How and to what extent can modern educational practices be employed to help make traditional Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young Muslims living in Britain?

A Case Study of The Amanah Centre

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Abstract

Islamic educational establishments are important features in Muslim communities, both historically and in the modern world. This study looks at how Muslim supplementary schools in Britain are educating young children about their faith. The Amanah Centre is a Muslim supplementary school situated in Cardiff and its founders are all Muslim women who come from professional backgrounds. Using The Amanah Centre as a case study, this project investigates the extent to which modern educational practices can be employed to help make traditional Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young Muslims living in Britain. The findings from this qualitative study are based on twelve hours of participant observations at The Amanah Centre and three semi-structured interviews with teachers and stakeholders. The primary data acquired from this research were analyzed from a phenomenological perspective.

Key words: Muslim supplementary schools, Islamic education, pedagogy, educational theory, Quranic studies, *Tajweed*

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Introduction

Educational activities and their accompanying institutions are notable features throughout Muslim civilizations. Islamic institutions in Britain vary in both form and function (Gent 2013:28). This study critically examines how teachers at a Muslim supplementary school decide how and to what extent modern pedagogical tools can be used effectively whilst providing and preserving 'traditional' rudimentary Islamic education. It closely inspects how the teachers at The Amanah Centre (AC)[1] act contextually in light of modern pedagogical practice and long standing Islamic traditions. This research provides a unique lens into how teachers at AC are able navigate through the realms of 'traditional' Islamic scholarship as well as modern educational practice in order to make Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young British Muslims.

The acquisition of an Islamic education for the vast majority of Muslim children is at the disposal of some form of supplementary schooling (Cherti and Bradley 2011, Mogra 2005). Although the figures are highly speculative, recent studies show that most Muslim children living in Britain attend some form of supplementary school (Cherti and Bradley 2011, Gent 2005). Children who attend these schools are as young as five and they learn about the basics of Islam, what it means to be a Muslim, and how to read the Quran in classical Arabic. In general, Islamic education has generated a plethora of literature from a vast array of authors (see Abbas 2002, Gunther 2007, Kadi 2006). Many academics advocate the growing need for the production of academic material that closely examines the daily experiences and interactions majority of young British Muslims have with formal Islamic education i.e. Muslim supplementary schools (Gent 2013, Scourfield 2013, Mogra 2007).

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[1] AC is an abbreviation of Amanah Centre; both of these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

In comparison to supplementary schools, the case for or against Muslim 'faith schools' has received greater scholarly attention[2]. Surprisingly, only four per cent of Muslims attend such schools (Ahmed 2012), and it is fair to make the assertion that the 'faith school' debate has drawn disproportionate attention. Scourfield et al (2013) comment on how the impetus into researching Muslim faith schools was largely motivated by media and political controversies.

The number of Muslim supplementary schools in Britain are increasing and it is unclear the extent to which Muslim supplementary school teachers are trained. It is therefore important to understand these educational establishments in greater detail, and this dissertation aims to make a contribution to this discourse. This study provides a look at the way one institution has organised itself to teach young British Muslims about their faith. A specific focus is placed upon how Muslim women have socially constructed 'roles' that are often non-existent in mainstream supplementary schools. This study argues that AC is a successful model for teaching and learning, which other Muslim organisations can benefit and draw lessons from[3].

A note on the term 'traditional

The term 'traditional' in the context of Muslim education is often associated with negative connotations such as pedagogical methods imported from foreign countries. These practices are usually deemed as 'cultural' and not seen as distinctively 'Islamic', e.g. physical punishment. 'Traditional' education is often spoken of as backward and perceived to be inconsistent with modernity, for instance, Gent (2013:27) describes how one participant referred to 'traditional'

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[2]For instance, Meer (2009) as well as Tinker and Smart (2011) have studied Muslim schools with a particular focus on the construction and articulation of 'Muslim identity'. Whilst, McLoughlin (1998) addresses the issue of 'representing' Muslim schools and the politics of applying for state funding (see also Archer 2003, Cheema 1996, Hashmi 2003 and Hewer 2001).

[3] See Yin (2003:16) and Schorr (1997) for details on how single case studies can be generalised

methods as a form of 'punishment' and 'a crude *(sic)* method of teaching'. Contrary to this, my use of 'traditional' is done so in relation to content and not practice. Although AC's educational practice and school ethos suggests that it is a 'modern' institute, its educational programme however is firmly rooted in the Quran, *Sunnah* and the longstanding Islamic religious tradition, and to refer to its educational programme as anything other than 'traditional' would be a disservice. I use The Amanah Centre as an example to demonstrate how the fusion of traditional Islamic education with modern educational practice can potentially bring about a successful model of teaching and learning, which Muslim supplementary schools throughout Britain and by extension the West can learn from. Institutions such as AC, are able conjure up a form of Islamic education that is traditional and authentic as well as both meaningful and relevant to young Muslims living in a Western context.

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review conveys some of the main themes and topics that have been discussed in academic writings in relation to Muslim supplementary schools. It does this whilst maintaining a sharp focus on the research questions designed for this project. In doing so, an emphasis has been placed upon the nature of Muslim supplementary schools in Britain, their educational programmes and pedagogical practice, as well as portraying the way in which Muslim supplementary schools contribute to developing an 'identity' for young Muslims living in a British context. The literature review concludes by making a strong case for more academic research against the backdrop (and implications) of popular media portrayals. In light of this, the wider literature, such as the philosophical underpinnings of Islamic education and the diversity of Muslim institutions in Britain are referred to but not expanded upon. These aspects fall beyond the scope of this project and have been deliberately omitted. By constraining the literature review in this manner, a strong framework of secondary data emerges; this provides a useful framework for analysis in the 'Findings' chapter.

Muslim Supplementary Schools in Britain

The facilities for after-school provision for young Muslim children to learn Islam are well established. However it is difficult to ascertain a consensus on the number of Muslim supplementary schools operating in Britain, as well as acquire a clear indication of how many children attend them. Figures vary among academics and journalists. In the early 1990s Raza (1993) estimated 500 Muslim supplementary schools operating in Britain, whilst more recent estimates suggest that there are

around 2000 (Hayer 2009, Abrams 2011). Rosowsky (2012) provides a figure which suggests that 500 000 Muslim children attend these schools, whilst Cherti and Bradley (2011) present a figure of 250 000. Gent (2013:28) explains that any figure provided is likely to be 'highly speculative' due to the absence of a central registration system. Though the data is inconsistent, it still demonstrates that the Muslim supplementary school sector in Britain is well established. This is a reflection of the concerns and struggles that the first generation of Muslims experienced post Second World War (Gilliat-Ray 2010). This generation of Muslim migrants found British society to be confusing and difficult to relate to, they perceived the British schooling system as secularising and believed its moral and spiritual provisions were inadequate for Muslim students. In conjunction to this, there was a determination and a strong sense of duty to preserve future generations' religious, cultural and linguistic identities (Gilliat-Ray 2010, Merry 2007, Mogra 2004, Scourfield et al 2013).

Conventionally, these schools are integral features of mosques, of which there over 1600 in Britain (Gilliat-Ray 2010). However, Muslim supplementary schools can also take up multiple forms besides 'mosque-schools'. There are also independent schools, which are housed inside private homes, public schools and community centers, this make it all the more difficult to quantify exact numbers (Gent 2005, Mogra 2005). To further exacerbate this, a whole host of varying terminology has been employed to describe such establishments, from '*madrassas'* by Cherti and Bradley (2011), 'Quranic schools' by Boyle (2004), 'mosque schools' by Barton (1986), 'supplementary schools' by Hafez (2003), '*kutubs'* by Hefner (2007) and '*maktabs'* by Gent (2013) and (Mogra 2005). This, to some extent, also conveys the problematic nature of quantifying such institutions[4].

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[4] Individual Councils, such as the Kirklees Council in West Yorkshire, have made recent attempts to document the number of Muslim supplementary schools in their respective borough. Forms were sent out to various community leaders and organisations to disclose details of their institutions. Even those schools that are held inside of private homes were encouraged to disclose themselves. I was a recipient of the email that was sent out, and as Appendix 1 shows, there is no real incentive or explanation for organisations to disclose themselves. One has to question the efficacy of such methods.

Educational Programmes and Pedagogical Practice

Studies on British Muslim supplementary schools can be traced back to Stephen Barton's seminal doctoral thesis in 1986. Here he conducted a detailed and in-depth study of the Bangladeshi Muslim community living in Bradford. Barton (1986:157-174) included a description of the organisation, curriculum and value of the Qur'an school. He writes:

> 'The main value of the Quran school is that the children discover what it means to belong to a Muslim community. More specifically, they need to know the Quran and the prayers in Arabic, in order to be able to pray and receive the *baraka* of the word of God.' (*ibid*:174)

From this, it can be derived, that religious socialisation, formation of identity and preservation of culture were important facets to the establishment of Qur'an schools. These aspects have continued to remain important as documented by more contemporary studies (Cherti and Bradley 2011, Gent 2013, Scourfield et al 2013, Rosowsky 2012).

Educational programmes at Muslim supplementary schools often start with young students learning the *qaidah,* a primer for learning Quranic Arabic. Students are introduced to letters and sounds of the Arabic alphabet. As students progress they move onto combinations of sounds and letters, later moving on to words and eventually entire sentences/verses of the Quran. Students also commit to memory key passages in Arabic, often those required in daily ritual prayers *(salah)* (Gent 2013, Scourfield et al 2013). Alongside classical Arabic, students are taught the

essentials of Muslim life, for instance, Gent's (2013:29) findings show how pupils studied a range of Islamic booklets, which were written in the English language and published by a South African Muslim organization. These booklets were used as a curriculum framework and contained information on Muslim law *(fiqh)*, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad *(hadith)*, and morals and characteristics of Muslim life *(akhlaq and adab)*.

The value Muslims place on Quranic literacy has been documented in many studies (Gent 2013, Mattson 2013, Nelson 2001), however the pedagogical practice associated with this has been subject to much criticism. Criticism ranges from 'styles' in teaching to wider issues such as discipline, engagement and interaction (Halstead 2004, Mogra 2005, 2007). Zerdouni (1970 cited in Rosowsky 2008:3) questions the efficacy of rote learning. He says, 'Qur'anic school imposes on the child a purely mechanical, monotonous form of study'. Contemporary writers such as Lewis (2001 cited in Rosowsky 2008:3) concur with such statements: 'inevitably, their experiences of rote learning without any understanding left them bored and alienated not only from the *madrassah* but from the religion itself'. Contrary to this, individuals such as Gent (2005, 2011, 2013), Boyle (2004) and Rosowski (2008) have expanded upon the function of rote learning. Boyle (2004:85) asserts that non-cognitive memorization sustains a broader role in Islamic education, she explains how 'memorization does not preclude understanding but it is a precursor to it'. Gent (2013) discusses how memorization of Quran helps Muslims 'internalise' and 'embody' the text, he further suggests that the skill of memorization can be of value to the wider educational practice, in subjects such as law or mathematics (2005, 2013). Rosowsky (2008, 2012) demonstrates the important role 'liturgical literacy' plays in forging a combination of social, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious identities. These aspects are explored in more detail in the 'Findings chapter'.

Scourfield et al (2013) shows how the pedagogical practices in some Muslim supplementary schools have developed considerably whilst remaining 'strikingly'

stagnated in others. Their study explores how supplementary schools are adopting new forms of learning:

> 'The pedagogical goals and scope had widened in recent years to
> include homework clubs, home-schooling, leisure activities (e.g.
> Muslim Beavers and Scouts), and the development of Islamic
> studies classes that focus less upon the acquisition of classical
> Arabic and learning Qur'an, and more on belief, practice and
> Islamic history'.

Developments in such areas, such as the use of kinesthetic learning were found in those institutes where the educators were likely to be Muslim professionals as opposed to Imams (ibid). Cherti and Bradley's study revealed a similar trend:

> 'Overall, it is clear from our research that there is an appetite
> for madrassas to develop effective teaching methods and to
> support rewarding and encouraging the progress of their pupils.
> However, the degree to which they have been able to achieve
> this is varied' (2011:45).

Muslim Supplementary Schools: Citizenship and Identity

This study aims to investigate the extent in which modern educational practices can be employed to make Islamic education more relevant and meaningful to young Muslims living in Britain. Therefore a discussion on the impact an Islamic education can have on young British Muslims, either positive or negative, in relation to both citizenship and identity is prudent. Dyke (2009) suggests that Islamic education can

lead to Muslims distancing themselves from a British identity, particularly if teachers are not British born. Her discussion asserts that the foreign Imams who teach in British institutions are 'psychologically' in their country of origin, though they are physically in Britain. Cherti and Bradley (2011:6) agree with this, however their findings show that the majority of Muslim supplementary schools perceived that the underlying principles and teachings of Islam were already aligned with good citizenship. Scourfield et al (2013:122) study found:

> 'Far from promoting isolation or separatism, children who attend
> formal Islamic institutions learn not only how to be a Muslim, but
> also what it means to be part of a community and a society'

Their study demonstrates how supplementary schools allow young Muslim to 'gradually acquire an embodied identity as a Muslim', and consequently this empowers them with confidence to express and explain their faith to their non-Muslim school friends and other acquaintances. This is also reflected in Cherti and Bradley's (2011) study.

Media Portrayals and Implications: The Case for More Academic Research

Research projects have shown that Muslim supplementary schools are often isolated and hidden from the wider population. This often leads to myths replacing evidence-based research (Cherti and Bradley 2011, Gent 2005). Seminal sociologists such as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) write how social researchers are tasked with uncovering the truth. This review concludes by demonstrating the growing need for academics to portray the 'true' image of Muslim supplementary schools whilst employing a subjective, interpretive and reflexive framework.

In November 2010 BBC's Panorama series aired a documentary entitled 'British Schools, Islamic Rules'. A description of this programme reads how the documentary:

'Uncovers disturbing evidence [which shows] that some Muslim children are being exposed to extremist preachers and fundamentalist Islamic groups. We also expose the part-time schools where hate is on the curriculum. The programme asks why school inspectors have missed the warning signs and examines the impact this could have on young Muslims' ability to integrate into mainstream British life.' (BBC 2013)

A few months later Channel 4's Dispatches aired a similar documentary entitled 'Lessons in Hate and Violence' (Channel 4 2013). Both documentaries successfully portray British Islamic institutions in a disapproving and negative light. They feed into Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis (Huntington 1996), which depicts Islam and Muslims as inherently intolerant separatists who are incapable of conforming to 'Western' norms and values. Depictions of this nature are far from isolated. The aforementioned programmes were purposefully selected for this review as they were referenced in the current Coalition Government's revised Prevent policy (HM Government 2011:68). This conveys the 'real' impact popular media can have on Government Policy. Boyle (2004:3) makes the following assertion about the involvement of supplementary schools as breeding grounds for extremist ideology:

'While undoubtedly there are politicized Qur'anic schools that preach intolerant or violent messages, research on Islamic schools in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria suggests to me that these types of schools are rare exceptions among millions of Islamic schools that

unfurl their straw mats and open their doors daily in Kan Kan and

Labe, Kano and Lagos, Marrakech and Fes, Sana'a and Ibb, Cairo,

Jakarta, Detroit, Cape Town, Islamabad, and beyond.'

In more recent times the Government reacted to the 'Woolwich' incident[5] by

planning to enforce policy on Islamic educational establishments such as Muslim

supplementary schools. Section 5.1.3 in a recent report produced by the Prime

Minister's Task Force on Radicalisation and Extremism stated:

'To widen the protection of school children further, the Task Force has

agreed to improve oversight of religious supplementary schools. We

will introduce a voluntary code of practice which will depend on

schools implementing robust policies to protect children and young

people from harm, including exposure to intolerant or extremist

views. This will help parents make informed decisions about the right

choice of supplementary school for their child' (HM Government

2013:5).

The opening paragraph elucidates that the impetus for this report was the killing of

Drummer Lee Rigby (HM Government 2013:1).

This final section has exposed the disparity between academic portrayals and media

portrayals. For such reasons, this study asserts that more academic based research is

needed to further understand Muslim supplementary schools, their professional

development, curriculum framework, pedagogical practice in order to demystify

sensationalist portrayals. This study hopes to contribute to and build on the study of

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[5] see Wintour 2013

Muslim supplementary schools in Britain. It does this by carefully examining how one institution employs modern educational practices to help make 'traditional' Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young Muslims living in a British context.

Research Question, Research Aims & Objectives

The research question asks: How and to what extent can modern educational practices be employed to help make traditional Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young Muslims living in Britain? By doing so, this research aims to describe the educational programme and pedagogical tools that The Amanah Centre employs, whilst exploring the relationship between AC's learning objectives and pedagogical practice. The objective of this research is to provide a 'thick description' of AC's curriculum framework and map out the various forms of teaching and learning; this is done in conjunction to critically analysing the relationship between pedagogy and learning objectives.

Methodology and Methods

Introduction

The aim of social research is to 'make the invisible more visible' (Denzin 1989:2). Various scholars of religion have written extensively on some of the 'challenges' associated with making aspects of British Muslim communities more 'visible' during academic research (Bolognani 2007, Geaves 1996, Gilliat-Ray 2005, Haw 1996 and McLoughlin 2000). By recognising and understanding the methodological challenges associated with qualitative enquiries, researchers like myself are able to make

informed and intelligent decisions in selecting the most appropriate, ethical and culturally sensitive methods.

Researching Muslim Communities

Bolognani (2007:281) discusses how in the current 'climate of Islamophobia' a general sense of 'mistrust' has developed towards individuals researching Muslim communities. In an attempt to access British Dar al-'ulooms (seminaries), Gilliat-Ray (2005:17) explains that this has become more complex against the backdrop of 9/11, she says, 'my use of the very word 'research' became politically charged and was automatically translated as 'investigation''. Other research projects also show how different communities may perceive researchers as 'intruders'. For example Peshkin's (2010:255) study in the US exemplifies how his Jewish identity affected his relationship with 'Christian fundamentalists'. Peshkin (ibid) explains that the Christian community felt besieged by 'a hostile federal Government as well as media misrepresentation', which resulted in his presence as an outsider to be deemed as 'intrusive'. This aspect poignantly strikes a resembling cord with many British Muslim communities. Only on Peshkin's fifth attempt did he manage to gain access to a fundamentalist church and school (see also Connell 2007, Smith 1999). Researchers studying Muslim communities must therefore carefully consider all steps prior to carrying out fieldwork, from design, to access, to methodology and methods. For such reasons a whole array of methodological issues concerning the study of Muslims were closely examined (Abbas 2010, Bolognani 2007, Gilliat-Ray 2005, 2010b, 2011, Haw 1996, Mcloughlin 2000, Shah 2004, and Zubair et al 2010). This information provided valuable insight into the methodological challenges scholars of religion have already documented. It also helped shape a strategy for this research project. Having access to both insider and outsider perspectives meant that I was able to study and understand a wide (and growing) range of methodological issues related to the study of Muslims.

Designing a Case Study

This research is concerned with 'how' modern educational practices can be used to convey traditional Islamic education. It also investigates The Amanah Centre's educational programme, and aims to understand 'why' they employ their chosen pedagogical tools as part of their teaching and learning practice. For such reasons a qualitative case study was deemed as an appropriate mode for enquiry (see Gray 2004:124; Yin 2003:7). A lack of research on British Muslim supplementary schools in conjunction with the uniqueness of AC all indicated a case study design as a suitable research strategy for this project. This approach is also in line with the underpinning ontology and epistemology of this. 'Generalisability' of case studies has been questioned by Yin, who cites Crane (1998 cited in Yin 2003:16) as an example of how case studies are unique to single cases, but at same time he cites Schorr (1997 cited in ibid) as an example of how single case studies have been generalised to impact broader issues, such as bringing improvements to welfare reform, social conditions and child protection. A major advantage of a case study design is the incorporation of multiple methods. For this particular project, participant observation was employed as my primary data collection tool. In conjunction with this, I also conducted semi-structured interviews. The incorporation of triangulation strengthens the overall validity of this project (May 2011).

This research has been conducted from a phenomenological perspective. A phenomenological approach is rooted in subjectivity and it recognises the implications one's identity can have on the entire research process, from gaining access to the way data is analysed and interpreted (Denscombe 2010:94).

The Timescale and Mechanics of the Fieldwork

The fieldwork lasted just over two weeks and took place in early June 2013. In that time I observed five separate Quran lessons, two 45-minute sessions were spent observing the youngest group of students, aged between 5 and 7, and another two 45-minute sessions were spent observing children aged between 7 to 11. Finally I spent two more hours observing the teenage boys classes, this totaled to 5 hours of Quran class observation.

In addition to this, 3 hours were spent observing the Islamic studies classes, where I observed a class of children aged between 5 and 7 for 45-minutes, as well as a class of children aged between 7 and 11 for the same amount of time. Finally, 3 more hours were spent observing the 'activity day', which takes place on Fridays, again, my time was divided equally between the two cohorts in the same manner as described above. I began liaising with The Amanah Centre's Administrator in pursue of negotiating access from 27th May 2013, details of the access story is provided below.

Gaining Access to the Amanah Centre

The complexity around accessing Muslim communities for research has been documented by many (Bolognani 2007, Barton 1986, Gent 2006, Gilliat-Ray 2005). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:65) make an astute point on this topic:

> 'Whether or not people have knowledge of social research, and
> whatever attitude they take towards it, they will often be more
> concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the
> research itself. They will try to gauge how far the ethnographer
> can be trusted'

By appropriating this position, I aimed to gain access through building rapport, establishing trust and conveying my research aims with honesty, transparency and academic integrity.

Recognising the 'self' & my 'insider' identity

Researchers have cultural baggage that they bring with them to the field (Chryssides and Geaves 2007). Coffey (1999:158) explains that a fieldworker's 'identity' has been shaped and constructed by a 'complex social process', this is not something that we can simply detach ourselves from for the purpose of academic pursuits.

I entered the field fully knowing that I shared the same religious identity as the participants at the Amanah Centre. Labaree (2002) asserts that by virtue of being an 'insider' one should not assume that gaining access will be easily obtainable, but rather it is a complex process (see Yip 2008, Zubair et al 2010). Important factors such as 'entering the field, positioning, and disclosure, shared relationships and disengagement' may pose methodological dilemmas (Labaree 2002:97). Brewer (1993:182) and Gray (2004:242) further mention how gender, race, social class and education can influence social research, and these aspects need to be considered when designing research projects. Although I maybe considered as an 'insider' in one respect, it is equally viable to consider me as an outsider in other respects, most pertinently my gender. It was therefore important for me to carefully prepare a sensitive research strategy, beginning with seeking access (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert 2007).

Access story

The process of acquiring access to AC was threefold. The initial stage involved making a phone call on the 27th of May 2013 explaining the aims of this research. This was also complimented with a written letter (see Appendix 2). The second stage involved making two separate visits to AC for reasons discussed below. In the final stage I was granted 'full' access and thereby 'formally' began to conduct my research, which took place between the 10th and 21st of June 2013.

Bogden and Biklen (1992 cited in Shah 2004) discuss formal and informal systems of acquiring access. They draw attention to the significance of 'informal systems', such as using a friend or somebody helpful to attain access. Using existing contacts and relationships for access purposes is not uncommon in the world of social research (Silverman 2010:204). In my specific case, a University Lecturer played an important role in the access strategy. My Lecturer had personal acquaintance with the Administrator at the Amanah Centre and suggested AC as a good model for my research, and from this discussion about utilising AC as a potential research site took place. If it were not for this mutual acquaintance, gaining access to AC would have proven difficult (Shah 2004:557). In conjunction to this, AC's administrator was aware of the 'good work' that was taking place at 'The Centre for the Study of Islam-UK', for such reasons she was happy to oblige. It is worthy to note that at the very initial stage (during the first phone call) access was obtained. However I decided to arrange meetings prior to 'formally' entering the field for reasons discussed below.

From my desk research I was aware that gaining access is a multi-layered process (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Shah 2004). Though I had successfully acquired 'physical access', I wanted to ensure 'social access'. I felt that this could not have been properly achieved without a face-to-face meeting with the Administrator as well as various other participants (Shah 2004: 559). The reason behind this was quite simple. I could not predict how a group of female Muslims would respond to a male researcher in their social context (see Peshkin 2010).

From the initial phone call, it was unclear whether I would be able to observe and interview female teachers; the Administrator had generically informed me that I could utilise AC as a research site without providing any specific details. For culturally sensitive reasons, I felt it would be more appropriate to enquire in person about observing/interviewing female participants. The outcomes from this initial meetings resulted in me acquiring access for: taking photographs, recording interviews, as well as observing both female and male teachers. More crucially I felt as if I had overcome 'social distance' and obtained 'social access' (Bolognani 2007:285 and Lee 1993:133).

During the second meeting I introduced myself to the teachers. This meeting was equally vital as some of the staff expressed genuine concerns about the nature of the research, whether it was academic or whether it had a hidden political agenda. Essentially they were trying to gauge how far I could be trusted, which is 'typical' in social research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:65). This meeting enabled me to provide reassurances and answer any concerns participants had in an open and transparent manner. It was also at this point where I discussed ethical issues such as: informing parents about this research, DBS check (formerly known as CRB), naming the institution in my thesis, anonymising participants, as well clarifying other intricate and important details. In retrospect, I doubt whether I would have been able to establish an atmosphere 'where people were at ease and free to talk' if I were to enter the field after the initial phone call (Shah 2004:560). Ultimately the meetings were important in establishing trust, building rapport and providing an opportunity to explain and justify my intended data collection tools.

Participant Observation

> 'We cannot simply walk into other people's worlds, and expect
>
> thereby to participate with them. To participate is not to walk *into*

but to walk *with* – where 'with' implies not face-to-face

confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas,

and perhaps sharing the same threats behind' (Lee and Ingold

2006:67).

As I have already alluded to, participant observation can help with facilitating

through the various layers of access, from 'physical' to 'social' through building

rapport and establishing trust (Bolognani 2007, Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2008).

Nonetheless, participant observation also offers a whole range of different

advantages that are specific to and in line with the epistemological and ontological

underpinnings of a phenomenological study. For instance this qualitative data

collection tool allows researcher to accumulate a 'thick description' of the social

world that they are investigating (Geertz 1973:3-30). It requires researchers to

'immerse' themselves into the field of enquiry in order to understand the social

world from a member's perspective'; this is achieved through the observer's

subjective, reflexive and interpretive framework (Fetterman 1998:37; Flick

2002:139). Participant observation encourages the researcher to observe the social

world with a 'wide-angle lens'. This allows the researcher to observe phenomena

which *ordinary* participants may consider as 'unnecessary trivia', and can lead to the

collection of 'some of the most important data' (Spradley 1980:56). This method

requires the researcher to become the 'research instrument', and therefore

increasing 'introspectiveness' is a desired outcome (Spradley 1980:57).

Oakley (1992:16) discusses how participant observers collect data 'not only through

the verbal, the transcript, but through all the senses, through movement, through

their bodies and whole being in a total practice'. Multimodal aspects in ethnography

are becoming more popular amongst contemporary researchers (Dicks, Soyinka and

Coffey 2006), and in this sense, this data collection tool allows for the incorporation

of visual images. Taking photographs will be employed to help 'capture' the social

context in a more nuanced manner. It will also help capture aspects of AC that I may

initially consider 'trivia'. Thereby helping make the 'familiar strange' (Prosser 1998:116).

Luders (2004:223) conveys that the participant observer must position him/herself in an 'accepted role' within the social field. There are varying degrees in relation to 'involvement' (Gold 1958), ranging from 'complete participation', to complete observation (Spradley 1980:58). In the context of this project, I assumed I would, to employ Gold's (1958) term, be 'participant as observer'. I presumed that I would take the role of a teacher's assistant when making observations, but this became more complex upon entering the field. I discuss this in my 'reflexive comments' further below. Taking extensive field notes in the social setting proved difficult, I however made a 'condensed account' of the observations, containing key words and nouns, which were later converted into a 'expanded account' immediately after I exited the social setting (Spradley 1980:69-70).

Semi-structured interviews

Additional interviews allowed further probing into the social world which I had observed and been a part of. I was able to enquire why teachers taught a certain way, or chose a certain textbook. The semi-structured interview allowed access into the interviewee's emotions, experiences and opinions. It provided flexibility in the ordering of questions and fluidity throughout the whole interview process (May 2011, Mason 2002, Punch 1998). As a result of employing open-ended questions, I was able to explore and expand on certain responses, as and when I felt necessary. This form of interviewing, as oppose to structured or unstructured interviews was more coherent and consistent to my overall research design (Mason 2002). Through carefully designing the questions, I was able to shape the final narrative, in a manner which ultimately complemented my field notes and helped me understand my findings in a more nuanced way (Goffman 1959). In total, I completed three

interviews, which required designing two interview schedules, one for the administrator and the other for the teachers (see Appendix 3 and 4).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The process of analysing qualitative data is an important part in qualitative research, which often requires the researcher to think creatively (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). It is during this stage where the data undergoes a transformation, upon being analysed, interrogated and interpreted through the researcher's subjective and reflexive framework (Mason 2002). Along with making and expanding my field notes, I also transcribed the supplementary interviews. The process of transcribing digitally recorded audio interviews into a Word Processor Document is more than a clerical duty; rather it is the first stage of data analysis, as argued by Kvale (1996). In conjunction to this I conducted a semiotic analysis of the various photographs that I took at The Amanah Centre (see Rose 2001). Upon accumulating the data, I then studied my field notes, images and interview transcripts in order to develop a 'coding frame' to help answer my research questions. Strauss (1987:27) argues that:

> 'Any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and easily….The excellence of the researcher rests in large part on the excellence of the coding'.

Flick (2002:177) describes coding as 'expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts'. In practice, coding involves a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coffey and Atkinson (1996:31) argue that:

> 'Coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualizing data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationship among and within the data, and discovering the data'.

They continue to discuss how coding should 'open up' the inquiry and move 'towards interpretation', they describe how coding is the 'inevitable payoff for grounded conceptualization' (ibid). For the purpose of this study I intended to employ in vivo codes as oppose to sociologically constructed ones. I employed Coffey and Atkinson's (1996:32-45) guidance on the 'coding process' to make my own coding diagrams, these can be seen in appendix 5.

Ethical Considerations

As this project involves young children, a DBS check was acquired prior to conducting any fieldwork. A copy of this check was submitted to AC. In line with University policy, I submitted an ethical approval form to Cardiff University's School of History, Archaeology and Religion's 'School Research Ethics Committee' (SREC). I also read and complied with Cardiff University's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. As a researcher, I have a responsibility to ensure (as far as possible) that all steps are taken in order to prevent any possible harm coming to those involved in research. In view of this, I provided a pseudonym for each of the participants. This is commonly employed by social scientists to protect the identity of the participants and the identity of anyone they happen to mention. However, in order to maintain analytic value, I provide a detailed description of the participants at The Amanah Centre, for instance I mention the views and opinions of the administrators and teachers. I have done this whilst remaining aware that any individual who is vaguely familiar with The Amanah Centre will be able to identify the participants quite easily (Guenther 2009:418). Even if participants are identified, I feel that it will not pose any great threats for a number of reasons, including the fact that the content of this study is not controversial or provocative.

I also informed AC of the scope and potential of the research, and how upon completion it would be made publicly available. Also an information sheet was provided to all of the participants. This informed them that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at anytime without providing any reason. A signed consent sheet was obtained from them to acknowledge that they were happy to participate. In line with best practice, a letter was also sent out to all parents/carers informing them of this research. A copy of this letter was also placed on AC's notice board.

Reflexive Comments

Within the world of social research, it is recognised that research is not a neutral act (May 2011, Nebitt 2004). A research diary was kept to help maintain a reflexive awareness (Plummer 2001). At this point it is worth considering how my personal biography impacted the research and those being researched. Peshkin (2010:256) discusses how his Jewish identity made him feel as if he was the 'enemy within', as time went by he managed to blend in with the Christian participants and his Jewish identity was no longer an issue, but nonetheless he still feared 'dismissal' and 'discovery'. Unlike Peshkin it would have been impossible for me to hide my male identity, and at times I too felt like the 'odd man out' in an all-female social setting (Peshkin 2010). My gender did act as a barrier in certain regards, for instance one teacher did not want to participate in the research and wished to wear the face veil in my presence. As I have previously mentioned, during observations I intended to take the role of a teacher's assistant, however not all the teachers were comfortable with this, and at times I found myself conducting 'complete observations'. The research diary proved to be extremely useful in maintaining a reflexive awareness.

Research Findings

Introduction

Amanah Learning Centre 4 Life: Background & Context

The Amanah Centre (AC) was established in 2012 by a small group of Muslim women, all ranging from various professional backgrounds. AC's core team consists of five people who also act as the management committee. This group formed with the collective aim of setting up an Islamic 'learning project'. AC's founders and its staff members belong to a wide range of ethnicities and reflect various different schools of thought. This acts as a source of pride for AC; as they feel it projects 'a true and pluralistic understanding of Islam' (Aisha). This also paves the way for AC's objective in providing a universal, ecumenical and inclusive learning environment for young Muslims living in Cardiff. The group is united through their shared vision, philosophy and desire for educational excellence.

As well as having 'traditional' Islamic qualifications, the teachers at AC also possess qualifications from British universities, and have teaching experience in mainstream schools. Qualifications included BA's, MA's, and PGCE's (with SEN) as well as one qualified Teacher's Assistant. As a result of this, many of the teachers currently hold posts in mainstream schools, alongside their work at AC.

The Amanah Centre aims to nurture a new generation of young Muslims through establishing a place of learning that caters for the spiritual, social and religious needs of their students. Its primary target audience is children aged between 5 and 11. Integral to the school, AC offers classes for teenage boys (11 to 16 year olds), who

were also observed as part of this study. 'Life-long' adult learning courses, which are aimed at Muslim women, are also an important feature to AC's services; however the focus of this dissertation is on The Amanah Centre's educational provisions for children who are in full-time school.

Organisational Structure

At the time of this study there were approximately 50 students registered at AC. The younger children were organised into two separate cohorts and attended three days per week. The first group attends on Mondays and Wednesdays, and the second group attends on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and all children attend on Fridays. Each class has approximately twelve students along with one lead teacher and up to two additional Teacher Assistants. This organisational structure of AC contrasts with the typical British Muslim supplementary school, which usually operates for two hours in the evening, from Mondays to Fridays and/or at the weekend (Cherti and Bradley 2011, Gent 2005, Mogra 2005). Students at AC attend from 4:30pm to 6:00pm, and each day consists of two 45 minute classes, these being *Tajweed* and Islamic studies. On Fridays the students have an activity day which AC refers to as 'Explorer's Day'. The teenage boys are taught by a male teacher and they follow a similar format with the exception of having an 'activity day'.

AC aims to deliver a traditional Islamic education using modern means and methods. It recognises and takes into consideration the long days, academic pressures and general practical implications posed by mainstream schooling on young Muslims. The organisational structure allows for students to adequately complete their school homework and even pursue extra-curricular activities, such as sports, without having to completely compromise an Islamic education. The management at AC felt that young Muslims often miss out on these extra curricula activities due to having to attend a supplementary school for two hours a day, five days a week. Therefore AC's

organisational structure has been adjusted from the 'norm' to allow some flexibility for is students to pursue other endeavors, if they desire to.

The Amanah Centre: From Conception to Existence

AC asserts that:

> 'The motivation behind this project is to please Allah. We aim to strive with sincerity and hard work to inspire, invest and achieve in order to motivate, support and build the next generation of great Muslims *Insha'Allah*.' (AC Welcome Pack nd:1)

Throughout the course of the fieldwork it became increasingly apparent that AC's raison d'être is far more complex in comparison to what the above statement suggests. In relation to 'motivation' it was clear that there were external and internal factors which acted as an impetus from which AC was conceptualised and eventually conceived.

One of the major external influences revolved around poor educational provisions elsewhere. Both of the teachers interviewed had experience of teaching in a mosque-based setting, and they both spoke of the lack of facilities, issues around the teacher-student ratio, and the general pedagogical approach as a huge 'let down' to these establishments. Furthermore, Aisha mentioned how internal mosque politics impede on the quality of education, often in a negative and detrimental way, she expressed:

'There are major conflicts and issues in management committees

that run mosques and the kids pay the price. I basically wanted to

get away from all of that so that we are able to focus on the

children, through lesson planning and delivering an education

which is based on quality and not quantity.' (Aisha)

Integral to this, Aisha described from her own experiences how mosque-based

supplementary schools, though not intentionally, deliver lessons in a manner which

are insular and often divorced from reality. She spoke of how this form of

disenfranchised education can foster a separatist attitude in young Muslims:

'A lot of the times mosques teach Islam in a way which separates it

from the rest of life, our approach is more holistic. For example a

lot of mosques will teach about Christmas and they'll talk about

how it's *haram* (forbidden) to celebrate it, and that's it! We on the

other hand will discuss the different perspectives of Jesus and

teach them about respecting other peoples' views. We want our

students to be active citizens– why separate? It's important to

teach respect, and we've made a pledge to succeed in this area.'

(Aisha)

A major internal factor driving the motivation behind AC stemmed from reflections

about the education experienced by their own children. There was a deep sense of

dissatisfaction combined with frustration and disappointment towards the education

that their children were receiving. Aisha felt the need to withdraw her child from a

mosque-based setting, due to what she regarded as 'poor standards of education'.

She then opted for private tuition at home but ultimately felt her child was 'missing

out'. This notion of 'missing out' resonates with Scourfield's et al (2013) study, which

demonstrates that Muslim supplementary schools are places where young children

establish themselves as members of a community through the process of religious socialization–an important aspect that home schooling cannot provide. Khadijah echoed similar concerns to Aisha: 'kids just sit there and read and there's no real learning that takes place'. These internal and external drivers were important catalysts leading to the establishment of AC, and they informed AC's ethos, vision and direction.

A professional institution

AC does not refer to itself as a 'madrassa' or 'Muslim supplementary school' etc, though it technically is. The administrators insisted that they are an 'after school club' above anything else. Amina elucidated that AC is different to a mosque-based institution, where the focus is not just on 'reading' but 'meaning' as well. Though AC has a distinct Islamic ethos it prefers to be disassociated and distanced from the term 'madrassa' due to the negative connotations associated with it. This philosophy is effectively depicted in their logo, which has no specific Islamic reference.

(See Image 1)

AC wishes to convey to parents that they do not operate like 'normal traditional setups'. Rather it is a 'professional educational centre' that strives for educational excellence, something that she felt mosques are unsuccessful in achieving. Again, this representation, which captures AC's educational dimension, is successfully depicted in its logo.

Ethos

'Ethos' is often associated with notions such as 'atmosphere', 'ambience', 'culture' and 'climate'. AC's strong sense of ethos sustains an important part to its overall educational experience. Research by the Department For Education and Employment shows that schools which have a strong sense of ethos perform best (Department For Education and Employment 2001). In his paper titled, 'the educative importance of ethos', McLaughlin (2005) advocates that the notion of 'ethos' in the context of education needs to be brought into clear focus. William's (2000:76) argues that the ethos of 'teaching and schooling is clearly a significant part of the overall educational experience of students'. In relation to AC, the Arabic word *'Amanah'* translates as 'trust'; and the management carefully selected it as they felt that it best epitomizes and represents AC's ethos:

> 'Parents are entrusting us with their children to provide them with
> an education that they deserve. Not only that, but we as Muslims
> have a responsibility to Allah to uphold this trust, we want
> everyone involved with Amanah to remember that and to never
> forget it. We aim to uphold this trust at all times as we continue
> into the future' (Aisha).

Again, the choice of word 'Amanah' or 'trust' appears to be informed by a sense of betrayal, perhaps stemming from past experiences of Muslim supplementary schools.

Transparency Vs Openness: A Paradox

Synonymous with 'trust' there is a clear sense of AC developing better transparency for parents as well as the wider community. Aisha strongly felt that in the current

climate of heightened Islamophobia organisations like AC need to strive harder to become 'more transparent'; she said:

> 'Sometimes we [Muslims] are our own worst enemy because we
> don't make enough effort to show the wider community the good
> work we are doing'.

In future she plans to invite local councilors and other civic leaders to visit AC in hope of demystifying and breaking down stereotypes commonly associated with Muslim organisations like AC. It is this attitude which effectively made this research possible.

As an aside, the property that AC is renting and operating from has no indication that it is a place of education, Islamic or otherwise. When asked, Aisha responded that:

> 'I'm not actually sure if we're allowed to put a sign outside but
> even if we were I wouldn't want to for safety and security reasons.'

Appendix 6 shows images of AC and conveys its 'hidden' nature. The discussion around Islamophobia and its implications is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but appendix 6 nonetheless portrays the real impact it has on organisations like AC.

As discussed in the literature review, it is extremely difficult to approximate the exact number of Muslim supplementary schools in Britain, and any number or percentage offered must be treated with suspicion. The Amanah Centre was not

registered with the Charity Commission nor could it be found in 'popular' directories such as 'The Muslim Directory'. This exacerbates the whole issue surrounding the quantification of Muslim supplementary schools, even those that appear to be 'public' and not confined to private homes. The Kirklees Council's approach of 'self disclosure' may possibly be the most pragmatic way of accounting for such institutions. Cherti and Bradley (2011) suggest the need of a regulating body, such as MINAB, but the issue still remains in the hands of individual institutions, that yet remain to be convinced by the pros and cons of 'self-disclosure'. Here lies the challenge for organisations like AC. On one hand they desire to be transparent in pursuit of good practice but on the other hand they feel that being too open may make them vulnerable, largely due to these establishment being misunderstood.

Organisational Structure: Roles and Responsibilities

AC's educational success rests on a range of characteristics, which together, make it a successful model. For the purpose of this study it is important to recognise the broader roles and responsibilities various individuals play which seem to make AC successful. The management is made up of two administrators and three teachers who are also the heads of subjects. Alongside bureaucratic duties the administrators have an important role in top-level decision making, ranging from recruitment to ensuring good communication between all parties. The heads of subjects are assigned to duties ranging from curriculum development to training new teachers and volunteers.

AC identifies parental input as a key tool in meeting the needs of students and requires active parental engagement. Each student has a 'communication book' which ensures regular contact between parent and teacher. Students are also taught about their responsibilities in facilitating the learning process. Prior to enrolment, teacher, parent and student all sign up to a 'partnership agreement' to say that they

will conform to the responsibilities and requirements AC places on them (AC Welcome Pack). AC recognises the importance of developing a cooperative relationship between parent, teacher and student in ensuring educational achievement. The importance placed on parent, teacher and student relationship to help ensure that a child is making progress, as well as employing a 'communication book'[6] has been informed by modern educational practice and have become key aspects to AC's school culture.

AC's Educational Programme & Pedagogical Practice

The educational programme at AC can be divided into three broad categories: Quran or Tajweed studies, Islamic studies and Explorer's Day. From the observations it was clear that each of the lessons were structured and planned with clear lesson objectives in mind. However, prior to discussing this, it is worthwhile exploring the classroom environment and how along with AC's ethos, the physical environment also helps facilitate the entire learning process. The theoretical frameworks that underpin AC's teaching and learning practice are examined later in this section.

Physical Learning Environment

The atmosphere at AC is akin to a primary school setting. It has the vibe of an educational space as oppose to a sacred space. Children would walk into classrooms with their shoes on, seated on chairs with desks. Gent (2013:28) conveys how the students' seating arrangements in his study were on the floor and would take the form of a *halaqah* or a 'learning circle', a tradition which is said to date back to the

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[6] Other mainstream schools employ something similar as a tool for communicating with parents, often referred to as diaries or planners (see Tassoni et al 2010)

time of the Prophet Muhammad (Melchert 2004 cited in Gent 2013:29). This move away from a traditional mosque arrangement, where children remove their shoes and sit on the floor, was a personally informed choice. Aisha explained that 'kids are fidgety on the floor' and the use of desks and chairs conveyed to the children 'that this is a serious place of learning', something which she drew from her own experiences.

Before walking into the classrooms children pass the main office, which also functions as a reception, adding to the overall educational feel. The classrooms have been decorated with AC's aims and objectives in mind. Symbolic images of sacred Islamic sites as well as students' work have been used in a manner that allows AC's Islamic ethos to permeate. For instance, before entering the classrooms there is a large poster of the Cave of Hira.

(See Image 2)

It was here, where according to Muslim belief the Angel Gabriel visited the Prophet Muhammad with the first revelation of the Quran (Gent 2005, Mattson 2013). At this juncture Gabriel was instructed by God to command Muhammad to 'Read' and this became the first verse of the Muslim holy book. The first revelation or surah also talks about 'knowledge' and 'teaching'. From this it can be argued that from the very inception of Islam there has been a great emphasis placed upon 'reading', and this bright colourful image conveys this message in a powerful and succinct way. The message is also in line with AC's objectives, particularly in relation to their emphasis on liturgical literacy. A sign below the image reads:

'This cave is a very special place and millions of Muslims visit this

cave every year. Prophet Muhammad was alone in this cave when

he received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Jibra'il'

Alongside this there were many other images including the Ka'bah in Mecca and the

Prophet's Mosque in Medina. These images act as an important tool in familiarising

AC's students with the wider Islamic community. Muslims are required to face the

direction of the Ka'bah for every ritual prayer and are also mandated to make the

pilgrimage of Hajj once in their lifetime, for those who are physically and financially

able. These images enable AC to bring what can often be a distant world closer to

children living in Cardiff.

The educators at AC felt that Islamic education is transformative in its nature; the

following student's poster conveys this:

(See Image 3)

The students are not only required to learn about the ritual prayers but are

encouraged to perform them as well, specifically elder children. The first question

Ahmed[7] asked his students, which is made up of teenage boys, was whether they

had prayed their late afternoon prayers. Posters such as the above act as a reminder

to children to perform the ritual prayers at their due time. The various decorations

help create a child-friendly learning environment. This is further substantiated by

classroom rules. The rules are quite generic and resemble what one may expect to

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[7] During the fieldwork one teenage boys class taught by a male teacher was observed. These students
attend AC twice a week.

see in a school. As many younger children are still in Reception and therefore unable to read, a visual poster depicting how children are expected to behave is displayed.

(See Image 4)

Alongside tools of this nature which encourage positive behaviour, AC had devised a seating plan which takes into consideration both students' age and ability. Appendix 7 demonstrates a map of the seating arrangement as well as providing a visual representation of the physical space. Ultimately the physical space helped create a child-friendly and organised learning environment. This enabled teachers to be more effective as educators for each of their respective disciplines.

Teaching Tajweed: Theory and Practice

The *Qaidah* can be understood as a primer to Quranic recitation. The short booklet is organised in a logical and cumulative manner. Students start off by learning individual letters *(huroof)*, a special emphasis is placed on pronouncing each letter from its place of origin *(makhraj)* along with its correct quality *(sifat),* this is broadly summarised as *Tajweed*. Upon mastery of the letters the students then progress independently in an attempt to complete the *Qaidah*. This involves learning the variations of each letter, for instance the letter '*taa'* can appear in anyone of the following forms, depending on the context in which it appears:

ت تَ ةَ

Diagram 1: variations of the letter '*Taa'*

The next stage involves learning about the various vowels and symbols that occur throughout the Quran, children are taught to recognise them visually and understand their implications. Over the course of the *Qaidah* children are taught to recite short words and eventually full verses of the Quran.

Tajweed Concepts

Ahmed was teaching his class of teenage boys the rule of '*shaddah*', which is a diacritic that occurs on the top of a letter symbolising the doubling of a letter. The following diagram depicts how he approached this lesson, it vividly demonstrates the cumulative and logical nature in which the *Qaidah* is both organised and taught.
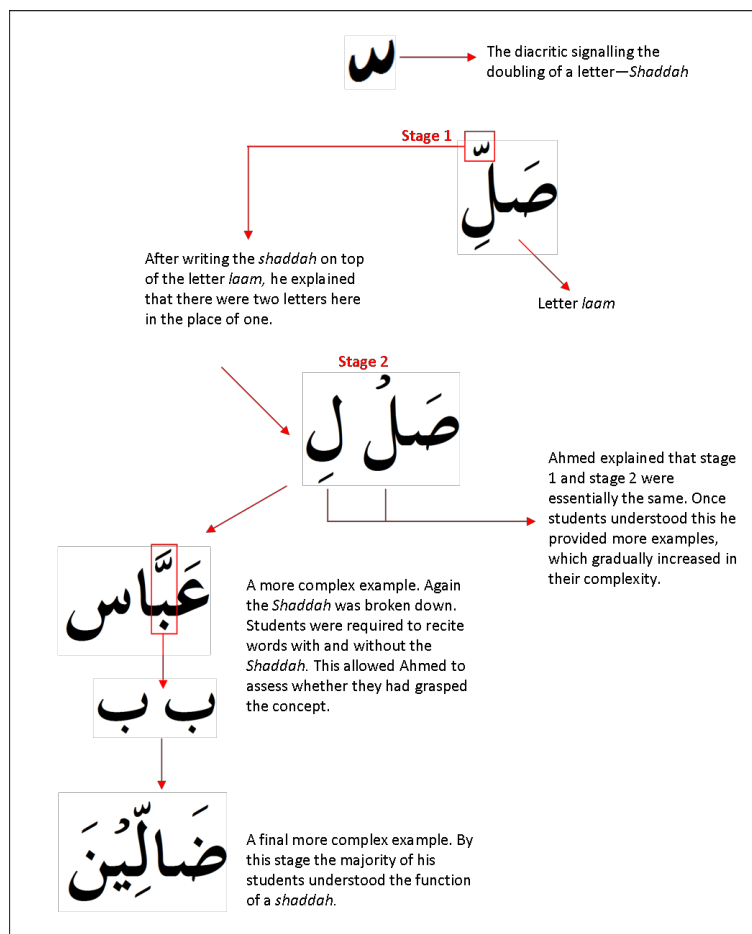

The diacritic signalling the doubling of a letter—*Shaddah*

Stage 1

After writing the *shaddah* on top of the letter *laam*, he explained that there were two letters here in the place of one.

Letter *laam*

Stage 2

Ahmed explained that stage 1 and stage 2 were essentially the same. Once students understood this he provided more examples, which gradually increased in their complexity.

A more complex example. Again the *Shaddah* was broken down. Students were required to recite words with and without the *Shaddah.* This allowed Ahmed to assess whether they had grasped the concept.

A final more complex example. By this stage the majority of his students understood the function of a *shaddah.*

Diagram 2: The Rule of *Shaddah*

Ahmed would ask his students' to write out their work by hand, he placed an emphasis on writing as demonstrated by one student's exercise book below:

(See Image 5)

He explained how writing helps young students differentiate between letters that have a subtle resemblance; he provided an example of the letters '*waw*' and '*raa*':
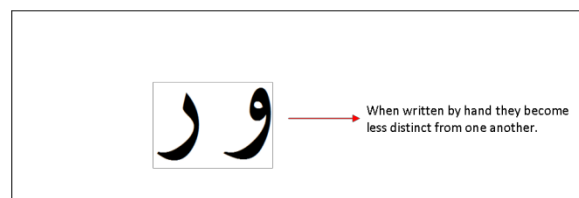

When written by hand they become less distinct from one another.

Diagram 3: The letters 'Waw' and 'Raa'

He believed that Arabic writing, in particular calligraphy as a discipline is becoming rare and warranted preservation. He saw this as a unique opportunity for introducing Arabic writing to his students.

Teaching Makharij

The Amanah Centre places an important emphasis on the level proficiency expected from their students in pronouncing letters from their correct place of origin, Khadijah expressed that there should be 'no difference between the Arab and the non-Arab child'. The importance and emphasis placed on pronunciation has also

been documented by others (Gent 2013, Scourfield et al 2013). Habibah reinforced this principle to her students by explaining that 'the Quran is the word of Allah and it deserves to be read correctly'; she would often use the phrase 'read it loud and proud' in an attempt to motivate her students to increase their volume by reciting more loudly with confidence.

The teachers would begin by explaining that letters originate from various places, ranging from parts of the throat to different parts of the lips and so on. Khadijah used the whiteboard as a visual aid to draw a diagram of a pair of lips; she used this to help students identify where certain letters originated from. For instance she explained how the letter '*Baa'* is derived when the upper lip is placed on the lower lip, children would then practice and enunciate various letters whilst sitting in their seats. The Teacher Assistants' would help students to practice individually or in small groups; this proved particularly helpful on letters that proved more difficult to pronounce.

In Habiba's class, an activity had been prepared for her students. The activity doubled as a form of revision and assessment. The students were organised in small groups of threes or fours, and they were required to place together a jigsaw puzzle, which formed an image of a tongue. Upon completion, Habibah would ask 'where does the Arabic letter *Jeem* come from?' or 'where does the letter *Raa* originate from?' and her students would hold up the relevant section of the tongue in the air, for example, for the letter *Jeem* they held the middle of the tongue to signify its place of origin or *makhraj*.

Asma used rhyme as a way of communicating where the 'throat letters' originated from:

'Hamza un Haa bottom of the throat

Ain un Haa middle of the throat

Ghayn un Khaa top of throat'

This poem was sung, supporting the children's ability to memorize and later recall the point of origin for these letters.

Teaching Sifaat

The letters in the Arabic alphabet have particular qualities that students are required to learn. The teachers again applied instructional methods that were informed by the wider educational practice. For instance Khadijah spoke of how she was currently developing a unique method to teaching the Arabic alphabet based on the 'Jolly Phonics', which is popularly used in mainstream pre-schools to teach young children phonics in the English language (Tassoni et al 2010:291). Elements of this were already apparent in their pedagogical practice. In Habiba's lesson she would instruct her students to clench their right fist and place them firmly against their left open palm upon reciting a *'gunna',* which is a distinct nasal sound that is prolonged for one second. Every time a *'gunna'* would appear the students would place their right fist into their left palm for approximately one second as reminder to pronounce the sound.

Teachers would also use their body to make gestures to help students remember certain qualities, such as the 'full mouth letters'. For example Khadijah clenched her fists and raise her elbows when reciting the letter 'Qaf', she would instruct her students to repeat after her in a 'daddy voice', indicating that this letter is read in a very strong voice. For the same letter Asma imitated the actions and sounds of a chicken, which the students evidently enjoyed replicating. Teachers would also

employ child-friendly vocabulary to make lessons more relatable and relevant to children, for instance the letter *alif* is read with an 'empty mouth' or a 'full mouth' depending on the context in which it appears. Habibah explained that *alif* is a 'shy and sensitive letter and she just copies whatever letter appears before it'.

Alongside these instructional methods teachers also employed audio/visual tools in their lessons. Habibah asked her class to listen to a *surah* via a CD player in order to look out for *Tajweed* rules such as the '*gunnah*'. Khadijah employed flashcards to assess whether her students were able to recognise the letters or words that she had previously taught her students.

The above sections demonstrate why a proficient teacher of Tajweed is required when discharging Quranic literacy. Gent (2013:34) succinctly explains the important emphasis placed on 'person-to-person oral transmission' and 'aurality' when teaching the 'words' and 'sound's of the Quran–by doing so he demonstrates why learning can not be achieved in 'solarity' and why a teacher is always required to facilitate the learning. This is done in order to preserve a long-standing tradition, which Muslims believe was initiated by the Angel Gibrail, when he commanded the Prophet Muhammad to 'read' during the first revelation of the Quran. In the Tajweed lessons there were clear examples of independent learning, shared learning in small groups and learning as an entire class.

Quranic Recitation: Issues around 'comprehension'

For non-Arabic speakers, the meaning of the words contained within the Quran would be little understood 'in terms of intellectual cognition' (Gent 2013:29). Ahmed demonstrated a clear sense of passion for Tajweed. He had high and ambitious hopes for some of his students to go on to commit the entire Quran to memory.

When asked, Ahmed felt that being proficient in recitation was a precursor to memorisation, and memorisation was a precursor to understanding. He justified this by explaining that young children do not possess the intellectual maturity to grapple with the *'Ahkam'* (religious rulings) contained within the Quran, but are able to master both Tajweed and *hifz*. This response is akin to what Gent (2013:34) describes as the 'traditional Muslim response' to memorization. An argument that suggests that memorization ought to take place when a child is 'young and receptive' whilst meaning should come later would carry little weight in the Western world. Gent's study shows that in order understand the position of Muslims in this matter, would require one to understand the Quran and its accompanying pedagogy in a much more nuanced manner. Learning the Quran allows young children to 'enter the community of practice' but also leads to the 'embodiment of the Quran which then:

> 'Acts as a point of reference, a compass, as children grow older,
> understand more of what they have memorized, and make
> decisions on the direction of their lives. (Boyle 2004:131 cited in
> Gent 2013:34).

Gent continues to explain how committing passages to memory helps 'internalise' the text in an intimate way. The very act of learning 'by heart' is ultimately a:

> 'Spiritual resource that is tapped automatically in every act of
> reflection, worship, prayer, or moral deliberation, as well as in
> times of personal or communal decision or crisis' (Graham
> 1987:160 cited in Gent 2013:34)

He further explains how the 'sound' of the Quran is experienced on a purely aesthetic level, particularly to Muslims who do not understand the Arabic language.

The Quran is therefore significant for Muslims 'symbolically, spiritually and practically' (Scourfield et al 2013: 101).

The Islamic Studies Curriculum

Ninety-nine names of Allah

At the start of each lesson, children would 'sing' the ninety-nine names of Allah in Arabic. A particular focus was placed upon the English meaning underpinning each of the names. This part of the lesson could be broadly described as an introduction to Islamic theology. By learning these names, which are essentially qualities of Allah, children familiarise themselves with the 'Islamic' concept of God. For instance Khadijah discussed with her class how 'Allah is Al-Rahman, which means the Most Kind, more kinder than anyone in the world, even our mums and dads'. Her discussion developed into talking about the extent of God's kindness by using examples from nature to describe God's bounties bestowed upon humans. Each of the names convey a different message, for instance Khadijah also spoke of 'how Allah is As-Salaam, the source of all peace' this conversation led to her talking about the social responsibility which Islam places on Muslims. She continued by saying 'as Muslims we have to spread peace and avoid causing harm, that's why when we meet anyone we say 'Assalamu Alykum' which means 'peace be upon you'. This is a popular phrase within the 'Muslim' vernacular that the children were already very familiar with, but by presenting in this manner it provided depth and understanding as to why the Muslim faith requires people to greet one another with the words of peace. Delivering the lesson in this manner allows teachers to convey and instill core Islamic values when teaching their lesson.

Evidently, teaching the ninety-nine names of Allah was an important segment in AC's curriculum–reciting and discussing one or more of these names is how every lesson is initiated. Exploring the meaning of each name helps children to better understand God, which for the teachers at AC was clearly very important.

Islamic Studies Textbooks

The Islamic studies curriculum revolves around a series of textbooks called 'Islamic Studies: Weekend Learning series' and act as AC's curriculum framework. The series was developed in America and is geared towards English speaking Muslims living in the West. After conducting independent research, the management at AC felt that this was the most suitable textbook, which matched Amanah's educational philosophy. It enabled teachers to deliver an inclusive education, irrespective of the various schools of thought that their students followed, and it also was a means for them to combat intra-Muslim sectarianism. The textbooks are organised to accommodate the cognitive development of children, in relation use of vocabulary, assessment criteria, as well as the choice of topics. For instance, Sadia's lesson with her younger cohort involved learning key names, places and events that occurred in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, her lesson with the elder cohort required a higher level of comprehension, as she explored more abstract themes such as the harms of arrogance and ego. Integral to the activities provided in the textbooks, which ranged from puzzles to quizzes and colouring activities, the Islamic studies teachers also prepared their own activities. The following image depicts the activities offered in one of Sadia's lessons:

(See Image 6)

The first activity is essentially a 'pop quiz' designed to reinforce the learning objectives from Sadia's previous lesson, and this took place at the very beginning of her lesson. The second activity occurred after the 'main task' had been completed. Students were organised in small groups in order to chronologically place the story of the Prophet *Salih* in order. This involved students working together, communicating and participating to complete a group task. The students then placed their pieces of the story on the whiteboard where the entire class discussed the sequence of events and thereby allowing the teacher to reinforce learning objectives.

Sadia would also ask her students to perform role plays as demonstrated in her lesson plan (Appendix 8). This lesson plan also showed clear signs of good practice which incorporated clear learning objectives, differentiation and an organisational structure that is informed by modern educational practice.

Unlike Gent's study (2013), the teaching practices at AC incorporated whole class learning, group learning, paired learning and independent learning. In Gent's case study the teaching practice was predominantly individualistic:

> 'Although 'whole class teaching' might take place occasionally, this is an exception rather than a rule and certainly subsidiary to the dominant mode in which teaching and learning take place, person-to-person' (Gent 2013:29).

Again, this is another way in which AC have adopted modern educational practices to help make traditional Islamic education more relevant and meaningful through the application of child-orientated teaching styles. The theoretical frameworks that underpin their Islamic studies are explored later in this chapter.

Explorer's Day

Sensory learning styles are primarily used in this session to encourage learning through play, arts and crafts as well as other forms of learning, which require a more 'hands on' approach. For instance, from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*sirah*) children learnt that he and his family lived in the state of poverty. Students were asked to try to envisage what his house and living conditions may have been like. From this, students created mud houses from clay and other relevant material, as a way depicting the humble, selfless and simplistic life-style that the students had learned regarding Prophet Muhammad.

The teachers at AC are advocates of providing a holistic Islamic education. In these sessions students are required to work together as a team in order to complete a task. This often involved students delegating roles to themselves and other team members. Students often have a responsibility or a role to perform in order to successfully complete a task. AC aspires to develop their students' communication, personal development and interpersonal skills, and the Explorer's Day is the main means by which they achieve this. Young children who are able to perform group work successfully and work well with other children, shows signs of positive emotional and social development (Tassoni et al 2011:227). If students are not able to perform these tasks well, either by not willing to or struggle cooperate and communicate, then the teachers and other staff members are there to help provide the necessary support to ensure that young children are developing both emotionally and socially, this is all done in the spirit of providing a holistic form of Islamic education.

Another important aspect involved outdoor learning and educational visits. During the course of the year the students visited 'Techniquest', a science Museum located in Cardiff. Aisha spoke of how the visit 'fitted in with what children were learning about Allah and His creations'. Another visit involved a trip to the National Museum in Cardiff. Visiting these types of educational sites, which are essentially 'secular' in nature, reinforces notions of active citizenship and civic participation in conjunction with attempting to forge a British/Welsh-Muslim identity. This form of learning is consistent with AC's 'holistic approach' to Islamic education.

In addition, AC is trying to make innovative developments to the 'Explorer's Day' so that it is more integrated with its curriculum. For example, AC's learning method for a lesson on the Prophet Yunus, the biblical version of Jonah and the whale, was organised to take place during a boat trip. Aisha spoke of the success of this lesson and how it was 'fun, exciting and memorable' for the students. She is currently in the process of recruiting 'coordinators' to bring more 'structure, planning and creative ideas' to help develop these forms of learning. Physical development is an area that AC needs to include to its educational programme.

Values and Attitudes

The Islamic studies lesson is an important vehicle for teaching core Islamic values. Rizwana began her lessons by reciting the following prayer

(See Image 7)

This is placed in the classroom for all the students to see. The students repeat the prayer along with its translation. This prayer reinforces the spiritual dimension in AC's curriculum.

Islamic morals and values are primarily taught through storytelling. The lessons involved contextualising the morals from Quranic stories to modern-day society. These lessons also allowed students to engage in debate and discussion. For instance in Rizwana's lesson the students learnt how people of *Salih*[8] disabled God's camel by cutting off its legs, which led to an interesting discussion on animal welfare. Students discussed the ethical line between 'eating' animals and 'hurting' animals; in conclusion the students learnt that though Muslims are allowed to consume certain animals they have a responsibility to treat them humanely.

Bridge Building

From the outset it is clear that AC is different from 'traditional' educational arrangements for Muslim children and this is reflected in their policies, practice and culture. The founders of AC, are trying to 'fill the gap' that exists between mainstream schooling and Muslim supplementary schooling. For them, this void often results in a disenfranchised and disenchanted form of Islamic education, which is they felt is often irrelevant to the context of British Muslim youth. As a result of this, AC aims to bridge learning practices, and to offer Islamic education that is 'well-rounded and holistic'. Attempts to achieve this are evident in their pedagogical practice as described above, alongside their efforts to build bridges between mainstream and Muslim supplementary schooling.

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[8] *Salih* is the name of a Prophet of God which is mentioned in the Quran. This lesson was about how the People of Salih disobeyed God by killing a camel which they were instructed not to harm.

A clear example of this bridge building was found in their approach towards Ramadan, which closely resembled the build-up to Christmas in many mainstream schools. As soon as you entered AC the image below was made visible for both parents and students to see. Teachers would remind children on a daily basis the number of days remaining prior to Ramadan starting.

(See Image 8)

In relation to this students were creating lanterns and other 'Ramadan decorations' for their classrooms, in a similar fashion to the way many schools create an atmosphere reflecting the Christmas/winter season. There was a general excitement in the atmosphere at AC in anticipation to the arrival of this month; this could be seen and sensed in the general attitude of both the staff and students.

In addition to this, AC employed merit charts, another idea 'borrowed' from the wider educational practice. Students would receive stickers and stars for different reasons, ranging from completing homework, to behaving well. The stickers would have an 'Islamic' message on them, as illustrated below.

(See Image 9)

This encourages positive behaviour, which is reinforced with an Islamic message.

As Barton's study (1986) identified, many Muslim communities perceive the mosque teacher as someone more than a teacher, almost as a family member, everyone is either an 'uncle' or a 'brother'. This is also evident in AC. The students were required

to address the teachers as 'Aunty', which resonates with Barton's (ibid) findings, the main difference here is the choice of word, 'Aunty' being drawn from the English language. However saying this, the students would regularly, though not intentionally refer to teachers as 'Miss', as this how they address their school teachers. This overlapping of terms to address the teacher would suggest that students perceived their teachers as 'professionals' as well as 'family members', as students would use both terms interchangeably.

Other areas where ideas were borrowed from the wider educational practice include: induction days, parents evening, bureaucratic model and policies. For instance, AC's behaviour policy contains information that one may expect to see from a mainstream school, however it also contains a Prophetic *hadith* in relation to Muslim conduct and behaviour, for instance it reads:

> 'All pupils are expected to behave in a positive and responsible way
> at all times, both within and outside of class demonstrating the
> good manners of the Prophet Muhammad in their conduct with
> teachers and fellow pupils…The Prophet said: 'Allah has sent me to
> perfect good manners and to do good deeds.'' (AC Welcome Pack,
> nd:6)

This is one example of how AC has adapted an approach to fit in with their Islamic ethos. The above statement also conveys that students are expected to exemplify their 'behaviour' both inside and outside of class, reinforcing the idea of a transformative education and notions of 'embodied learning'.

Embodied Learning

The teachers at AC felt that Islamic knowledge is transformative and not transmissive, this is reflected in their school's culture. Children were expected to practice what they learnt, and this message was regularly and consistently reinforced. After Khadijah taught her class the 'prayer before going to bed', she encouraged them to recite it every night, and the whole purpose of teaching this prayer was done with spirit that children get into the practice of reciting it. Sadia instructed her class to convey the morals learnt from the story of the Prophet *Salih* to their families. Ahmed mentioned how he wants his students to be 'good Muslims' and how he gives his class 'good advice' in the hope of motivating them to be practicing Muslims. Integral to this, teachers are expected to act as role models for their students. Aisha discussed how this is an important characteristic when she recruits new teachers.

Educational Theories

This section provides evidence of some of the theoretical frameworks that underpin teaching and learning at the Amanah Centre. Understanding such theories is useful for analysing the teaching and learning practices at AC.

Piaget's Theory

Piaget's theory on cognitive development is important to understand as it significantly influenced modern educational practice, from the way practitioner's understand how children think and learn, to influencing educational settings and teaching practices in mainstream schools (Tassoni et al 2010: 64-66). Piaget argued that children construct knowledge based on their environment and experiences. He also suggested that a child's ability to progress in learning is linked to cognitive development. The four stages of cognitive development are outlined below.

Stage	Approximate Age	Features
Sensory-motor	0-2 years	Development of object permanence
		Child begins to use symbols (e.g. language)
Pre-operational	2-7 years	Child uses symbols in play and thought
		Egocentrism
		Centration
		Animism
		Inability to conserve
Concrete operational	7-11 years	Ability to conserve
		Children begin to solve mental problems using practical support such as counters and objects
Formal operational	11-15 years	Young people can think about situations that they have not experienced
		They can juggle with ideas in their minds

Table 1: Piaget's four broad stages of cognitive development (taken from Tassoni etal 2010:65)

Gardner (2011:29-32) provides a succinct explanation of each of these stages. By describing the differences between each stage, Gardner reveals how a child's educative needs change and vary in accordance to his/her level of cognition or

cognitive development. For instance, he asserts, how during the 'formal operational' stage, young teenagers are:

'Able to reason exclusively on the level of propositions; that is, given a set of statements–for example, about respective speeds and trajectories of objects A and B–the youth is able to make deductions or inferences and draw proper conclusions on the basis of the statements alone. Although it maybe convenient to have a diagram or an ensemble of objects on hand with which to work, such aids are no longer necessary. The objects can now be construed mentally; the operations that once had to be carried out in a physical realm have now been 'internalised' or 'interiorised'. The mathematician or scientist can progress simply by sitting in her study and thinking, because the requisite operation can now be performed in abstract, or formal manner (ibid:30).

Although Piaget's theory has received scholarly criticism, such as, his understanding and focus of learning dominated around students of science; his theory nonetheless conveys that children of different ages learn differently. Tassoni et al (2010:64) explains how Piaget's theory transformed educational practice in Britain from the 1960s onwards, particularly in early years settings, where teaching is now much more 'hands on' and are catered according to the developmental needs of young people.

One of the major reservations that teachers at AC had with Muslims supplementary schools, which they have had personal and previous encounters with, was that classes were not child friendly and students were all taught in the same style and manner. It was therefore important to the management that the students at AC are put into classes according to their age. In relation to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the students at AC fall into one of the following stages: the 'pre-

operational stage (students aged between 2-7), 'concrete operational' stage (students aged between 7-11) and 'formal operational' stage (students aged between 11-15). By organising the classes in this manner meant that lessons cold be planned and delivered age appropriately. During observations it was noticed that lessons delivered to the youngest cohort of students were much more hands on in comparison to the eldest cohort, these classes also had more than one Teacher Assistant.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives is a way of classifying knowledge in some form of hierarchy as they progress in cognitive difficulty (Bloom 1956). The figure below represents this hierarchy.
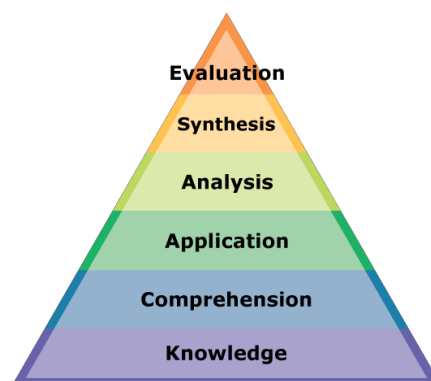
(Figure Adapted from: Pappas, Pierrakos and Nagel 2013:56).

It is interesting to note that the simplest form of learning, such as rote learning of knowledge is placed at the bottom. Throughout the fieldwork, teachers consistently referred to the importance AC places on 'meaning'. Employing Bloom's Taxonomy, Higher Order of Thinking could be seen in lessons such as the one on the Islamic perspective of Jesus, where children are required to analyse, synthesise and even evaluate their beliefs against Christian/non-Muslim beliefs.

In the Tajweed lessons, students are required to utilise the Lower Order Thinking skills, such as knowing or memorising a rule, understanding it, and finally being able to apply it in other places. As explained, the students at AC do not understand the Quran, as this falls beyond the scope of their curriculum, but parts of it are covered in their Islamic studies curriculum.

Elements of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 2011) could also be seen in their teaching practice. This theory stipulates that there are seven different types of intelligences/ways to learn; linguistic, mathematical, visual, kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. The teachers at AC adapted this theory to provide a range of classroom activities, such as learning Tajweed through jigsaw or participating in role plays (kinesthetic), singing the ninety-nine names of Allah (music-rhythmic), the use of flash cards (visual) and Explorer's Day (inter/intrapersonal) to name a few.

The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer 2001) was also seen in AC's educational practice. This theory suggests that there are two separate channels, auditory and visual for processing information. It stipulates that learning is an active process of 'filtering, selecting, organising and integrating information' (ibid). The application of this was witnessed in one of the lessons observed, where the teacher was seen to use symbols, such as a mosque, moon, and food and drink, to help her class to engage in a discussion about the meaning and significance of Ramadan. She would ask students what each of the images represented. This section shows why learning at AC is important as well as demonstrating how its educational [ractices are informed by theory, which consequently fosters successful learning.

Discussions

Critical Comments

Though AC arguably qualifies as a successful model of good practice, like all institutions, there are some areas in which practice can be improved. Classes begin straight after school, leaving little or no time for children to go home and relax. Consequently, many students arrived in school uniform. AC felt that a 4.30pm start was preferential; children are able to go home with enough time to relax before bedtime. However, it was apparent in the classes that many children were tired and lethargic; on one occasion a child was fast asleep in the class. More importantly, an immense amount of energy was required on the teachers' behalf to keep the class alert and engaged. This resulted in lessons being taught at a fast pace. Teachers were delivering various activities, often more than three or four in a short span of 45 minutes, leaving little or no time for children to absorb, digest and reflect on the lesson. Also, the switch over between the two lessons incorporated no breaks. In effect children sit through 1 hour 45 minutes of class time without any 'official breaks'. This raises a few questions around organisation and time planning.

The Islamic studies textbooks restrict the teachers in many senses, from content to organisation. Teachers use the textbooks to structure the lessons and set homework from the pre-prepared sheets provided. The *Tajweed* teachers on the other hand have very limited resources available to them; they on the other hand have to create the resources themselves. If the same level of creativity, ingenuity and planning that is put into the *Tajweed* lessons were to be directed into the Islamic studies curriculum, the delivery of this subject could also perhaps reach new heights and levels. It was apparent that the *Tajweed* teachers had studied *Tajweed* at an advanced level and possessed in-depth knowledge on the subject matter, whereas

the Islamic studies teachers were heavily reliant on the series of textbooks for most of their information.

AC has no robust admissions policy, which results in new students starting midway through the academic year. During observations two such students were enrolled in this way, this can have negative implications on both the functioning of the existing class, as well as the new students.

Women and Muslim Supplementary Schools

In her paper entitled 'women are believers in their own right'; Piela (2013) explains how the 'ordinary voice' is marginalised from the discourse on Muslim women, often represented in a discursive manner depending on their level of conformity to western norms. She talks about how Muslim women are perceived as 'liberal' or 'progressive' when they fit the western agenda, or they are 'vilified' and 'otherised' when they do not. In conjunction to this, Muslim women also are also represented similarly in a patriarchal discourse–'the pure, submissive woman is often contrasted with the loose outspoken woman' (Piela 2013:394). Piela (ibid:389) demonstrates how Muslim women throughout Britain 'often circumvent male authority by creating and populating their own spaces', often online. Though some mosques approve of women who wish to develop their knowledge in Islam, 'most mosques are managed by traditional, patriarchal imams who may not approve of women's heightened agency' (Bhimji 2009 cited in Piela 2013).

This study shows some of the challenges (and frustrations) Muslim mothers have experienced in exercising agency within traditional mosque settings. The complacency and perceived poor levels of education in mosque based supplementary schools drove a group of Muslim mothers to take provisions for

Islamic education into their own hands. This raises some interesting questions about how these Muslim women have socially constructed roles that are usually ascribed by men. During AC's start-up Aisha described the difficulties of recruiting male teachers. She expressed how the local mosques seemed to be confused about what AC was trying to achieve. In Scourfield's et al (2013) study in Cardiff, they convey that in most mosques, with the exception of a few, both religion and ethnicity goes hand in hand. One of AC's objectives is to provide an inclusive and ecumenical form of Islamic education which is detached from a single dominant ethnic race. Aisha made an astute point on how mosques are naturally labeled by some sort of sectarian gropu, 'you're automatically, a *Shafi*, *Hanafi*, or *Salafi*'. By having no direct ties or connections to a mosque-based institute, AC has managed to create some form of religious neutrality. By freeing themselves from internal mosque politics, AC feels it is in a position to focus on delivering Islamic education.

Making Traditional Islamic Education Meaningful and Relevant

This section answers the initial research question: How and to what extent can modern educational practices be employed to help make traditional Islamic education more meaningful and relevant for young Muslims living in Britain?

> 'Some lecturers do not know where to start improving [teaching],
> at once overwhelmed by and willing to admit its complexity, they
> ask for a set of rules that will solve all their difficulties. Half the
> difficulty with doing it better is knowing what the real problem is,
> of being aware of what we do not know' (Ramsden 1992:12)

The above quote resonates with AC's educational practice. Unlike traditional mosque-based supplementary schools, AC possesses teachers who are familiar with

and qualified in both Islamic scholarship and western educational practice. This positions them to deliver Islamic education that is both meaningful and relevant to a British context through their acquired knowledge of working in mainstream educational settings. As a result of this, teachers at AC are in a position to not only understand the 'problems', but also have access to the best solutions in relation to teaching and learning practice, child development and organsiational structure. This achieved in several ways as discussed below.

Though the teachers at AC may not be aware of the theoretical frameworks that are at play, these theoretical frameworks nonetheless sustain an important role in their teaching and learning practice. The important emphasis placed upon 'meaning' is informed by the management's personal experiences of 'being' Muslim in a western context. AC attempts to make Islamic education more meaningful through appropriating the modern educational practices. Due to AC's staff holding posts in mainstream schools, and thereby having received the accompanying training, the teachers are very familiar with modern practices, such as effective lesson planning.

In conjunction with this, their pedagogical scope incorporates forms of teaching, such as kinesthetic and multi-sensory forms of learning. The visits that AC makes to museums and science centres challenge notions suggested by Halstead (2004). Here he comments on how Muslims are torn between western democracies and their Islamic faith he says:

> 'If [Muslims] allow their children to receive an education based on
> western epistemology and liberal values, they must wave good bye
> to any hope of restoring to divine revelation the authority to
> furnish the ontological and ethical foundations of all other areas of
> knowledge. However, if Muslims in the west seek to insulate
> themselves from the broader society, this means they are unable
> to enjoy full citizenship and unable to influence the way that

western society develops. Yet they may feel they have much to contribute here, particularly in the spiritual and moral domain and in restoring a sense of sacred in everyday life' (2004:526).

Centres like AC do not exist to protect children from British society, they exist to educate children how to be part of society without having to compromise their Islamic principles and identity. By doing so, they offer a form of Islamic education, which is authentic and rooted in tradition and yet remain meaningful and relevant to a modern context.

Conclusion

This study provides an in depth analysis of The Amanah Centre, its educational programme and pedagogical practice. It demonstrates how a group of Muslim women have organised themselves to create a space for the educational provisions for young Muslims living in Cardiff. More pertinently, this project examines the extent in which AC employs modern educational practices to make traditional Islamic education more meaningful for Muslims living in a British context.

AC is successful in making Islamic education relevant and meaningful in a number of ways, from establishing a strong ethos through to having a robust set of roles and responsibilities for staff. Aisha's comment on how Islamic education is often presented to young children in an insular and separate manner raises some vital questions for institutions that have limited pedagogical scope. If Muslim supplementary schools do not expand their pedagogical range to include forms of kinesthetic, multi sensory and differentiated learning, then there is a possibility that some young Muslims will not be able to relate to what they are learning. This form of learning can produce what Ahmed (2012) describes as a dual identity, where children have a 'Muslim' identity and their 'other' identity, depending on the social setting that they are in.

This project has conveyed the level of ingenuity teachers at AC apply when adapting modern educational practices for the purpose of discharging rudimentary Islamic education. This has been done through successfully applying educational theories to their teaching and learning practice. The results of this are evident, from the way teachers created jigsaws for delivering lessons on *Tajweed*, or used role-plays when teaching Islamic stories; all this ensured that traditional Islamic education is being taught thoroughly, in a manner that includes all children, particularly those who have different styles of learning. Alongside this, a detailed description of the

curriculum framework was provided. This conveyed how AC would utilised their Islamic textbooks to teach students about Islamic morals and values, as well encourage them to embody their learning through practice and action, particularly the fulfilling five ritual prayers *(salah)* at their given times. It was also demonstrated the delivery of lessons at AC are an attempt to bridge learning with mainstream schooling, for instance, the lessons on Ramadan were conveyed in a manner similar to how mainstream schools typically deliver lessons on Christmas/winter season.

The use of photographs in this study conveys the child-orientated educational setup that AC has successfully established. It also captures a visual insight into the physical world of an Islamic supplementary school, which is often hidden from the wider community. It reveals how AC uses student's work as well as displays of sacred Islamic sites, like the Cave of Hira, in an attempt to make familiar and bring closer a world that can often be distant to young Muslims living in Cardiff.

The findings in this study share some similarity to other research projects, such as how Muslim supplementary schools contribute to building a strong sense of identity. AC's visits to museums and science centers convey notions such as citizenship and civic engagement. More importantly this reaserch affirms the emphasis Muslim communities place on the acquisition of classical Quranic Arabic. This is done in conjunction to providing a detailed description of how the *Qaidah* is learnt by children as young as five.

This research project conveys one institution's attempt in conveying a holistic Islamic education. It describes how AC was successfully able to provide an ecumenical form of Islamic education, through being independent, and more crucially having no direct associations with any sectarian mosque. When staff members at AC are pushed to 'confess' which school of thought they follow, they simply would reply 'our

education is based on the Quran and *sunnah*', according to Aisha this response satisfies all who enquire.

Though this research has made some contributions to the discourse on Muslim supplementary schools, it nonetheless conveys the diverse nature and shape a Muslim supplementary school can take up in Britain. More research in this area would generate other samples of good practice, which can later be shared and distributed. There are many 'lessons' contained within this research which other supplementary schools can take benefit from. More research on this topic can subsequently be used in designing and developing tailored training for Imams and practitioners who teach in Muslim supplementary schools.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board
www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.com

Kirklees COUNCIL

Dear Colleague
I would like to update my records for all madressahs and supplementary schools in Kirklees. Also I would like to find out what kind of help you may require so that I and my colleagues may be able to support you accordingly.
Please complete the following and return it to me either by email or by post to the address shown.

Name of organisation:						
Address:						
Town:						
Post code:						
Website:						
Contact person:						
Tel/Mobile:						
Email:						
Numbers of pupils on roll:	Boys		Girls		Total	
Numbers of staff & volunteers:	Male		Female		Total	
Opening times:	Mon – Fri			Sat – Sun		
Please indicate below what kind of support you require, such as; advice, information and guidance?						
Please indicate below what kind of training you require, such as; safeguarding children, behaviour management and health & safety?						
Please indicate below which organisations you wish to work closely with, such as; a local school or a local children's centre?						

Thank you for your co-operation.
Shakeel Hafez
Safeguarding & Community Engagement Manager
Communities & Leisure, Directorate for Well-being & Communities

Madressahs & Supplementary Schools - Records Update   Inbox   x

Shakeel Hafez <Shakeel.Hafez@kirklees.gov.uk>   2 Apr
to Shakeel

Dear colleagues

Please find attached for completion by madressahs and supplementary schools, including those who operate privately from homes. If you or someone you know is involved in one of the organisations or you are aware of private madressah/supplementary school activities, please encourage them to complete and return this form to me as soon as possible.

If however you have already completed and returned the form to me, please accept my apologies.

Many thanx

Shakeel Hafez – Safeguarding & Integration Manager
Communities & Leisure
Directorate for Communities, Transformation & Change
Kirklees Council
2nd Floor South | Civic
Direct Dial:
shakeel.hafez@

This email and any attachments are confidential. If you have received it in error - notify the sender immediately, delete it from your system, and do not use, copy or disclose the information in any way. Kirklees Council monitors all emails sent or received.

📄 **Records update.pdf**
237K View Download

Shakeel Hafez <Shakeel.Hafez@kirklees.gov.uk>   2 Apr
to Shakeel

Dear colleagues (I have been asked to send alternative format so it is easier to complete and email the form)

📄 **Registration form.pub**
169K Download

Click here to Reply or Forward

Appendix 2

28/05/13

As-salaam-u-alaykum ww,

Following our brief conversation on the phone, I enclose this letter (and information sheet) describing the aims and objectives of my research.

My name is Yunus Ali and I am originally from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. For a while now, I have been interested in education, particularly Muslim supplementary schools. This is what brought me to do a Masters degree at Cardiff University. My research interests revolve around supplementary schools and it was recommended to me that the Amanah Centre would make a really interesting case study. My research aims to look at the different styles and techniques which Muslim educators use to teach young Muslims about Islam. By doing this research I aim to:

- Provide a better understanding of Muslim supplementary schools
- Explain the importance of Islamic education
- Promote good practice (which other organisations can benefit from)

I have also attached an information sheet which explains in more detail the nature of the research. Please feel free to circulate this information amongst your staff. If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to get in contact with either my supervisors or myself (contact details on information sheet).

If you are happy with me conducting this research, I would like to spend a maximum of 10 days at the Amanah centre starting from Monday 10th June 2013. I am more than happy to offer any services which I could possibly provide as I have experience in both teaching and administration.

In the meanwhile, barakAllah for taking out time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Wa salaam

Yunus Ali

Appendix 3

<u>Interview schedule for Teachers</u>

1. Can you tell me a litlle bit about yourself and how you became a teacher at the Amanah Centre

2. Can you tell me about the different teaching styles and techniques you have used in your classroom?

3. Can you tell me a little bit about your own philosophy of educational practice?

4. What do you like teaching at the Amanah Centre?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add that might be useful for this study? Or any general comments?

Appendix 4

<u>Interview schedule for Administrators</u>

1. Can you provide me with a brief background of why the Amanah Centre was set up, how long it has been running, how many teachers/students you have?

2. How many hours do children attend per week?

3. Can you provide me with an overview of Amanah's organisational structure?

4. How did you decide on the curriculum?

5. What aspects do you deem important when you recruit teachers?

6. Do you hold teacher training sessions?

7. What are the aims and objectives of Amanah?

8. What was your 'thought process' when you decided on the layout of the classrooms/decorations on walls (posters and artwork)?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add that might be useful for this study? Or any general comments?

Appendix 5

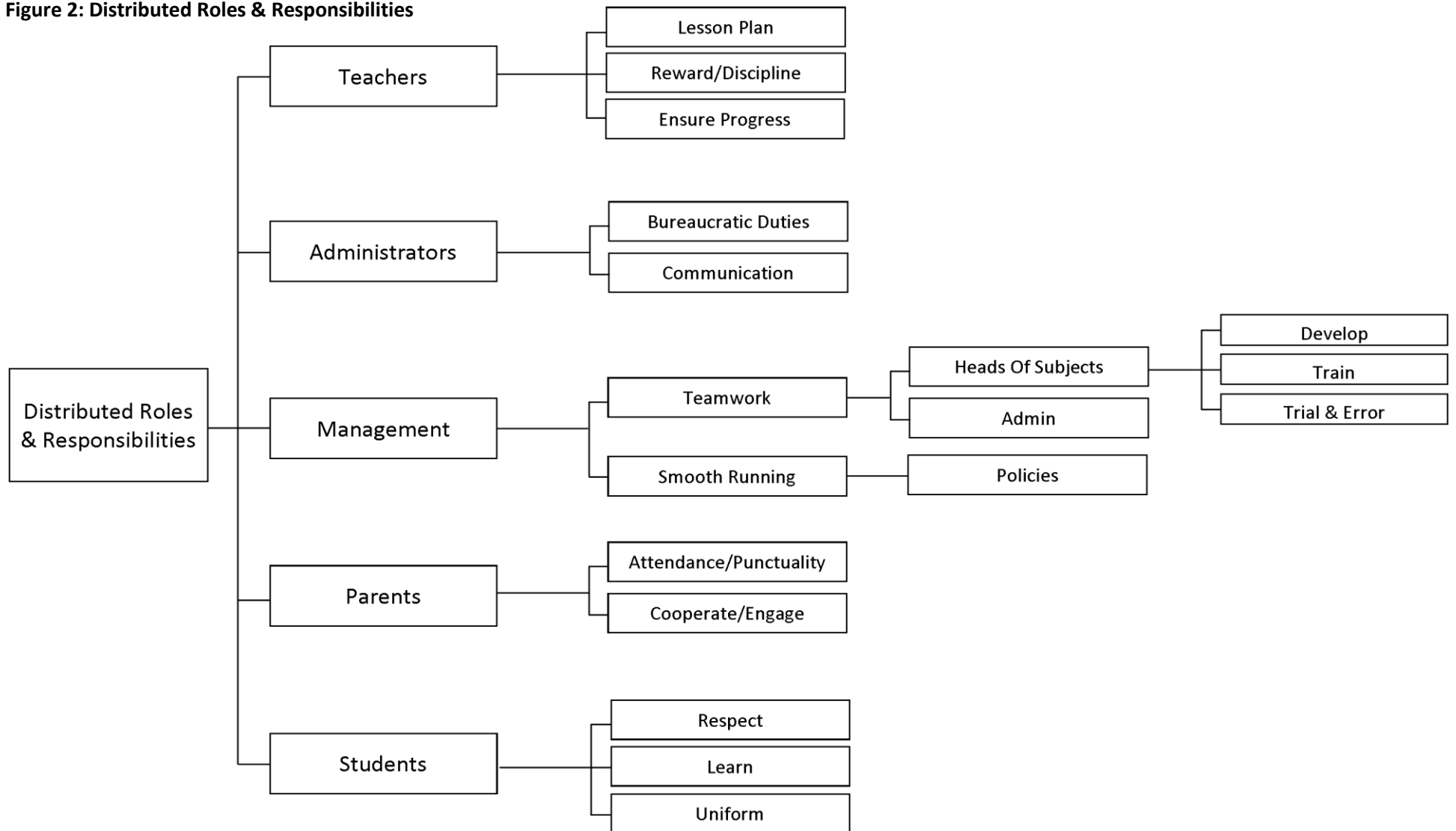**Coding Diagrams**

Figure 1: Reasons why AC exists

Reasons Why Amanah Exists

- Vision
  - Short Term
    - Child Centred Education
    - Safe & Fun Learning Experience
  - Long Term
    - Develop 'Well-rounded Individuals Who Have Natural Love For Islam'
    - Continue (& Modernise) The Islamic Learning Tradition
- Motivation
  - External
    - Internal Mosque Politics
    - Poor Education
    - Lack Of Infrastructure
    - Disenfranchised
  - Internal
    - Own Children
    - Bridge Building
- Ethos
  - Islamic
  - Ecumenical
  - Trust/Transparency
    - Parents/Community
    - Wider Community
  - Educational Excellence

Figure 2: Distributed Roles & Responsibilities

Figure 3: Overview of AC's educational programme
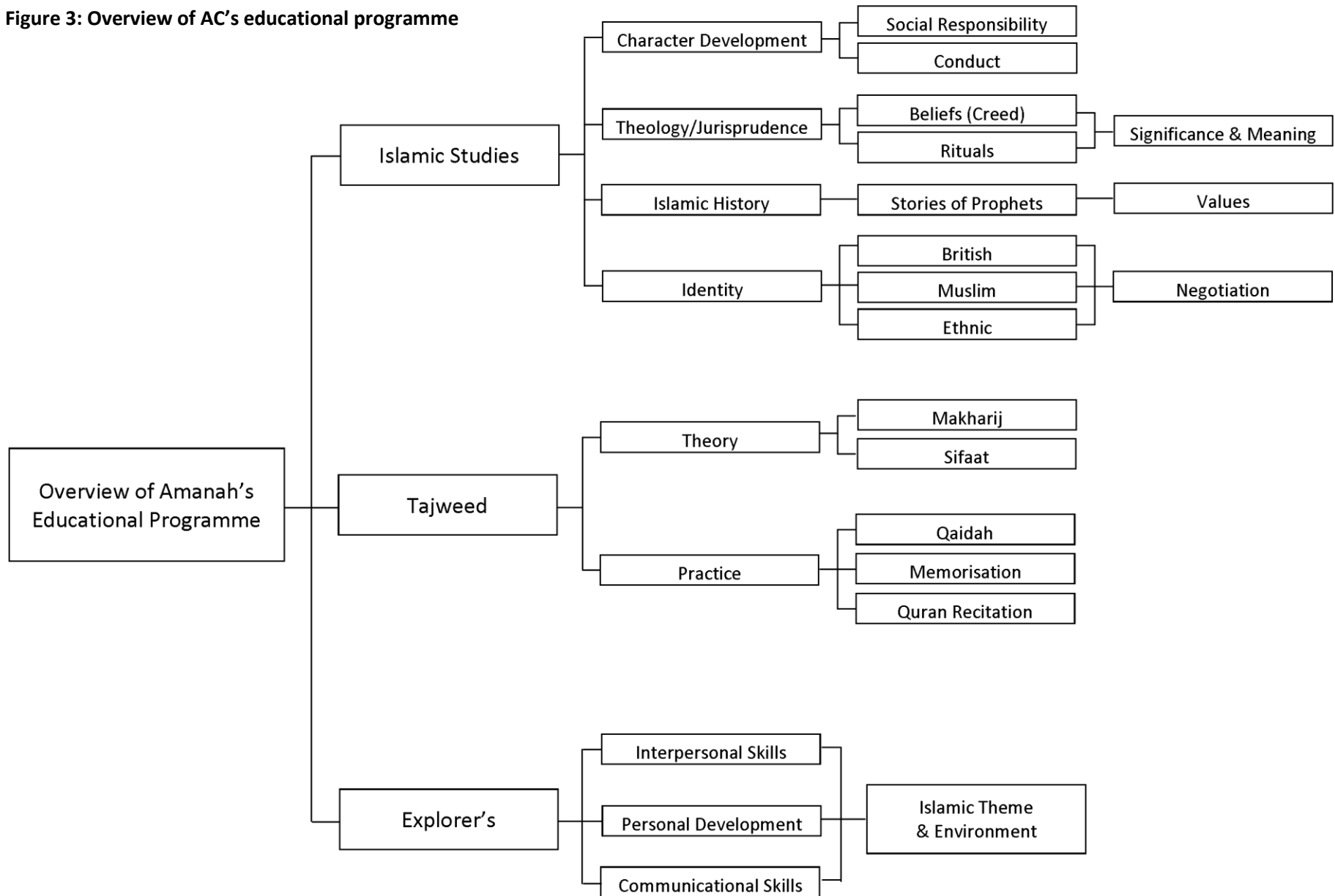
Figure 4: Mapping out AC's pedagogical practice
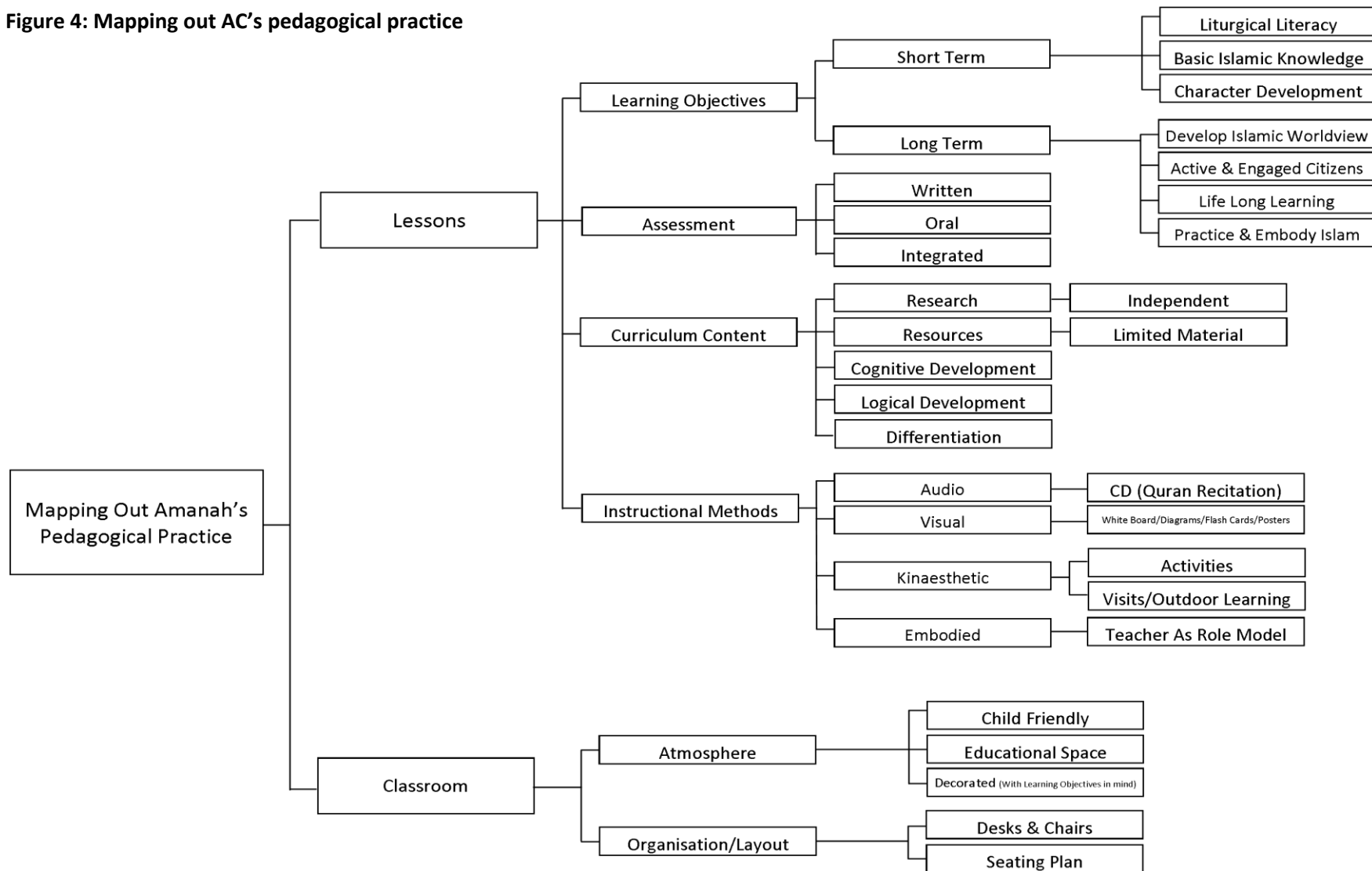
Appendix 6

External View of Amanah Centre

Main Entrance To Building (close up)

Classroom 1   Classroom 2

Main Entrance

From its outward appearance there is no indication that the Amanah Centre is an Islamic educational establishment. There are no signs or any indication that this is a learning establishment. When initially trying to locate the building I had to wait for and follow Muslim parents.

Appendix 7

Back view of Classroom 1

Front view of Classroom 1

Map of Classroom 1 at 5pm

Desk 3

Desk 2

Desk 1

Entrance to classroom 1

KEY

········· Whiteboard   ● Teacher   ◯ Teacher Assistant   ■ Student   ◇ Participant Observer
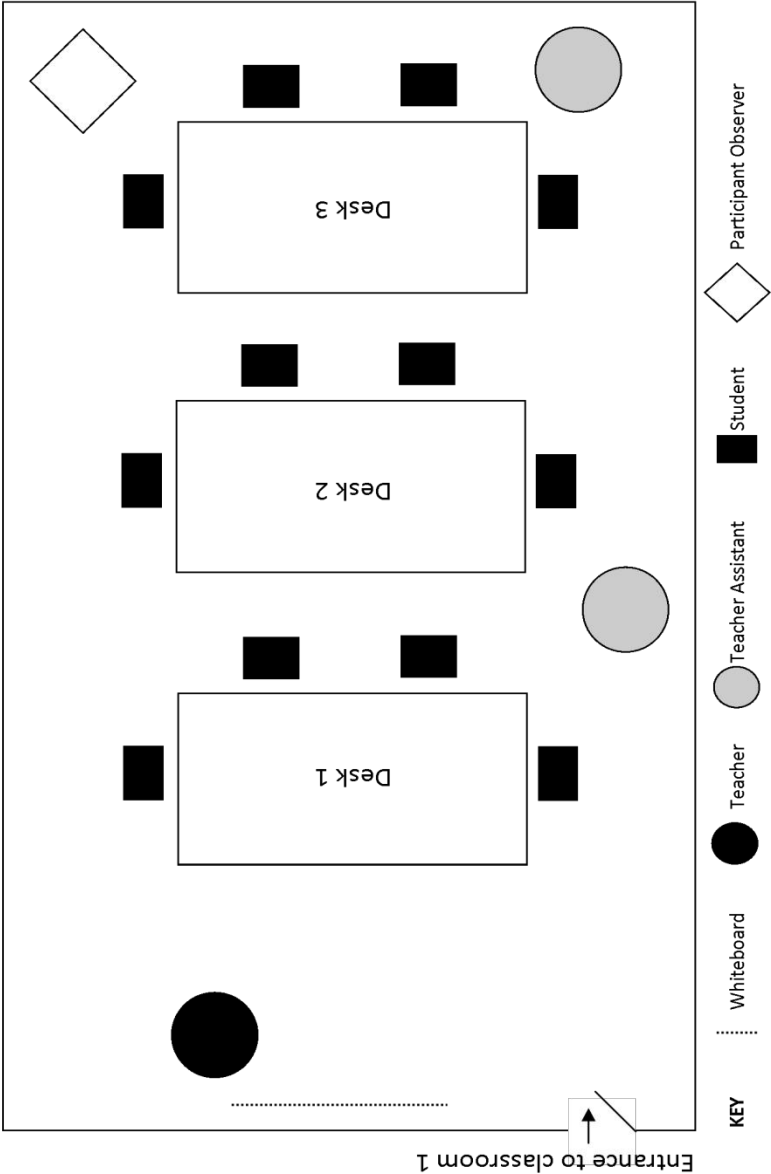
Map of Tajweed class (students age 5 to 8) at 5:00pm. The teacher is delivering a lesson on the which letters originate from the lips. The teacher assistants walk around ensuring that students are comprehending. Each teacher is assigned to a desk. Desks in this class are according to age/ability. Younger/least advanced students at the desk 1, older/more advanced students at desk 3.

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Appendix 8

AMANAH LEARNING 4 KIDZ LESSON PLAN ISLAMIC STUDIES

Topic Prophet Muhammad (s) – Part 2   Class 5 – 7 yr olds   Lesson No.

Context of Learning	Learning Objectives
The 2nd part of The Story of Prophet Muhammad, from the point of Prophethood.	To learn about the life of Muhammad(s) after he became a Prophet to the time he died.

Timings	Activities	Differentiation	Resources
Starter 10 mins	Salams, dua, Register. Recap on the keywords used in last lesson. Recap story of Muhammad(s) up to Prophethood.	Simpler Questions for younger	Keywords
Explanation (New learning)			
Main Task 15 mins	Class teaching from p26-27 ↳ Tell the story ↳ Enact Role Play on some points.	Simplify words	Textbook
Additional Tasks (Extension) 10 mins	Activity – On tables, put the story cards of the Prophet's life in order. Go over as a class		Story Cards per table
Plenary 10 mins	True / False Quiz – Kids to use thumbs up / thumbs down ↳ Quiz on all of lesson (all of life of R(s)). ↳ Use keywords from p27 Give out Hmk		Hmk Sheet 4

Assessment Criteria and Homework:	Teacher Review/Notes:
Homework Sheet 4	

Image 1: Amanah Logo
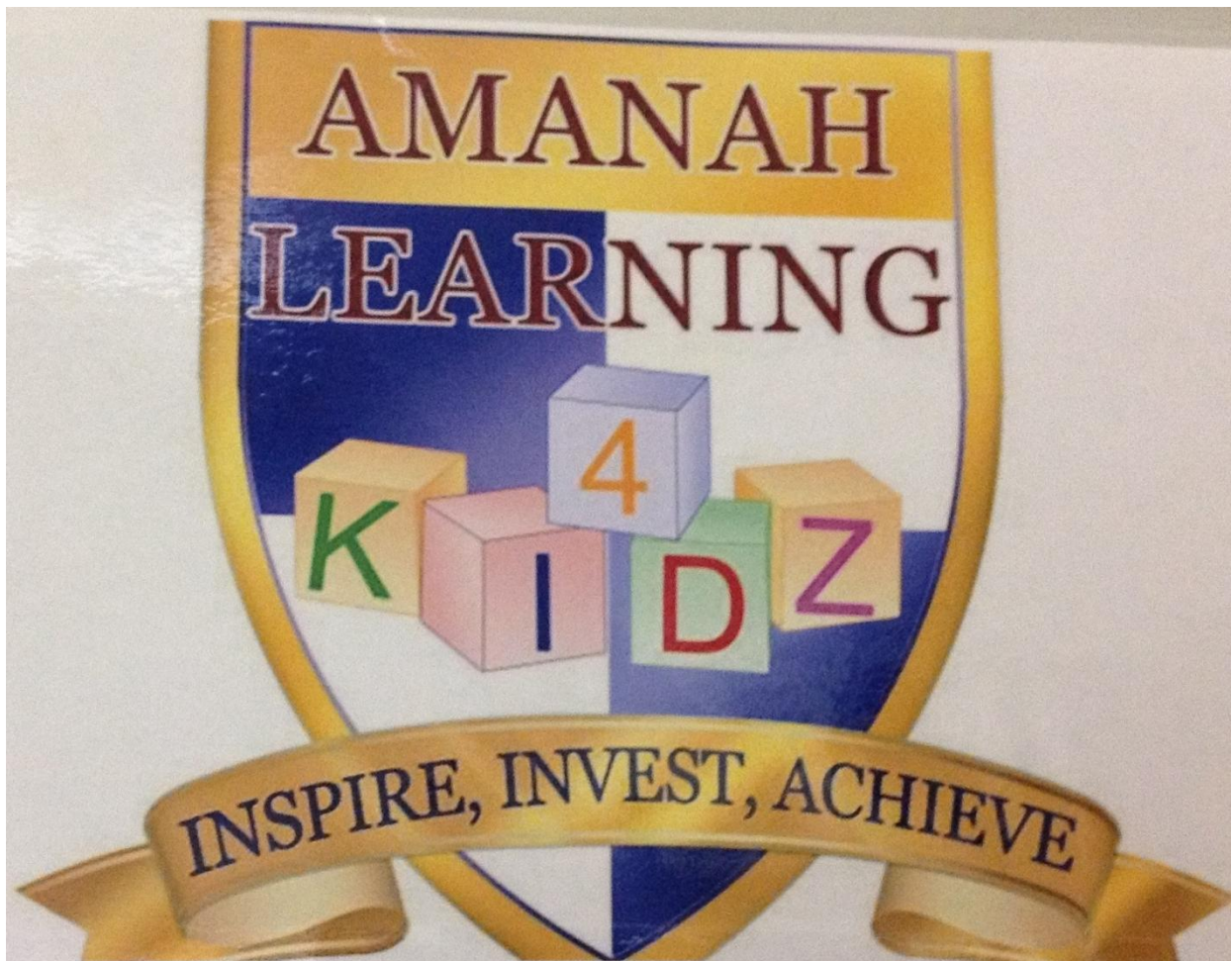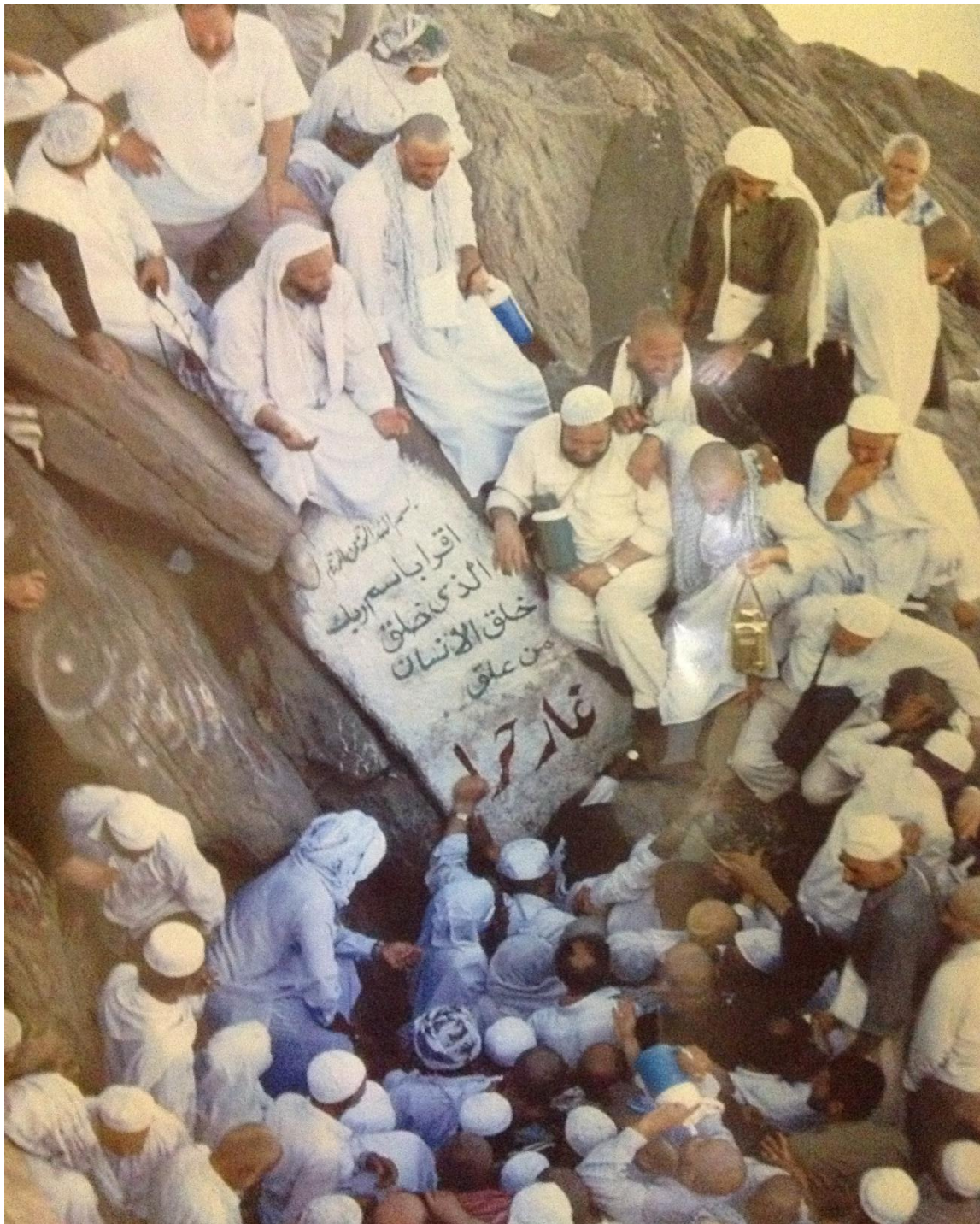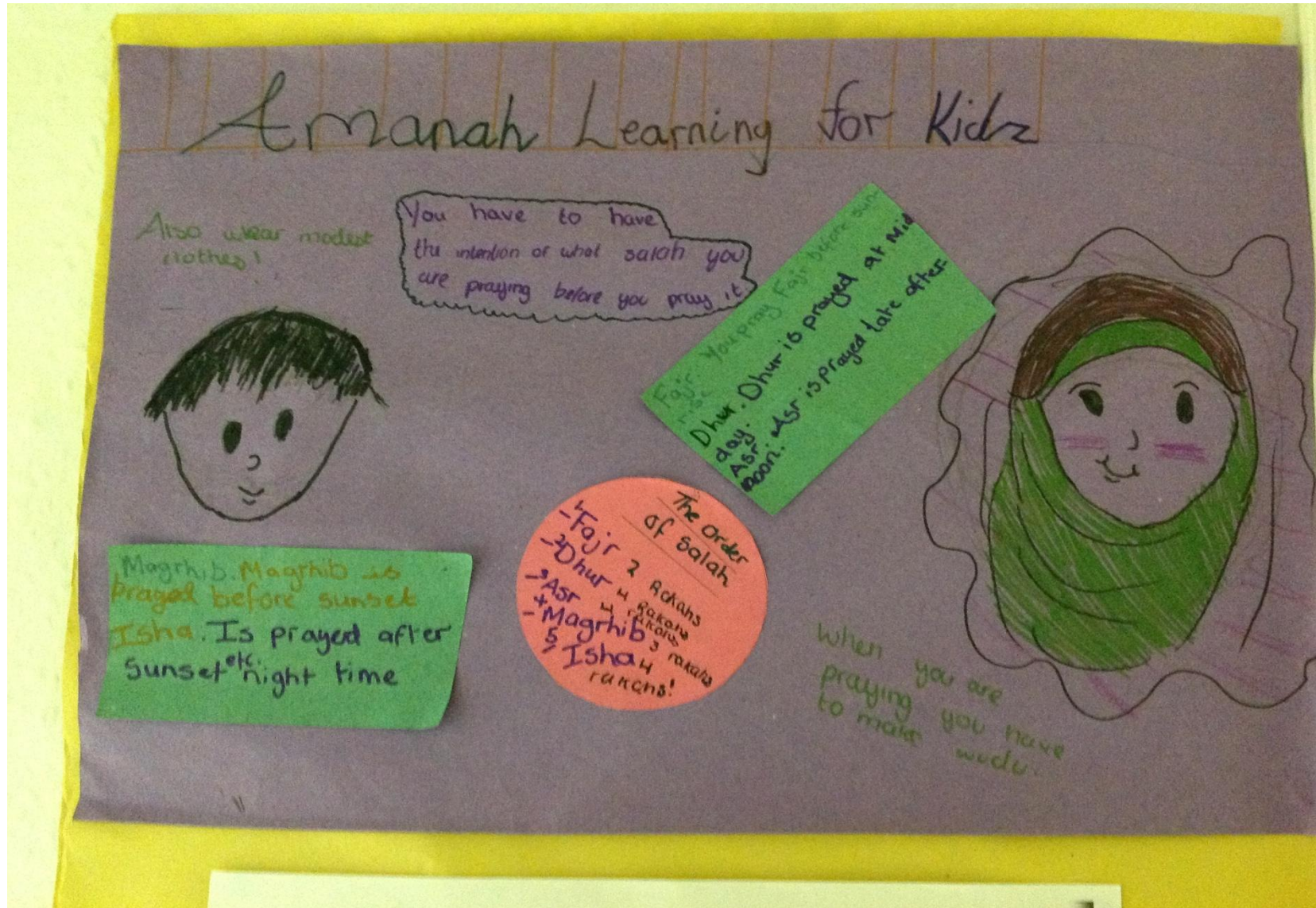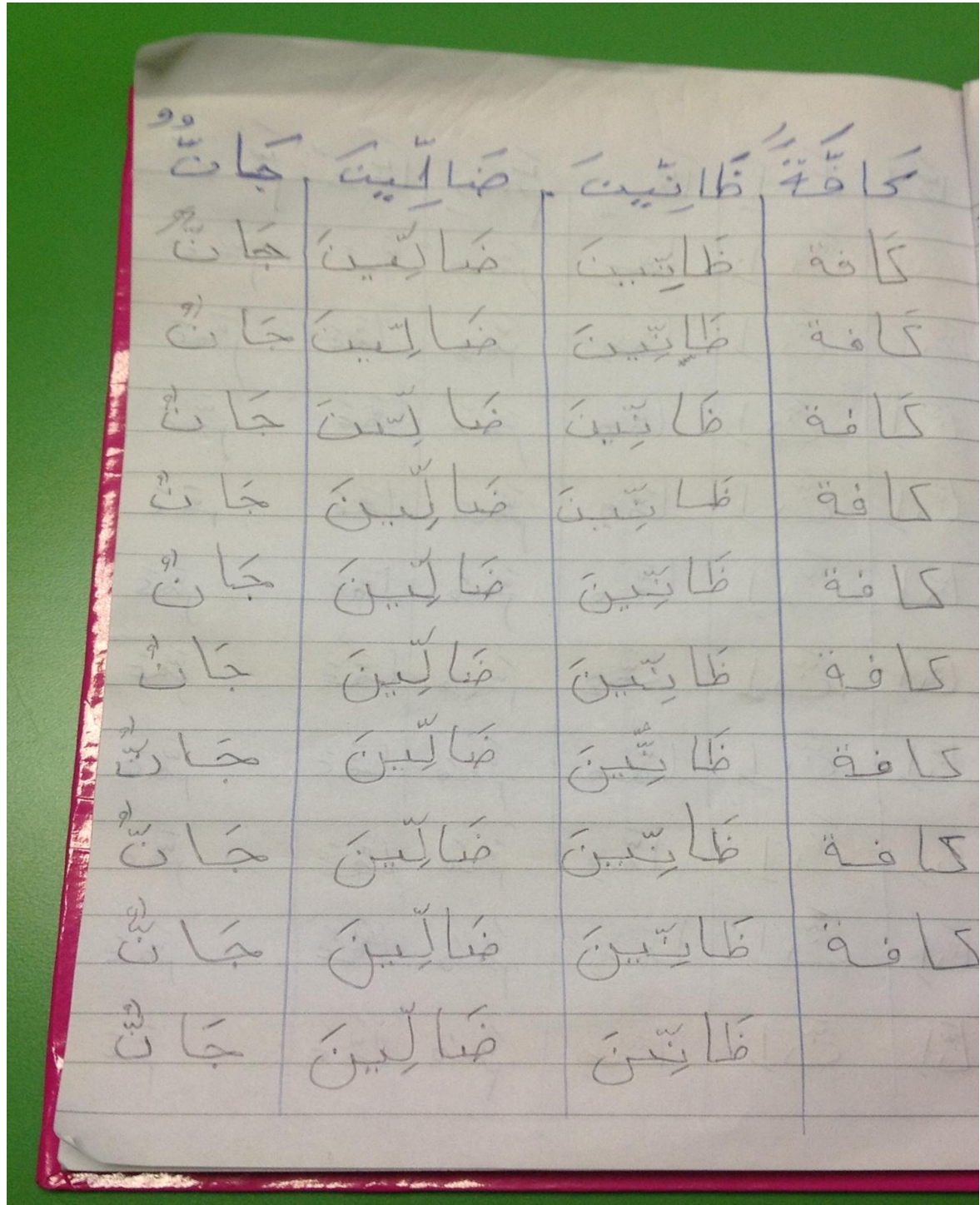
Image 2: Cave Heera

Image 3: Student's Prayer Poster

Image 4: Class Rules

Image 5: Students Exercise Book

Ahmed spoke of how the writing process speeds up the learning process. He explained that by 'writing the letters it would make the students think why the *shaddah* is going on top of a certain letter and what impact does it have on the letter?

Image 6: Islamic Studies Activities

Activity 1   **Activity 2**

Image 7: Dua (prayer) for knowledge

Du'a for Knowledge/Studying:

اللَّهُمَّ انْفَعْنِي بِمَا عَلَّمْتَنِي وَ عَلِّمْنِي مَا يَنْفَعُنِي

Oh Allah! Make useful for me what you have taught me and teach me knowledge that will be useful to me.

(At-Tirmidhi)

Image 8: Ramadan Countdown Calendar

Teachers would remind children on a daily basis the number of days remaining prior to Ramadan starting

Image 9: Merit Sticker