effectively: Muslim institutions need to respond to the poor image portrayed by the media about Islam and Muslims effectively. The first step is establishing an understanding that the anti-Muslim propaganda predates the current political conflicts. It is rooted in history, and often motivated by a combination of misunderstanding, fear and domination. The educational institutions need to address these issues internally and externally. This would include challenging Islamophobia and other forms of marginalization openly. It would also include “adopting a pedagogical approach that shifts the popular media

discourse away from the negative, essentialized referents toward a discourse of peace and social justices that is an essential, yet largely ignored aspect of the Islamic tradition” (Zine, 2008 b: p 4). Muslim schools therefore, need to reorganize their educational priorities and programs accordingly.

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APPENDICES

Appendix (A): Interview Protocols

Questions for Parents

1. What does Islamic education mean to you?
2. Why did you choose teaching at an Islamic school?
3. What makes Islamic education different? What makes your school different?
4. What kinds of challenges do Islamic educational institutions face in Canada?
5. What types of activities do you allow your children to attend? Why?
6. What types of activities do you not allow your children to attend? Why?
7. Do you face challenges in convincing your children in that regard? Does the school help you in this regard?
8. What do you expect of Islamic school teachers? How are they different from other teachers?
(Say in the public system?)

Questions for Teachers

1. What does Islamic education mean to you?
2. Why did you choose teaching at an Islamic school?
3. What makes Islamic education different? What makes your school different?
4. What kinds of challenges do Islamic educational institutions face in Canada?
5. What types of activities do you allow your students to attend? Why?
6. What types of activities do you not allow your students to attend? Why?
7. Do you face challenges in convincing your students in that regard? Do the parents help you in this regard? How?

8. What area of the curriculum do you find difficult teaching in Islamic school? Why?
9. Do you integrate Islamic principles to the regular curriculum? How so?
10. What do you expect of yourself as an Islamic school teacher? How are you different from other teachers? (Say in the public system?)

Questions for Students

1. Why do you attend Islamic School?
2. What does Islamic education mean to you?
3. What do you like about Muslim school? Why?
4. How do you practice what you learn when you are not in the school?
5. Do you find difficulty practicing some aspects of what you have learned in the school? Explain?
6. What types of activities do your parents allow you to participate, but the school does not allow?
7. Give me examples of some activities that you wish your parents allowed to do, but they do not?
8. Give me examples of some activities that you wish your teachers allow you to do, but they do not?
9. What do you expect of Islamic school teachers? How are they or should they be different from other teachers? (Say in the public system?)

Questions for Principals

1. What does Islamic education mean to you?
2. Why did you choose working at an Islamic school?
3. What makes Islamic education different? What makes your school different?
4. What kinds of challenges do Islamic educational institutions face in Canada?
5. Your school serves diverse Muslim communities. Is that a challenge or an opportunity?
How?
6. How does your school prepare students to be members of the Muslim *Ummah*?
7. How does your school prepare students to be integrated members of the Canadian society?
8. Do you find tensions between belonging to the Muslim *Ummah* and the Canadian society? How?
9. What do you expect of Islamic school teachers? How are they different from other teachers? (Say in the public system?)



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Appendix (B) Letter of Initial Contact

(Date)

Name and Address of Potential Participant)

Dear (Name of the Potential Participant)

I am a doctoral student in the Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Program at the University of British Columbia. I am conducting a research project that entitled: Islamic Education in a Multicultural context: The Case of Two Educational Institutions in British Columbia. As the title the research project suggests, my intention to deepen understanding of how Islamic educational institutions negotiate the tensions that stem from serving a highly diverse community on the one hand, and deal with the external pressures that arise from maintaining Islamic worldview and identity in a predominantly secular multicultural society.

The information that will be collected during this study is for purpose of writing a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education from UBC, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Department of Educational Studies. My research supervisors are Dr. Jennifer Chan, Assistant Professor, can be reached at (604) 822-5353 or Jennifer.chan@ubc.ca

and Dr. Handel Wright, Associate Professor, who can be reached at (604) 822-2705 or handel.wright@ubc.ca.

Participating in this study will involve accepting to be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will take place at your school, and it will take 2 ½ - 3 hours. The interview will be tape-recorded, transcribed, and you will have an opportunity to read the transcript, and make changes if you wish so.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me by telephone me at (604) xxx-xxxx during the day or at 778-xxx-xxxx in the evening or by email at xxxx@interchange.ubc.ca or indicate in the space below and return to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope I have provided by (date TBA following Ethics Committee approval).

I look forward to hearing from you

Sincerely

Abdullah Omar

EdD Student

I am interested in participating in the study described in your letter. I look forward to receiving the Invitation to participate and consent form from you

Name: _____ Signature: _____

(Please print)



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Appendix (C) Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences whatsoever.

If have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, I may contact Abdullah Omar by telephone at 604 xxx-xxxx during the day or at 778-xxx-xxxx in the evening or by email at xxxx@interchange.ubc.ca, or Dr. Jennifer Chan, Assistant Professor, at (604) 822-5353 or Jennifer.chan@ubc.ca or Dr. Handel Wright, Associate Professor, at (604) 822-2705 or handel.wright@ubc.ca.

If I have concerns about my treatment or rights as a research participant, I may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

I understand that if I should experience distress as a result of participation, in this study, I may also reach (name of a person, (school name) at 604) {school phone number} for consultation and referral.

I understand that the data collected from this interview will be secured and kept confidential. I do not waive any of my legal rights by signing this consent form. I have received a copy this consent form for my records.

I consent to participate in this study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date



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Appendix (D) Letter to Parents

School's Letterhead

June 12, 2007

Re: Islamic Education in Multicultural Context

Dear Parents:

(Name of the school) has agreed to participate in a study being conducted by a University of British Columbia Doctoral student, Abdullah Omar that has its aim to increase understanding of Islamic education in Canada, with an emphasis to understand Islamic educational institutions' endeavour to promote and maintain Islamic worldview and identity in predominantly secular society. Your daughter/son has been selected to take part in this study.

Participation of your son/daughter entails approximately three hours of interview in two different days. The participation is voluntary; your son/daughter can stop and withdraw from the study at any time of the interview. If you have any questions about your son/daughter participating in this study, please contact me at (phone number of the school).

Sincerely

Principal's name

I, _____ Parent/guardian of _____

Hereby consent to my daughter/son participating in the above study

Signature

Date



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Appendix (E) Letter of Assent

The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of Islamic Education in Canada with an emphasis on Islamic education institution’s endeavor to promote and maintain Islamic worldview and identity in a secular pluralistic society. It sheds some light on how Islamic educational institutions in Canada respond to various internal and external pressures.

The participation is voluntary, and you don’t have to be in this study. No one will be mad at you if you don’t want to do this. If you don’t want to be in this study, you just have to tell me. And, remember you can say “yes” now and change your mind.

Your parents/guardians know about this study. You have had it explained to you and you have been given and chance to ask questions about it. By writing your name below, you are saying that you know what participating in this study involves, and that you want to be in it.

I understand that the data collected from this interview will be secured and kept confidential.

I agree to be part of this study. I understand that the information I provide will be used for this study and other scholarly writings.

Do you understand this study and are you willing to participate?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Signature of Child

Date