ISLAMIC SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIALS IN THE 21ST CENTURY
A CASE STUDY OF *AL-AMAL*, A PRIVATE BILINGUAL SCHOOL IN KUWAIT

by

Kalthoum Mohammed Al Kandari

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty

of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY

in

Teaching and Learning

David Hicks, Chair

William Ochsenwald

Melanie Uttech

Josiah Tlou

Jane Abraham

May 5, 2004

Blacksburg, Virginia

Key words: Islamic schools, Modernity, Globalization, Kuwait

ISLAMIC SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIALS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A CASE STUDY OF *AL-AMAL*, A PRIVATE BILINGUAL SCHOOL IN KUWAIT

by

Kalthoum Mohammed Al Kandari

Chair: Dr. David Hick, Teaching and Learning

(ABSTRACT)

This study seeks to explore, and in exploring to describe, and illuminate, *Al-Amal* a private bilingual school in Kuwait that adapts and implements a curriculum designed by U.S. educators in three main academic subjects (English, science, and mathematics), while at the same time, focuses extensively on an Islamic studies curriculum. The main incentive for selecting this focus was the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Since that date, the mass media have paid much attention to Islam and to Muslim society, particularly to its educational system, which has usually been viewed with skepticism (Charif, 2002; Rugh, 2002).

This study focuses on a single school, for the general insight it can offer into a number of related research questions: How do Islamic parents who send their children to this school define the spiritual and/or religious needs they want their children to possess, and what role does the school play in fulfilling such needs? How do spiritual/religious and academic needs intersect within the formal curriculum at the school, as a result of daily interactions between teachers and children? Finally, in the midst of increased westernization and globalization, how do the teachers of this school negotiate the influences of western values on their students and curriculum? By exploring the nature, philosophy, and context of one Islamic school, this study seeks to enable readers to understand more fully and accurately how those involved with such an institution cope with the various challenges they meet in the global sphere.

To reach its goal, this study utilizes a number of research methods and tools, including direct observation, interviews, a research diary and reflection, and a traditional literature review. Ultimately, this study suggests that *Al-Amal* possesses unique complexities and contradictions. Those characteristics derive from the institution's transformation of traditional Islamic schooling in order to prepare its students for life in the global arena and from its desire to develop both academically and spiritually a new generation of Muslims better able to cope with the challenges they confront in this arena.

Dedication

To

Mohammed, Hajar, & Fatemah

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The primary motive and focus for this thesis became crystallized on a single day: September 11, 2001. By 9:45 a.m. on that morning, I had already taken my two daughters to school and had returned home to turn on the television. Every channel was broadcasting the same images, the same commentary, and the same tragedy: using airplanes as their weapons, terrorists had attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, leaving thousands dead.

As a Kuwaiti Muslim woman, I felt, along with countless others, emotionally paralyzed by the extremity of the incident. No thoughts, no words, no feelings could describe the emotions I felt as I watched the news footage broadcast and rebroadcast throughout that day. Who could commit such a crime against innocent people? Why? The sight of people fleeing for their lives through the smoky daylight of New York City, flinging themselves from the upper floors of the World Trade Center, and—for days afterward—searching the rubble for their loved ones, pasting their pictures on telephone poles and fences, are indelibly etched into my memory.

As it happened, at that time I was in the process of formulating the idea for my thesis. The September 11 tragedy prompted my focus, but my decision was strengthened by the events to follow, as well: the U. S' declaration of the war on terror—specifically, on Usama bin Laden and his al-Qa`ida organization. Despite the fact that the main thrust of the retaliation was the mountainous cave complex in Afghanistan where bin Laden, his troops, and Taliban members were known to have sought refuge, the strikes had a much wider effect: they also encompassed Muslims in general and Islam as a religion (Center of strategic studies, 2002). Despite American President George W. Bush's repeated declarations that this war was neither against Islam nor Muslims as a whole but was instead directed toward terrorists and those who harbor them— statements given credence by the president's visit to the Islamic Center in Washington, DC— the attacks by their very nature led to much distrust of, and anger toward, the Muslim community. As is often the case when a minority group is involved, members of that community have been stereotyped: their customs and religion—even their clothing—have made them guilty by association and thus they have become open to acts of revenge and retaliation. What is perhaps the most troubling aspect of this response is that the actions of the September 11 attack have no direct relation to the fundamental practices or principles of Islam as a religion and faith, a

1

perspective that all forms of media have often overlooked in their quest to explore angles more potentially explosive (Center of strategic studies, 2002).

Since September 11, the media have in fact paid much attention to Islam and to Muslim society, particularly to its educational system, which has usually been viewed with skepticism (Rugh, 2002; Charif, 2002). In the wake of the terrorist attacks, the United States press was congested with articles addressing the necessity for investigating the educational systems of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Yemen, countries that the U. S. media portrayed as having funded the schools in which most members of the Taliban and Al Qa`da were educated (Al Qasem, 2002; Cotchemnet & Spirit, 2002; Huwaidi, 2001; Kurasha, 2001; Rugh, 2002).

Such schools have been characterized as virtual factories for terrorism. In addition to such criticisms, questions have also been raised by the media regarding the need to reconsider the teaching of selected Holy *Qur'an* verses believed to foster or nourish terrorist activities. According to media claims, such verses indoctrinate in students a hatred of or hostility toward the west, specifically the United States (Rugh, 2002; Charif, 2002).

Such criticism was not accepted lightly by Muslim countries, who considered foreign questioning of their educational curricula as a form of interference with internal affairs. If such a study occurred, they reasoned, it should come from within. For example, in Pakistan, General Parwez Musharif began a campaign to examine the *madrasahs*, the Islamic schools where it is believed most members of Al Qa'da were educated and those which were garnering the most criticism. Among the questions he asked were the following: What kinds of courses are taught in these schools? Since the government does not support all schools fully, from what source or sources do the *madrasahs* receive funding? (Eckholm, 2001). In addition, the Arabic language press carried reports that Pakistani authorities would establish—with funding from America— what was referred to as a "bank of information" about students of the *madrasahs*.

At the same time, in Saudi Arabia, the education minister called for conducting a wide-scale examination of textbooks, specifically those involved in Islamic studies, in order to ascertain whether their content promoted terrorism (Huwaidi, 2001). In addition, the *al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper published in its December 14, 2002 issue an article detailing a meeting between Yemen's president and some of the country's scholars, at which he announced the government's decision to abolish the religious institutions operated by Islamists and to place them under government supervision. This decision, the article indicates, was believed crucial to

the prevention of additional attacks against the United States in the wake of September 11 (Huwaidi, 2001).

With regard to the criticisms leveled against religious educational institutions in Muslim nations, it is important to note that such schools are not exclusive to Islam. In fact, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism—among other religions—all possess their own forms of schooling, one of the primary aims of which is to secure the individual's right to worship as one chooses (Al Khatib, 2001). What is different about the Islamic schools is that for many people unfamiliar with Islamic principles, they have been defined largely—even solely—by media misrepresentations as havens for terrorism, seats of a violent Holy War against the west, and promoters of hatred against United States and all things American. Such misconceptions and assumptions provide the main impetus for this research project. Also the media often mistakenly misunderstand such terms as Islam and Islamic schools. While the media currently suggest a stereotypical simplistic and negative image for Islamic schools, very little effort appears to have been given to fully problematize and unpack as well as describe what Islamic education looks like. This research attempted to explore the nature and the practices of one of these schools by utilizing the case of a private bilingual school in Kuwait.

Islamic education is most definitely not a new conception. Rather, for more than 1400 years it has developed and evolved alongside Islam itself, appearing in several incarnations and adapting to the cultural, religious, and sociological needs of each particular historical context. Such a history is explored in depth in the second chapter of this study. Because of its long history and its dedication to continuous improvement and enhancement in order to maintain its individual legitimacy, most would agree that reform of the Islamic curriculum is unavoidable— but that it should occur without prompting from the west (Huwaidi, 2001). In fact, long before the September 11 attacks, Muslim educators believed in the value of reform, primarily because the concept itself serves as a cornerstone of the fundamental principles of Islam. As noted in the *Qur'an*[1] such reform cannot be accomplished in a void, but is greatly related to the political, social, and cultural contexts of each nation. The reform, the likes of which Huwaidi (2001) calls for, cannot be conceived of as "takeaway" reform: it cannot be ordered and made to fit. On the contrary, reform must occur in response to what is required by the reality of each country.

---

[1] "O my people! see ye whether I have a Clear [Sign] from my Lord, and He hath given me sustenance [pure and] good as from Himself? I wish not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire [your] betterment to the best of my power; and my success [in my task] can only come from Allah. In Him I Trust, and unto Him I look" (Hud, 88).

Moreover, it is vital to note that the primary purpose of Islamic schools is not the brainwashing of students, so identifying them as "hate clubs" or centers for terrorism is narrow-minded and judgmental at best. Part of the blame for this interpretation rests with the popular notion, identified by Friedman (2001), that Islamic practices and education, which dominate the culture, depend to a great extent on "traditional Qur'anic interpretations that are not embracing of modernity" (p. A25). Islam, it is believed by many unfamiliar with the religion, simply cannot adapt to modernity. This belief has become strengthened in the period after 9/11.

On the contrary, however, Islam is not "anti-modern," nor does it resist or fight against modernity, as long as the trappings of modernity do not contradict the main sources of Islamic values, the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Al Sibaee (2002) states that if modernity focuses on development and innovation, it is more than welcome among Muslims; however, if it advocates abandonment of Islamic values, ethics, and identity, it must be rejected. The association between modernity and Islam is multi-faceted, and I will examine those dimensions in the second chapter of this thesis.

In order for anyone to comprehend the significance of the complex religious and cultural contexts and philosophies of Islamic schools, one must first attempt to achieve an understanding of Islam and Muslims in general. As Ahmed (2002) notes, this involves a reciprocal two-step process "for Muslims to explain Islam to non-Muslims and for non- Muslims to be responsive and make an effort to understand" (p. 27).

Another crucial myth often promoted by the media regarding Islam and Islamic education is that all Islamic schools are alike. The schools that have received the greatest amount of publicity, the *madrasahs*, have their own unique philosophies and curricula, neither of which is necessarily adopted in other Islamic schools. Barber (2001) notes that to characterize all Islamic schools as following the same "line" would be to underestimate and minimize their cultural, social, educational, and religious values to their individual communities.

Accordingly, this thesis focuses on one example of the emerging Islamic school that has developed as a result of the "privatization" of education in Islamic countries (Rugh, 2002). In particular, my case study is a single school, *Al-Amal*[2], a private bilingual school in Kuwait. The goal of my study is to explore and understand the nature of such a school as *Al-Amal* in Kuwait.

---

[2] The school's original name and all participants' names have been changed as part of the research requirement of confidentiality.

I have chosen this single school as the case and the context of the study because of the complexities and contradictions which characterize it: It is a bilingual school that adapts and implements a curriculum designed by U.S. educators in three main academic subjects (English, science, and mathematics), while at the same time it focuses extensively on an Islamic studies curriculum. Studying this specific school is worthy because it explores the context and nature of such an educational institution and provides insight into how an institution can adopt and adapt such varying curricula and simultaneously face the challenges in this globalized era. Also, this study aims to determine the viability of such an institution, particularly given the fact that on all levels in Kuwaiti public schools, Islamic studies are already a compulsory component of the curricula. By investigating these conceptual categories, a better concept emerges of the school's context, philosophy, and nature, which in turn helps us construct a clearer picture of what *Al-Amal* attempts to accomplish compared to the typical and stereotyped pictures presented by the media.

To lay a foundation for subsequent analysis, this study initially reveals key issues affecting Islamic education, specifically the image that has been attributed to it after 9/11. It explores how an Islamic education intersects with students' lives, both inside and outside school walls. Additionally, through this study, I examine the notion of utilizing the label *Islamic school*. Does the phrase indicate the school's intention to promote the spiritual and religious needs of students—or is it meant to suggest a more political agenda, one that transcends the aims of a religious education?

This study does not adopt an evaluative tenor as much as it aims to identify the spiritual and the religious needs among diverse but related groups: students, parents and teachers. How can all of their needs—spiritual and academic—be fulfilled by the daily practices in this Islamic school? In the course of this study, teachers and parents pinpointed the expectations they hold concerning the spiritual needs, and identified the means by which such expectations can be fulfilled, particularly in the presence of a curricular intersection between western and Islamic values and practices.

My study focuses on *Al-Amal* in order to investigate a number of related research questions: How do Islamic parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* define the spiritual needs of their children? What are the differences or the similarities between the spiritual needs and goals taught to children in *Al-Amal* and those taught within the family? What role does *Al-Amal*

play in fulfilling those needs? How do spiritual or religious and academic interests intersect within the formal curriculum at *Al-Amal*? How are spiritual/religious values informally infused throughout the daily interactions between teachers and children at *Al-Amal*? In the midst of increased westernization and globalization, how do Islamic teachers at *Al-Amal* negotiate the influences of western values on Muslim society within the classroom?

In undertaking this study, I initially chose as my audience the committee supervising this thesis. However, that scope has broadened greatly. The information herein will prove vital to readers in Muslim societies, such as teachers, parents, and administrators, who would exhibit a natural interest in Islamic school practices and experiences. I also—and perhaps more importantly—wish to inform western readers. My goals are to provide insight into the nature, philosophy, and context of one Islamic school and to better understand how those involved with such an institution cope with the various challenges they meet in the global sphere.

Throughout this study I have tried to provide a holistic snapshot of one example of an Islamic school. As a result, Chapter Two presents how Islamic education itself was created and transformed over time. Providing this historical context can help create an understanding of *Al-Amal* as a case study. Chapter Three presents information regarding how I investigated this school and the methods I used to collect data. Chapter Four provides a historical context for the school, while Chapter Five explores the school and its contextual and physical environments, the participants, and the populations it serves. Chapters six, seven, eight, and nine provide analysis of the collected data, as well as identify emerging themes, concepts, and findings. Finally, Chapter Ten brings this study to a close by presenting conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

In order to understand the current status and role of Islamic education it is necessary to highlight the historical development of Islamic studies in countries with constitutions identifying Islam as their official religion, such as Kuwait (Kuwaiti Constitution, 1962). This section of my thesis focuses on the nature and the development of Islamic educational theory, as well as on its historical foundation.

The Holy *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* form the cornerstones of Islamic educational theory, thus effectively differentiating it from other, more purely academic, educational principles. The philosophy of Islamic education is considered a vital part of the philosophy of Islam as a whole. According to Islamic belief, *Allah* created humans to be his successors on this earth, to benefit from the universe, and to discover its secrets as indicators of his intentions and guidance. Many verses exist which speak to these concepts.[3] In order to achieve the psychological, physical, and mental equilibrium demanded by such a role and to handle the pressures of the larger world, humans need nourishment in a variety of forms (Al-keelany, 1985; Saad Al-deen, 2002). Since education is considered such a form of nourishment—after all, it provides humans with a significant means of achieving this vital balance—Islam privileges it, granting it a high status.

Education in Islam ministers to both aspects of human nature: it tends to the spiritual needs that are ingrained in the individual's relationship with his creator, Allah, and it provides the skills and fundamentals necessary for material existence, meaning life as it relates to economic, social, and family dealings. Essentially, as Allah's creations, humans must "educate" both halves of themselves in order to understand the world fully and to realize the roles they must play in it. Stemming from this philosophy, the theory of Islamic education seeks to create a balance between the learners' spiritual, material, and social needs, primarily because they cannot be separated. Tradition also indicates that the Prophet Muhammad (saas)[4] instructed his followers to "work for your life as if you will live forever, and work for the hereafter as if you will die tomorrow." According to the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (born in 980 A.D/ 370

---

[3] "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth'" (Al Baqara, **30**); "It is He Who hath made you [His] agents, inheritors of the earth" (Al An'am, **165**); and "[He] makes you [mankind] inheritors of the earth?" (Al Namel, **62**)

[4] "Salla Allahu `Alaihi wa Sallam" which means: may the blessing and the peace of Allah be upon him. When the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, A Muslim is to respect him and invoke this statement of peace upon him." www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/ reference/glossary/term.SAW.html

A.H)[5], the integrity of human nature cannot be achieved unless it combines the tenets of religion with the knowledge of science, which means that Islam is not merely a religion centered on practicing rituals but one which involves practicing one's duties—or fulfilling one's responsibilities—toward those around him (Al-Abrashee, 1980).

With these views and philosophies in mind, Islamic educational institutions in Muslim societies have been established. Before reaching their modern incarnations as public or private schools, however, they underwent a number of transformations. Their history actually begins in the home, before moving to mosques and then to the structure known as *Kuttab (plural: Katatib),* which in English means "the office."

Houses as Educational Institutions

With the emergence of Islam, Islamic education was first undertaken solely in the home, for it was in the house of one of his companions—*al-Arqam ibn al-Arqam*—that the Prophet Muhammad (saas) first began to meet with Muslims. There, in this informal setting, he taught them the rules of Islam and recited with them what he had received from the Holy *Qur'an*. Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad (saas) also used to meet with his companions at his home in Mecca. Ultimately, however, homes began to be considered more a place for settlement and quietness, to which the presence of the learners might prove disruptive, so education gradually became relocated to the next most natural setting: the mosque (Al-Abrashee, 1980; Malek & Al Kandari, 2002).

Mosques as Educational Institutions

Mosques played significant roles in the beginning of Islam because they served as the centers for all facets of life: political, social, educational, and religious. Most of the teaching in mosques was designed to remind people of their roles as Muslims and included instruction in the *Qur'anic* sciences[6]: reciting the *Qur'an*, achieving proper intonation, and learning the meanings inherent in the holy *Qur'an*. At the same time, the teaching process in mosques gradually expanded to include other subjects such as jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, grammar,

---

[5] A.H (*Anno Hijri*) refers to the Muslim Year and incorporates the term *Hijrah* or Emigration. The Islamic year has only twelve lunar months and so may began at various times in the solar year. In Islam, *Hijrah* refers to the migration of Muhammad and *Muhajirun* (his companions) from Mecca to the city of Yathrib. Muhammad departed from Mecca on the second day of Rabi al Awaal/ 13 September 622 and arrived on 12 Rabi al Awal/24 September 622. The commemoration of the *Hijrah* was instituted in 637 by the second Caliph, 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, as the first year of the new Islamic-Arabic calendar (Esposito, 1995, p.111).

[6] The *Qur'anic* science of education is not confined to mere reading of the text: it often includes inculcation of basic scriptural teachings in addition to the art of reciting the *Qur'anic* verses in a beautiful voice called *Tajwid* and the art of calligraphy, considered the most highly-developed skills in Islamic culture (Espositio, 1995, p. 395).

literature, history, math, astrology, and the natural sciences. Most of the teachers in mosques were considered to be *Imams or 'ulama'*, religious scholars (Mursee, 1983).

The mosques that are the most well-known as Islamic institutions are *Quba'*, the first mosque in Islam, built in *al-Madina*, when the Prophet Muhammad (saas) migrated from Mecca in the year 12 A.H/ 633 A.D; *'Amr ibn al-'As*, which was built in Cairo in 21 A.H/ 642 A.D; and the *Umayyad* in Damascus, built in 86-96 A.H/ 705-714 A.D.

Katatib as Educational Institutions

Another place associated with the emergence of Islamic education is the *Katatib*, a term which means *the offices* (Al-Abrashee, 1980; Mursee, 1983). Before Islam, this place focused on the teaching of reading and writing, but when Islamic studies became a part of the curriculum students also learned how to recite the *Qur'an*, received training in religious basics, and were instructed in the principles of mathematics (Al-Abrashee, 1980). *Katatib* spread widely during the first years of the Muslim migration. The most crucial qualification for selecting *Katatib* teachers was that they should exhibit a great capacity for memorizing the *Qur'an*, and also they should be knowledgeable about the foundations of religion and be highly qualified in reading, writing, and grammar. By far, though, the most important characteristics of the teacher were his behavior and goodness (Malek & Al Kandari; 2002 Mursee, 1983).

Emergence of Schooling in Islam

After these very traditional types of educational institutions, a more formalized system of schooling emerged in Islam during the 5th A.H. century/ 11th A.D. century. The most popular school, the *madrasah*, was built in Baghdad (Malek & Al-Kandari, 2002; Mursee, 1983). This type of school system differs from earlier Islamic educational institutions, because it was placed under the supervision of the state and possessed its own budget. The process of educating teachers became part of the development process, and an evaluation system was put in place for those who sought to make the classroom their home. In order to be qualified and hired, teachers were required to fulfill specific terms and conditions such as being knowledgeable in the subjects they were to teach and maintaining certain moral codes that govern behavior and character. In addition, regular salaries and certifications for teaching—which were absent before the formalized schooling system existed—were established (Saad Al deen, 2002).

The exact date of the first established school has been difficult to pinpoint. Some believe that the minister *Nizam al-Mulk* built the first school in the 5th century A.H. (Al Sharqawee,

1985; Mursee, 1983; Saad Al deen, 2002). Others, however, suggest that the first school was built in Nisabur in 329 A.H./ 941A.D. and that such schools spread widely even before the involvement of *Nizam al Mulk*. The minister is credited, though, with a number of firsts. He is considered the first official to work on the formation and organization of schools in the Islamic communities; to provide schools with such necessities as teacher salaries; to adapt specific traditions concerning the teaching systems, administrations, housing, and food; and to establish a system of graduation for those students deemed fully capable of dealing with the outside world and of being fully qualified for the workforce (Saad Al deen, 2002).

These Islamic schools fulfilled various aims and expectations:

- They fulfilled the need for jobs either in the religious sector or in the administrative and vocational sectors.
- They aimed to encourage the research process, composition, publishing, and translation in various sciences. This was obvious by the great interest in financing libraries.
- They provided direction for student scholars.
- They acted as an "immunization" system protecting Muslim beliefs from the thoughts and ideologies of non-believers. (Malek & Al Kandari, 2002)

Dar Al-Hikma as Educational Institutions

Another educational institution in Islamic history is the *Dar al-Hikma*, or the *house of wisdom*, which is similar to the universities and community colleges with which we are today familiar. The *Dar al-Hikma* was considered a very specialized educational institution and was not restricted to religious studies, but also taught philosophy as well as other sciences. These schools spread widely by the `*Abbasid* era when Muslims were very open to the exchange of knowledge with other communities and nations. At this time, translation of works in Latin was particularly recommended, as Latin was the chief European language of scholars, medicine, and law.

One of the most popular *Dar al-Hikma* institutions was opened in Cairo in 395 A.H./ 1005 A.D, and into it gathered students with a wide variety of interests, whether religious, medical, or scientific. These educational institutions also provided a place for those who were interested in reading very rare books, such as those from the classical Roman period, or even copying them (Al Abrashee, 1980; Mursee, 1983).

The Aims and the Structure of Islamic Education

Two main aspects characterize Islamic education. First, it begins with the individual and expands to encompass human society as a whole. Second, it begins with life and ends with the hereafter. All other educational aims stream from these basic fundamental conceptions that are initially adopted from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. These aims can be summarized as the following:

- To identify the human with his/her creator and construct a relation between them in a manner of worship according to verses from the *Qur'an.* In order to build such a relationship based on pure and sincere worship, the education emphasizes strongly that individuals should target all their works to Allah, through what is called in Islam *al-Niyah*[7].

- To develop humans' behavior in order to correlate with Islamic behaviors that, according to the Prophet Muhammad (saas), emphasize morality, good behavior, and appropriate values (Al keelany, 1985; Al Sheebany, 1993; Mursee, 1983).

- To train humans to deal with life's material requirements by being productive members of the workforce and obtaining a decent living.

- To emphasize the need to strengthen the relationships among Muslims where beliefs and acts are considered the same. This will result in creating unity and power among Muslims throughout the world (Al keelany, 1985; Mursee, 1983; Al Sheebany, 1993).

- To ingrain the belief of equality among humans according to Allah's sayings.

Based upon the promotion of Islamic values and ethics, the main objective of Muslim religious education continues to be, according to Husain and Ashraf (1979), the creation of the "good and righteous man, who worships *Allah* [God] in the true sense of the term, builds up the structure of his earthly life according to the *Shari`a* [Islamic laws] and employs it to sub-serve his faith" (p. 42). Siddiqui (1997) suggests that *Shari`a* means "the path, 'the way to the water,' as water symbolizes the source of life and of all Muslim existence" (Omara, 1987). Siddiqui (1997) adds:

---

[7] Al-Niyah is the intention, which is a prerequisite for any act of worship. In fact, according to the Prophet Muhammad, deeds are judged by the intentions behind them (Saleh, 2001, pp. 77-78).

The "basis of *Shari`a* is the *Qur'an*, in which norms and values have been laid down by God. It is also found in the [role model] of the Prophet Muhammad (saas), and how those norms and values were implemented in his lifetime" (p. 425).

The Islamic concept of worship includes "physical performance" of the religious rituals and, at the same time, encompasses all elements of the concept of faith, including feeling, work, and thought, all of which represent conformity to Allah's sayings in the Holy *Qur'an* (Husain & Ashraf, 1979).

Islamic education is similar to any educational structure, which embraces a specific philosophy, need, or belief from which it cannot be separated. Islamic education follows the same philosophical foundation as other systems except that it cannot adopt any philosophical perspective that is not identical to Islamic foundations (Husain & Ashraf, 1979). This philosophy of adherence to founding principles is ingrained in the belief of any culture that uses its educational aims and objectives to meet its people's cultural needs (Joseph, 2000); it is particularly relevant, though, in religiously- based cultures such as Muslim nations, which aim to reinforce through education both traditional cultural mores and religious beliefs (Bull, 2000; Cook, 2000; Talbani, 1996). Such an approach proves especially difficult when a culture is confronted by strong outside forces, such as colonization, which affected the Arab-Muslim educational structure by transforming what was once strongly focused on religious teachings to one that is currently "civic/secular" in perspective.

During an era of colonization that brought profound changes in the norms and attitudes of Islamic societies, Islamic schools could not maintain their power. Eventually, some of them faded from existence (Talbani, 1996). As a result of colonization, a conflict arose between secular and religious principles, and religion gradually became separated or excised from everyday life. These developments profoundly affected Islamic education (Siddiqui, 1997).

Aspects Influencing Islamic Education: Religion vs. Secularism

In Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey, there is an ongoing debate within the educational realm between religious and secular perspectives (Kinzer, 1997). Some Muslims are finding it increasingly difficult to accommodate the need for both traditional Islamic educational practices and the civic/ secular educational methods that resulted from colonization in the early 17th - 19th centuries (Al-Otaibi & Rashid, 1997; Al Sharqawee, 1985). Despite the fact that more than a century has passed since colonization, its influences remain powerfully

active in the new terms and concepts that have emerged within Muslim societies, such *westernization, secularization, modernity*, and, more recently, *globalization* (Al-Otaibi & Rashid, 1997). In order to fully understand the ramifications of these concepts upon Muslim society and educational practices, they must be defined and briefly discussed.

Westernization

"Westernization" results from the influences of European power on Islamic societies that occurred during the early periods of colonization, when European concepts, philosophies, and modes of thought began to influence the more traditional culture (Al-Attas, 1977; Tibi, 1995). As it moved toward its own particular civilization, the west experienced its own historical "fusion of cultures, philosophies, values, and aspirations of ancient Greek and Rome; their amalgamation with Judaism and Christianity, and their further development and formation by Latin, Germanic, Celtic and Nordic people" (Al-Attas, 1977, p. 20). Each culture contributed a particular aspect to the production of what we now call "modern knowledge" (Tibi, 1995). All of these cultures combined have resulted in the powerful concept of "Western Civilization." Even Islam contributed to Western Civilization through the context of knowledge where "Islam was Europe's teacher," (Griffin, 1999, p. 138) the period known as the "golden age" (Ahmed, 2002; Al-Attas, 1977; Cotchment & Spirit, 2002).

Al-Attas (1977) points out that the amalgamation of these various cultures and the inevitable conflicts that occurred as a consequence of competing ideas, cultures, philosophies, religions, values, and theologies ultimately promoted the conception of "dualism." Dualism, which exists in most aspects of western life, calls for a separation between state and religion. Dualism also views individuals as physical and rational entities who rely on scientific truths for their knowledge more than on religious beliefs (Al-Attas, 1977; Omara, 1987).

This concept of dualism gradually impacted Islamic societies, as well as psyches, creating a fundamental challenge for the traditional culture: how to accommodate, without adopting wholesale, western technology and its attendant values and attitudes, which by their very nature are incompatible with Islamic norms and thus threaten collapse of Muslims' identities (Cook, 2000). The concept of "westernization" thus relates not merely to the adaptation but also to the assimilation of cultural aspects of western life, which would result in dramatic changes to the original Islamic culture (Bull, 2000). The question raised by Muslims who are concerned about western influences is whether Islamic countries are capable of keeping and preserving their

Islamic identities while also embracing western technology. Essentially, can an Islamic culture adopt western technology if its values conflict with those of Islam? (Bull, 2000). Islamic education is currently dealing with such a dichotomy: it is struggling to reconstruct a whole educational system in Islamic countries, while at the same time it attempts to highlight the significance of science and technology (Siddiqui, 1997). What Islamic societies seek, according to Omara (1987), is an interaction with western civilization that does not bring about dissolution of Muslim and Arab civilizations.

However, it would be a mistake to consider any number of narrow, one-dimensional views: the west (represented by the United States specifically) and European countries are "against" Islam; Islam is "against" the west; the west has colonized without imposing its views; the west has managed to fully eradicate traditional perspectives (Berbenaty, 1999). Ultimately, the west must also be deemed as overlapping with some aspects of Muslim culture and in a constant state of evolution. It is viewed by some as good and some as evil. It is not, and should not be considered, however, as a single entity, either enemy or friend, when in fact it bears evidence of being both simultaneously (Al Yaseen, 2002).

Modernity

Another challenge facing Islamic education is modernity, another outcome of colonization (Tibi, 1995). This concept means, as Esposito (1980) states, "following the path of westernization and socialization as manifested in the development of the west; that the spheres of religion and politics must necessarily be separate in [the] modern system of the government" (p. x). In addition, modernity has multiple "paths," and Muslims should realize how to articulate these various forms of modernity in their public as well as political lives (Eickelman, 2000).

According to Giddens (1990), modernity itself is a "western project" (p. 174). Modernity and westernization are viewed by Muslim societies as influences that could lead to a weakening of religious power and legitimacy and ultimately result in the secularization of Muslim life (Esposito, 1980). Some consider that accepting such a secularization theory in the Islamic world will be the consequence of modernization (Hefner, 1998). However, Gellner (1992) argues that experience has shown how Islam has exhibited great success in surviving the "secularists' juggernaut." Gellner (1992) argues that this can be possible because "in Islam, and only in Islam, purification/modernization on the one hand, and the reaffirmation of putative old *local* identity on the other, can be done in one and the same language and set of symbols" (pp 5-13).

However, this viewpoint has been contradicted by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), Goldberg (1993), and Munson (1993), who point out that the unity between Islam and politics has been debated over history by liberal Muslims seeking disassociation of power in Islam. Currently, Islam is struggling to deal with the difficulty of amalgamating aspects of western civilization and its values that do not fit neatly into the Islamic frame (Al-Attas, 1977). Another difficulty faced by the culture is globalization.

Globalization

Recently, the concept of "globalization" has been added to the list of potential conflicts faced by Islamic society. According to Bull (2000), globalization "is a term often used and seldom defined" (p. 29). Bull (2000) explains that a unified definition of globalization is impossible to achieve among various nations, especially because the meaning of this term differs based on its purpose and usage. Nonetheless, he offers that it is "a cover term for the processes by which the 'world capitalist system' becomes articulated with local systems" (2000, p. 29). Others have explained it as the linking of the global system to the local system, meaning that the world economic system to a large degree penetrates the local one.

Additionally, Miller (1994) indicates that globalization is a system that produces comprehensive effects socially, economically, culturally, politically, and religiously. In addition, globalization has also been regarded "as a paradigm shift, involving shifts in values, lifestyles, tolerance for diversity—be it ethnic, cultural, or sexual— and individual choice" (Monshipouri & Motameni, 2000, p. 715). However, such a definition does not necessarily suggest that by adapting globalization, the world could be unified politically, culturally, and economically.

In the perspective of some Muslims, globalization is a "new hegemonic system upheld by the world's major capitalist economic interests [and both are considered] as a menace to their cultural solidarity and authenticity" (Monshipouri & Motameni, 2000, p. 715). Ahmed (2002) brings out Friedman's statement (1999) that Muslims can even "narrow globalization down further to *Americanization*" (p. 27). Many Muslims consider this phenomenon to be another means by which the world's major capitalistic economies after the Cold War attempted to promote their own political and economic interests over those of other countries (Monshipouri & Motameni, 2000).

All of these various definitions of globalization, both positive and negative, make it worth noting that all nations, religious or secular, are confronting and will need to deal with the

concept. It would be nearly impossible for governments to be selective in adopting the influences that accompany globalization, because even if they try to do so or attempt to reduce the openness with which they permit it, globalization still would be difficult, if not impossible, to control (Monshipouri & Motameni, 2000).

In general, some Islamic nations view westernization, modernity, and globalization as potentially dangerous to their cultural and religious heritage. Many Muslims consider globalization to be the method by which they are forced to make social changes, as well as adapt their principles, in order to fit into the new global frame (Fandy, 1999; Bull, 2000). Another viewpoint, however, argues that the simple presence of these phenomena does not mean that they will cause disempowerment or disintegration of Muslim societies, cultures, identities, and integrity (Bull, 2000). Likewise, Appadurai (1996) explains that "globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization, and to [that] extent, there is still ample room for the deep study of specific geographies, histories and languages" (p. 17). Bull (2000) notes that the superiority of U.S. power and the degree to which any society might adopt globalization and allow modernity would differ from one nation to another.

Muslim scholars approach the topic with some trepidation, though, suggesting that while it might be educational to "examine the ideas and to compare the courses of the social changes that have taken place in other parts of the world, our [Muslim] societies need not pay the heavy price that other societies have had to incur," (Ezzat, 2000, p. 138) including the loss of a cultural identity.

Speaking from a Muslim perspective, I believe that fears and concerns regarding the influences and the negative effects of modernity, globalization, and westernization could be minimized through the process of selectivity. Being selective as a Muslim would involve filtering outside influences according to whether they counteract Islamic principles: elements that do not do so could safely be incorporated into one's life, while those that have detrimental effects should be rejected. Despite the fact that some of these concepts penetrate one's world no matter how cautious and careful one is, one does not have to accept them wholesale but should be willing to examine each for its level of acceptability.

All of the fears, concerns, cautions, and suspicions expressed in Islamic society about the role and the influences of westernization, modernity, and globalization on their culture have led some scholars to seek an "Islamization". This process can be seen most clearly in the

educational system, which is attempting to deal with the conflicts attendant upon such changes while reintroducing and reemphasizing the role religion should play in learning (Al-Otaibi & Rashid, 1997).

The Role of Religion in Islamic Education

Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (saas) 1425A.H. years ago, education has played a central role in Muslims' lives. The first textbook for Muslims was the Holy *Qur'an*, which permitted religious teaching. Islamic education is highly guided by *Qura'nic* knowledge, the source to which educators continually turn for assistance in selecting the content of Islamic studies curricula (Malek & Al-Kandari, 2002; Reagan, 1996).

Just as the history of religious education in Muslim countries is marked by change, so is the role it has played in society. In earlier generations, religion formed the core of the educational structure for Muslims, who literally built their lives upon it. *Shari`a* became the law of their lives, their governor. Islamic values, morals, and behaviors ruled. In other words, Islam was believed to be the key for regulating and disciplining the lives and communities of earlier Muslims. In this earlier era, religion pervaded all aspects of Muslims' lives, holding sway in their homes, mosques, streets, and media (Qutb, 1977). Islamic education noticeably weakened and gradually faded from individuals' minds and hearts, however, when the religious power of the Umayyad Caliphate[8] subsided (Shafiq, 2000; Qutb, 1977). Religious education gradually lost ground in Muslims' lives, but currently, in an effort to re-empower it, "Islamization" movements have emerged in various Islamic nations as a response to modernity and globalization.

The "Islamization" Movement

Islamization aims to imbue all institutions in Islamic nations with Islamic values and traditions, as well as to restore the power and social control of Islam over all aspects of the culture. Geertz (1971) explains that the Islamization movement requires:

> An effort to adapt a universal, in theory standardized and essentially unchangeable and usually well- integrated system of rituals and belief . . .Islam not just as religion in general but as the particular directives communicated by God to mankind through the preemptory prophecies of Muhammad. (pp. 14, 15)

---

[8] The Umayyad Dynasty ruled the Islamic Caliphate from the death of the fourth caliph, 'Ali, in 661 until 750. The founder of the dynasty was Mu'awiyah, son of Abu Sufyan, of the Meccan clan of Umayyah.

Accordingly, Islamic education is one of the institutions that would reproduce a particular discourse of religious power (Owais, 2002; Talbani, 1996).

Islamization emanates from the belief that Islamic values and norms are the main sources of knowledge for Muslim peoples. Accordingly "education …plays a pivotal role in reproducing Islamic culture and promoting the ideological goals of Islamization" (Talbani, 1996, p. 66). Islamization would in turn not only imbue produced knowledge with power and legitimacy but also reduce the dichotomy in the educational system in Muslim countries between secular and religious education (Al-Otaibi & Rashid, 1997; Owais, 2002). In essence, Islamization aims to prevent the encroachment of duality into Muslim nations. It aims to create an Islamic life framed by the key Islamic philosophies and practices established by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (Khalil, 1991).

However, it is not easy for Islamization to occur without resistance, particularly from secularists who would challenge the legitimacy of religious teachings alone as a viable form of education. Modernization and westernization have not only influenced the role of Islamic education in Islamic societies but have also changed to some extent individuals' perceptions about Islamic education, including its fitness to prepare individuals for the workplace.

Islamization was created in an attempt to deal with the negative aspects that accompanied westernization, modernity, and globalization, but the movement was confronted by resistance from secularists, who proved themselves just as vocal in their demands for liberation from religious authority. Indeed, most Islamic governments are dealing at present with political discourses between these main parties, secularists and Islamists. These terms in Muslim nations have a different meaning, however, from that used in western culture.

The word *secularism* in the Arabic language is "*Ilmaniyah,*" from *ilm* ("science") and *alam* ("world") (Tamimi, 2000). Its adherents view Islam to be "a matter of personal belief" and are against "the reimposition of *Shari`a* and Islamic political authority" (Esposito, 1995). This concept advances the idea of liberation from religious authority (Al Qarazawee, 2001); it first entered the Muslim and Arab world with other concepts, such as westernization and modernity, as a consequence of colonization. *Ilmaniyah*, or secularism, minimizes or excludes the role and the influences of Islamic values and norms in Muslim societies (Tamimi, 2000) but at the same time, it has not succeeded in erasing Islam as a religion (Esposito, 1995).

As a whole, secularism does not so much oppose, as simply discard religion, whether Christianity or Islam, and this generally creates a defensive response from religious figures who realize the nature of the threat (Al Misiri & Al Azmah, 2000). The role of the *'ulama'*[9] was thus reduced, and they became mainly figureheads who represented religion but had little power or influence; at the same time, they did not rebel or disagree with the direction their culture was taking.

However, this trend did not persist without rebellion from other quarters. During the last 200 years, several attempts to reconcile the relationship between political power and the role of religion were led by Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri. Their rebellions were designed primarily to reverse the separation of religion and the state. Yet their task was not an easy one, for the seeds of secularism were already planted in governments that divided the ruler and his military assistants from the `ulama'* and religion. Muslims become more familiar with secularism after the shift of power caused by colonization and its reach broadened in Muslim nations (Omara, 1987; Shafiq, 2000).

Tamimi (2000) argues that the positing of an irresolvable opposition between religion and freedom of the mind, a concept that accompanies secularism, eventually gained ground in Muslim societies. The assumption became popular that Islam hinders the creativity of mind, as do Christianity and other religions. On the other hand, Tamimi (2000) also identifies the secular point of view of western culture, which tends to reduce Islam to extreme fundamentalism, but according to Marie (1994), "that word [fundamentalism] is seen as pejorative, and primarily used by the media in the wake of an 'Islamophobia' " (p. 13).

As a result, religion often has been marginalized in the political context. For example, such exclusion is obvious in the tendency of some Muslim countries, where the *Shari`a* is supposed to be the main source of legislation, to adopt secular-based legislation for their laws and practices. This notion—which has gradually penetrated into many Islamic nations, due to the influence of modernity and globalization—suggests that "religion is restricted to personal or private life, rather than a way of life" (Tamimi, 2000). Unfortunately, the west and some of the "secular-minded Muslims" consider Islam to be anti-modern, because they regard its dynamics as static and doctrinal. This view has resulted in constant clashes between Islamists and

---

[9] The ulama have *knowledge* of religion (the *Qu'ran*, the *hadith*, and *fiqh*, or religious law), and it has been accepted that the '*alim*' embodies the qualities expected of one who believes in God and practices Islam.

19

secularists in Muslim nations. The main challenge that confronts Muslim secularism is "how to adopt and adapt a secular option that remains true to the pervasive presence of Islam in society" (Tamimi, 2000, p. 17).

This struggle over preserving the Islamic identity through education while at the same time coping with the "requirements" of a modern world occurs in many Islamic nations. Kuwait, for example, is in many ways similar to other Muslim nations but at the same time its situation seems to be taking a different direction. Accordingly this study attempts to examine the capability of *Al-Amal* school in accommodating the requirements of the globalizing arena. The next chapter describes the research methods used for collecting and analyzing data, while the following chapter provides a glimpse into Kuwaiti society and its educational system, with a special focus on *Al-Amal*.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the purpose of this study and explores the methodological approaches it adopts. It also examines the level of interaction I was able to achieve with *Al-Amal* administrators, teachers, parents, and students as a result of using the case study method. To some, the case study might appear an easy task: one simply follows the same path as other researchers conducting observations, interviewing participants, and then writing about one's understanding (Hays, 2004). The method is not, however, that simple. Instead, it is very demanding and daunting work that "require[s] reflective and very focused research efforts" (Hays, 2004, p. 225). The method I chose involved negotiating access to virtually everyone involved with the school and undertaking intensive, extensive periods of observation. Regardless of the energy demanded by such an approach, my personal involvement enriched my research and made it possible for me to construct a more complete portrait of *Al-Amal*.

The Case Study as the Method for Research Inquiry

My decision to approach the research as a case study stems from its definition as an "intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). A case study is an appropriate approach for the research I conducted because the work aimed to explore a *specific* Kuwaiti private school, which according to Merriam (1998), represents such a single unit or "bounded system." In this instance, the unit of analysis for the study is the Islamic tenor of the school, while the sphere of the system is *Al-Amal*, a private school in Kuwait. The incentive for this study stems from my profession as an Islamic teacher who taught Islamic studies in public schools for almost six years. Ultimately, I wanted to explore *Al-Amal* for the insight it could offer into the different dimensions of what we call an Islamic education.

Some researchers would argue that using the case study approach limits the value of research, particularly when the subject being studied has its own unique philosophy, as well as expectations, that are not easily applied to other schools (Merriam, 1998). Conceptions of the case study as a qualitative approach vary among researchers. The "case study" is considered to be both a "methodology" and a "bounded system" (Creswell, 1998). This bounded system could refer to the *time* allotted for collecting the data or the *place*, such as the school, group, program, or individual, which is linked to describing the setting and the context for the case (Creswell,

1998). The *context for the case* is the description of the setting, be it physical, social, economic or historical (Creswell, 1998). Each study of this kind considers a unique, specific "case." Each case, in turn, has its own historical background; setting, whether it is physical or aesthetic; and uniqueness, represented by the "informants" who are identified and figure throughout the case (Stake, 1998). It is generally agreed that case studies "are situationally grounded, limiting views of social life. On the other hand, they are something more—not simply glimpses of the world or random instances of social activity" (Walton, 1992, p. 121). When selecting a case to be studied, a researcher must be able to justify it. Why was it selected? Why is it important to study this topic? As Walton (1992) notes, "the implicit idea of the case is a claim . . . that represents general categories in the social world, and that claim implies that any identified case comes from a knowable universe from which a sample might be drawn" (pp. 121, 122). As mentioned, the study I conducted was limited to *Al-Amal*, the private school in Kuwait. My work does not, as Merriam (1998) prescribes, "account for the whole," but rather investigates what she calls "part of a slice of life" (p. 42).

Utilizing the case study as my research approach helped me construct a profound understanding of the status and the transformation of this Kuwaiti school. Studying this school as an effective case was, as Wolcott (1995) states, "specific and circumstantial, its relevance in a broader context . . . also apparent… [T]he case must remain particular, its implications broad" (p. 174).

Additionally, the case study approach permitted complex descriptions that would not only inform the reader but also provide for analysis and interpretation. In this way, knowledge of the subject is transmitted that extends beyond the mere description and recounting, thereby creating a "whole picture" of the case or the phenomena (Merriam, 1998). This method of inquiry requires a profound and "in depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and of the patterns that emerge" (Sturman, 1997, p. 61).

The main objective of my study was to answer a series of related questions: How do parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* define the Islamic curriculum they anticipate for their children? What are the main spiritual needs they want their children to fulfill? And what role does *Al-Amal* play in fulfilling those needs? How do spiritual or religious and academics interests intersect within the formal curriculum at *Al-Amal*, throughout the daily interactions between teachers and children? In the midst of increased westernization and globalization, how

do the teachers of *Al-Amal* negotiate the influences of western values on their students within the classroom? Only through a case study could such questions be answered.

Considering the timing of my research, arriving after more than six months of mass generalizations and misconceptions regarding Islamic educational institutions in general, it is hoped that this study can help promote a better understanding of one of these Islamic schools, as well as foster a greater level of cooperative awareness between the western and Islamic perspectives.

Accordingly, in order to reach a valid understanding of the case, data were collected from various sources in order to "develop a typology, a continuum, or categories that conceptualize different approaches to the task" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 38, 39). The main sources I used for such data collection were interviews, observations, and documentation.

Case Study Component 1: Interviews

Voice speaks about stance and perspective, revealing the place from which the portraitist observes and records the action, reflecting her angle of vision, allowing her to perceive patterns and the strange in the familiar. (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 105)

Davis (1997) points out that in the interview process "through the dialectic between interviewee and interviewer, voice as interpretation contributes to the determination of the direction and shape of actors' responses" (p. 120). As the researcher or—as Lightfoot (1997) designates—the "stranger," I firmly believe that the interview is neither solely an instrument to gather data nor a representative of the "other" as much as it is "jointly constructed" (Way, 2001). The main purpose of the interview is to reveal humans' thoughts; sometimes it is, in fact, the only true means of finding out what others think, as it is especially difficult and even inadvisable to make assumptions and construct interpretations from merely observing people (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, the interview also shows the unique ways in which proficient researchers invite participants to permit them entry into the "other" world, thus making them insiders fitted with an insider's unique perspective. They no longer have to observe and record, but instead can see from within (Patton, 1990).

The interviews I conducted in my case study took the *semi-structured* approach. This type of interview "explicitly acknowledge[d] both the interviewer's agenda (e.g., to understand a particular topic from the participant's perspective and the participant's agency) or power (e.g., to

introduce important new knowledge that the interviewer had not anticipated)" (Way, 2001, p. 114).

Since the focus of my study was the *Al-Amal* private school in Kuwait, its participants included anyone currently involved with this school: parents, teachers, and administrators. This group of participants is "purposive" or "purposeful" (Merriam, 1998), because as a researcher I considered them capable of providing a wealth of information and knowledge.

As is the case for any such study, the first step involves canvassing for volunteers I approached volunteers only after visiting the school on several occasions, after familiarizing myself and beginning observations that facilitated the interviewing process. Once individuals agreed to be a part of the study, we chose a mutually suitable and convenient time and place to meet.

The teachers I interviewed were either those whose classes I attended as an observer or those who became interested in the topic of my study and volunteered to participate. I have interviewed female teachers, from various subject matters such as Islamic studies, English, Arabic, social studies, science, mathematics and the behavioral curriculum. Some were elementary teachers, while others were secondary and high school teachers. As to parents, some had children in the classes I attended, while others were introduced to me by teachers as willing to share their experiences—and those of their children—with the school. Most of those I interviewed were females except for one male (father). I had contacted some male candidates to participate but unfortunately they did not appear for the interview.

These interviews provided insights that I did not anticipate. They also provided a strong foundation upon which to construct the whole picture of the case I investigated (Merriam, 1998). I conducted over 27 formal interviews with both parents and teachers. All of these interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, except on three occasions, when the participants (all teachers) accepted the idea of being interviewed but objected to being recorded. Notes accordingly replaced the transcription process.

Most of the formal interviews with teachers were held inside the school during the school day. We used some of the empty classrooms. Some of the teachers who were interviewed were not among my original participants but volunteered to speak when they observed their peers talking with me. Some parents preferred being interviewed in their own homes, while I met with

others in other locales, such as coffee shops (generally unsuitable sites, but accepted because they were suggested by participants).

In addition to the formal interviews I also engaged in informal interviews with 15 students and three school administrators. Students were gathered as groups and reflected on their experience in the school, while I met with the administrators in their offices at *Al-Amal*. Such informal interviews were mostly open and no guidelines were used for my questions. Most of these informal interviews started by students asking me why I was in their classroom. Even the side conversations that would occur while I was in the school provided significant data for my research.

Just as with the case study itself, the arranging of interviews is also process-oriented. Before the interview sessions, I provided participants with interview guidelines, so they could become acquainted with the nature and the core purpose of the interview. Each interview session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. Although it was anticipated that one session would be sufficient, some participants were contacted for a second or subsequent interview so they could elaborate on or clarify aspects of the earlier meeting. As process and common courtesy dictated, I also sought their permission for another session at their convenience (Seidman, 1998).

Also, before each interview session I provided the participants with an Informed Consent Form. A copy of this document is located in Appendix A. The consent form states the participants' rights and explains the interview procedure. It also emphasizes the confidentiality of the participants by keeping their identities anonymous and by creating pseudonyms whenever possible.

Case Study Component 2: Observation

"Gaze" is the act of seeing; it is an act of selective perception. Much of what we see is shaped by our experiences, and our "gaze" has a direct bearing on what we think. And what we see and think to take the process one step further, had a bearing upon what we say, and what and how we write. (Paul Stoller, 1989)

Observation also played an important role in the gathering of information for my case study. Collecting data through observation involves "gathering up someone's data in some innocent and neutral fashion. We shape the product and we influence the event" (Jackson & Vies, 1996, p. xii). The act of observation is imbued with difficulty: it is not simply a means to look into someone else's world, but also is an interaction with that world (Jackson & Ives, 1996).

While difficult in this way, the method of gathering data is crucial to the researcher, for, as Merriam (1998) notes, it helps us make sense of another's world, as well as our own. Furthermore, observation is considered to be, as Strater and Sunstein (1997) explain, "a means [of locating] focal point[s]" that permits us to filter the way we study a subject (p. 98). Such filtering is necessary, because observation is a very personal instrument, quite similar in nature to "reading." All of us read differently, and all of us perceive what we have read and what we have seen differently (Strater & Sunstein, 1997). Therefore, to "read" a situation or person without properly filtering it is to provide an essentially biased perspective, no matter what the original intention. So that I could gather the greatest amount and most insightful kinds of information, my role as the researcher in this study was "observer as participant" (Merriam, 1998). The approach I chose dictated that I observe students on a daily basis in their natural environments, from their arrival in the morning to their recess or lunch breaks to their leaving at day's end. This enabled me to understand their practices, how they acted and interacted with others. At the same time, I attended classes at two levels—seventh grade and eight grade—alternately. One day I would attend a seventh grade class; the next, an eighth, and so on. This process of observation extended over a five-month period, over two academic years: during 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. In addition, I attended most of the school activities and seminars presented while I was at the location.

Specifically, I observed how the classes were taught at *Al-Amal*, how teachers dealt with controversial issues that might emerge as a result of their lessons, and I also observed the nature and context of the school, the building, and visitors. When I first introduced myself to the administration, they directed me to the high school principal, who questioned me about my purpose and asked me to write a formal request outlining the nature and purpose of my intended observation. A copy of the letter can be found in Appendix B.

My observation was approved for the school year 2001-2002 and was to last only two weeks; however, I explained that this period of time would be insufficient for my research. Administrators kindly agreed with my request that I be allowed to attend classes until the academic year ended in late June. When I returned to the school the following year, they had become so accustomed to my presence that they did not set time restrictions upon my work. As a result, I was in attendance at *Al-Amal* also for the 2002-2003 year.

Field Notes

During my observation, I also maintained a personal journal or diary in which I recorded field notes. My observations in and out the classrooms enriched the data I gathered. At the beginning of my visits to classes, I would put my notebook in front of me and jot my thoughts, record observations, and even sometimes write primary analysis, about which I could later ask. After the class was over, and during any breaks, I would write down words, phrases, and abbreviations that helped me. By the end of each school day, I had recorded all I had observed, as well as jotted down responses and thoughts, as Merriam (1998) recommends. These thoughts are part of my field notes.

Researcher's Diary

Documenting and reflecting upon my personal perspective throughout the data collection process helped me discover minor revelations which actually became crucial to the study and its interpretations. Comparing my personal journals with other data resources helped me imbue the entire data collection process with "intersubjectivity and [make it] explicit" (Flick, 1998, p. 172). Additionally, Flick (1998) states "documentation of this kind [a researcher's diary] is not only an end in itself [that gives] additional knowledge but also serves in the reflection on the research process" (p. 172).

These procedures were used as a mean to "transform the studied relations into text" (Flick, 1998, p. 168). When writing field notes, the researcher should be careful neither to highlight specific events heard or seen nor to *interpret* them (Flick, 1998).

What I obtained from the observations is manifold: the curricular content and focus, activities undertaken by the group, and the nature of informal conversations during and after the observation, among other things.

Case Study Component 3: Documentation

An additional source for enriching the case study is the written document, which Hodder (2000) describes as being "not like the spoken word" (p. 703). Documentation consists of many types of information (Patton, 1990), such as letters, memoranda, agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, written reports of events, administrative documents, proposals, progress reports, and other internal documents, and finally newspaper clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media (Yin, 1994). These documents, Hodder (2000) notes, "require more contextualized interpretation" (p. 703). They include information that cannot be observed, but

they can also "provide the researcher with private interchanges to which the [researcher] would not otherwise be privy. They can reveal goals or decisions that might be unknown to the [researcher]" (Patton, 1990, p. 233).

Clearly, then, "because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies. Systematic searchers for relevant documents are important in any data collection plan" (Yin, 1994, p. 81). However useful such documents are to the study, though, researchers must approach them with caution and accept that they cannot always be counted on for a high degree of accuracy. The researcher should be very careful to validate any information gleaned from documents used in scientific study of a subject (Yin, 1994).

I began the documentation phase of my case study by locating materials concerning the *Al-Amal* School and requesting permission to access these materials (Creswell, 1998). Documents that I found particularly useful were administrative documents and students work.

I asked for access to administrative documents, such as the school philosophy, mission statement, school texts, students' work and teachers' work. Some of these documents were found to be significant or enlightening to my research. Looking for these documents provided me with more insight concerning the school's philosophy, goals, and expectations. See Appendix C for examples of school documents such as the mission statement of the school, students' code behavior, and samples of lesson plans. Utilizing these various documented resources helped me obtain the "inner meaning of every day events …[where it] may yield descriptions of rare and extraordinary events in human life" (Merriam, 1998, p. 116).

The Role of the Researcher

Conducting research about two fields simultaneously—religion and education—forced me to draw greatly on my professional background. Being an Islamic teacher of Islamic studies in Kuwaiti public schools for almost six years influenced my decision to investigate *Al-Amal*. I became interested in this school in particular when I first enrolled my daughter in it as a kindergarten student by the year 1996-1997 she spent almost one year and half at this school. As a mother and teacher, I was attracted to the school because of its philosophy, as well as its environment and setting. All these aspects motivated me to explore the school's potential and to what extent it would fulfill my expectation concerning my child's education.

As the researcher of this case, my main role stemmed from my profession as an Islamic teacher who is always seeking a curriculum and environment that would promote students' sense

of their Islamic morals, ethics, norms and identities. As a qualitative researcher I became the main instrument for data collection (Merriam, 1998), I also took "steps to make [my] personal stances explicit and to guard against researcher bias in interpretation" (Anzul, Evans, King,& Robinson 2001, p. 246). I am not attempting to use this study as a means of advocating this Islamic educational institution. I am not trying to advocate my religion or beliefs, but I do know that if it were not for my beliefs and personal background, I would not be interested in conducting this study. Furthermore, as a qualitative researcher I did not attempt be an "objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1049).

Even though my personal experience, as well as my profession as an Islamic teacher, might have occasionally interfered with the way I proceeded with this study, I did not try to ignore my biases. Rather, I tried explain the bias that I might fall into throughout this study, because the "researcher must be aware of any personal biases and how they may influence the investigation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 21)

Research in religious studies usually flows from personal belief and, therefore, makes neutrality hard to achieve even for the most specialized scholars. I believe that there is no kind of research that can be entirely free from even a small portion of a researcher's subjectivity. Even the idea or the inquiry (Kaplan, 1997) that is the beginning point for constructing any research has a subjective source. Gross (2000) explains,

> Our personal interests and standpoints do influence our choices of subject matters, the data we see, and the conclusions we derive, [however that] does not turn us into unbalanced, fanatical zealots and proselytizers. Nor does it mean we become sloppy scholars; good rules of argument and good use of evidence remain important, but we do become more honest- and more humble, which though considered a virtue, is not often something to which scholars are prone. (p. 167)

This study was not meant to serve as an avenue for the voice of the researcher. It encompassed listening to and then presenting parents and teachers' voices, whose beliefs did not necessarily overlap with mine. However, my goal was to present a life dialogue and "social transformation" (Lightfoot, 1997). Since what is being introduced in this research must be filtered invariably through the researcher's lens, I believe that it is crucial to explain to readers

my role and perspective, and Hays (2004) would verify such a belief. My role as a researcher in this endeavor was defined by Wollcott (1994):

> I do not compartmentalize my personal and my professional lives: I personalize the world I research and intellectualize the world of my experience. I have presented this case- and, to the extent possible, given it immediacy and my deep involvement, suggested what I can by way of interpretation (p. 365).

Data Analysis

In any study, the analysis of data is an ongoing, as well as demanding, process that requires the researcher's assiduous attention. Dealing with such a step in the qualitative research is critical, because all methods of data analysis vary greatly. No "quick recipe" for effective data analysis exists. For this project, the process of analysis began with the creation of a conceptual framework. Throughout this period I have been jotting down countless notes about potential avenues for inquiry, what I might expect, how to reach for answers that are not immediately forthcoming, and how to create a solid foundation for the eventual analysis.

The process of analysis encompassed two directions: in-field and out-of-field (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The in-field analysis involved making continuous observations and taking copious notes—all the while trying not to lose myself in the amount of information and knowledge I was gathering. The field notes, interviews, and transcriptions often created a load of work that was difficult to manage. As a result, I felt it crucial to keep the number of interviews I conducted and classes I observed to a manageable level. Yet, I was constantly impressed by the advice I had learned: "Once you get going, keep going" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 36). I kept writing whenever thoughts or questions emerged. Such a continuous process allowed me to keep ahead of the mountains of information I collected.

Out-of-field analysis began after data collection ended. At this point, I found myself sitting in front of mounds of papers, notes, scraps, fieldstones, transcriptions and observation codes, and abbreviations. At times I felt almost lost, and I looked for methods by which I could manage the information in front of me. Where to start? Am I on the right track? Was I losing sight of my goal? I had to leave the whole thing for a while and come back with a fresh mind, recharged and looking forward to solving the puzzle so I could see what picture it would reveal. I felt that distancing myself from the data for awhile helped alleviate my worries and confusion.

It gave me, as Bogden and Biklen (1998) identify, a "new enthusiasm for data that may have become boring" (p. 170).

Through this step of my research I sought to explore several facets of *Al- Amal*: its general practices, how it combines religious and traditionally academic subjects in its curriculum, how it deals with the controversies and complexities of its educational processes. According to this aim, my data analyses centered on identifying and investigating the themes that emerged simultaneously with the data collection process.

The basic steps I undertook in organizing and analyzing the collected data involved the following components.

Step One: Coding and Organizing the Data

First, I used marginal notes to code all pertinent documents: interview transcriptions, observation field notes, my own field notes of the interviews, and my journal. Then I categorized and classified the documents according to conceptual aspects: words, phrases, people, even settings. This two-phase process demanded extensive reading, "rereading, resorting, refining, rechecking, [and] revising" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 38). Such a procedure helped me to construct bridges and create relations among various bits of information as I retrieved them, until I felt I had identified preliminary concepts and units of information that could be extracted and written about.

Step Two: Making Meaning

After this process of coding and organizing, as well as setting preliminary concepts, the phase of making meaning and interpretations arrived. Such interpretation began with asking myself specific question regarding the data I had accumulated: What explanations does it reveal? How does it answer the research questions? Working back and forth between the data and my perceptions and understanding helped me make sense of the information and the evidence I had gathered (Patton, 2002), as well as extract the main themes of this study. One of the main strategies I used to present the data involved interpretations through intensive descriptions. By applying such a method I tried to relate my personal background, as well as my professional experience and understanding, to the creation of a meaningful case study (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). However, personal experiences still required support.

The main categories for this case are the following: Muslim parents' agenda for their children's education; the values they prioritize; parental perceptions; the teachers' role in Islamic

school; challenges for and expectations of the curriculum; and finally, how to maintain harmony or balance within the school. I supported these themes by categorizing them and searching the literature for previously-published studies. In this manner, I empowered the analytical process and my interpretations.

The basic strategy I used in this case to analyze data was *triangulation*, through using various sources for information previously mentioned, including interviews, observations, and documents. This procedure is helpful in dealing with multifaceted perspectives within a complex context, as in the present case (Merriam, 1998). Previously published materials also proved vital to analyzing and interpreting the main themes that emerged from this study. Such literature served as a significant instrument in validating the analytical process, as well as the information gathered during the study itself (Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

When utilizing the case study methodology or any other qualitative line of inquiry, the most arguable element involves how to measure reliability and validity. However, "reliability" and "validity" are terms associated with traditional experimental research; the qualitative paradigm replaces them with "trustworthiness" and "credibility". Any case study that depends on qualitative inquiry must be bounded by the context and the participants who become part of the case. Accordingly, in an attempt to achieve clear trustworthiness, I utilized triangulation as one of the main methods for enriching the data analysis process. The idea of referring to multiple sources of information and moving between the transcriptions and field notes is a critical strategy that helped prevent me from inserting into the analysis my own biases.

Trustworthiness is "defined as that quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). Credibility "address [es] the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). However, that confirmation of such a study cannot be accomplished. It must be noted that in studies of the social sciences, there is no one truth, no single reality: human nature, perspectives, and behaviors are not static but evolve over time (Merriam, 1998). Utilizing triangulation assists with questions of trustworthiness and credibility, as through it the researcher must explain the whole process she/he is going through in the case study.

Another method that helped enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study is known as *member checks*, the process of verifying information and data with participants in the study (Merriam, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2001). Such a process involved discussing with participants questions that were brought up during original interviews, requesting additional explanations of observations, and verifying of "hard" facts, like names, dates, and other concrete data. Looking for explanations and reflections helped ensure my perspective and understanding remained valid. To a great degree, such methods helped me "construct a credible story—putting pieces together to create a logical coherence" (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 246).

Generalization

The uniqueness of this case can reduce the possibility of generalizations (Stake, 1998; Wolcott, 1995). For example, in the case of my research, I elected to study a single private school in Kuwait, which means that the themes or results that emerged from the data collection process represent solely this school. It is also important to note that *Al-Amal* school has its own philosophical foundation for its establishment, expectations, and anticipations, and that these differ from other bilingual private schools, either in Kuwait or in other nations.

Accordingly, my initial approach when dealing with this school involved exploring its educational foundations and directions, and the potential conflict between Islamic studies and the secular subjects. Since Al-Amal is quite unique in the Kuwaiti educational system, making generalizations based upon it would have been not merely ineffective but impossible.

The process of generalization cannot be determined by the researcher individually; on the contrary, it is engendered mainly by the "reader or user," as Merriam (1995) points out. Presenting, portraying, and reflecting involves determining answers to the question: What is the point? The researcher should explore these questions, not offer notions of right and wrong. As Geertz (1973) notes, the "important thing about the anthropologist's findings is their complex specificness, their circumstantiality" (p. 23).

Despite the fact that the notion of generalizability is initially ingrained in the natural sciences, when it comes to applying such a notion to the social sciences, many questions can be raised regarding how the study and its results can be applied to other situations or contexts. An answer is provided by Yin (1989), who indicates that

Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical positions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like experiment, does not represent

33

a "sample," and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic

generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization) (p. 21).

What Yin (1989) indicates is that the case study should always be considered for the theory it

develops and the social construction of it, not merely considered in isolation with the signal

organization or group that it originally studied (Snow & Anderson, 1991). Case studies aim to

present reasons and explanations, which will in turn help the audience or readers have a holistic

understanding of the case under investigation.

Accordingly, the study I have presented would be generalizable more in its implications

and with regard to how the analysis of this case can illuminate the social construction and

context of such an organization. The essential point to glean from all of this is that in the social

sciences, one must understand that generalization involves "the development of a theory that can

be extended to other cases" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 97). As Snow and Anderson (1991) point out, the

case study " may not be the only avenue to such knowledge, but it is more likely than other

modes of research to generate that knowledge" (p.166).

My study of *Al-Amal* presents a slice of the social context. Both the reader and the

researcher can, through their shared experiences and perspectives, view and examine connections

between the social life, its nature and complexity (Schwandt, 2001).

Limitations

By its very nature, the methodology adopted by this study—interviewing the various

individuals involved with *Al-Amal*—possessed some limitations, including language barriers that

might have affected transcriptions and the conducting of interviews without tape-recording.

Representation in Translated Transcription

One of the main limitations involved the language differences: some of the participants I

interviewed were native Arabic speakers, while other participants were native speakers of

English. Despite the fact that some of those I interviewed were English teachers, they were from

Arab countries, so when they were offered the option of being interviewed in English or Arabic,

all but one preferred the latter. While I could have conducted interviews in English—as it is my

second language—the decision of most participants to be interviewed in Arabic was helpful for

me since my native language is Arabic.

However, this decision ultimately presented an interesting problem: the participants'

original quotations—which represented some of the most eloquent examples of data—then had

to be translated into English for use in this thesis. This process could, to some extent, alter the original meanings of the quotations, as well as disempower the voices of the participants, which could result in what Delgado-Gaitan (1994) calls "the problematics of representation due the language translation" (p. 301). Despite the fact that my native language is Arabic, as a means of ensuring the relevancy of the extracted quotations I had to search and struggle to translate some of the words used by participants because they might hold several interpretations. The difficulty that I confronted involved my attempt to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible in transforming participants' responses from Arabic to English.

Interviewing without the Audiotape

Another barrier I confronted that to some extent limited the research methodology and the data collection process involved audiotaping of interviews. Some of the teachers I asked to interview wanted to know if the conversations would be audiotaped. When I answered in the affirmative, three of them declined my request.

One of the justifications for the objections was that they would be embarrassed and intimated by the process of being recorded. This is a common response. Johnstone (2000) notes, for example, that "the setting up and the tape recorder…. can [make] people embarrassed and self –conscious, [and] make them start talking in unnatural way or to stop talking at all" (p. 105). In fact, I experienced just such a response from one of the teachers I attempted to interview. As soon as she saw the tapes set on the table where we met, she put her hands over her mouth with look of shyness and then pointed with her hands "no" as an indication of refusing to be taped during the conversation.

This situation led to great frustration. However, in my attempts to overcome the new limitation set before me, I returned back to the time-honored tradition of diligent note-taking. Taking notes either completely (when possible) or by using abbreviations helped me capture key ideas that emerged during interviews.

The experience was new for me, as I attempted taking notes with some participants. As a new researcher in the qualitative field, however, I found myself distracted because of the absence of the audiotape. As a result, my first hand-recorded interview was not very successful. During that interview I wanted to capture as much as I could of the participant's thoughts, so during the conversation I rarely had time to make crucial eye contact with that teacher or even raise my head. Such an unpleasant experience provided a beneficial lesson for me.

For my next interviews that were not audiotaped, I decided to merely jot down words and abbreviations, as one of my professors once suggested, and enjoy the dialogue. As soon as I finished the interview I sat in a very quiet place, turned on my audiotape, and recorded my thoughts, feelings and even analyses and comments concerning what had been brought up during the interview. During the last two interviews that were not audiotaped I felt more relaxed and actively engaged in the conservation and had a lot of prop questions to ask, compared to the first interview which I felt a nightmare—but also proved to be an unforgettable lesson for me about how to deal with non-taped interviews in the future. My main concern regarding the non-audiotaped interviews was that I would lose the exact wording of the participants. From my perspective, the technique of hand-recording interviews prevented me from capturing all the details that the audiotape could preserve, such as the silence and the tone of the participants, which enrich the quality of the data.

Interviewing male participants

As a female researcher working in a conservative environment and in a religious school, I felt that interviewing male participants could create some difficulties. As a result, most of the participants in my study are female teachers and parents. The idea of contacting male teachers arose because I felt it important to present a perspective that might be different from that offered by female teachers and other participants. Even so, in the beginning of my interview phase, I was hesitant to contact any males. However, I was encouraged to seek out male participants by some of the female teachers in the school.

Two thoughts continued to concern me. The first involved how I might be affected as an interviewer sitting alone with a male volunteer, even within the confines of the school. The second involved whether male participant would even agree to sit with me for almost one hour discussing various issues concerning their experience in the school. Despite all my concerns I was really looking for as much information as I could glean from those who had experiences to share regarding the school. Accordingly, I contacted some of the male teachers as possible interview subjects. I talked to some of the anticipated volunteers via telephone, and they questioned why I chose them. I told some of them that one of the female teachers had recommended them, and I felt that their perceptions could be helpful in shaping my understanding. One of those whom I contacted asked for a copy for the interview guidelines and told me that he would be traveling the next day, but that he would meet with me before he left.

However, when I visited the school the next morning, he had already gone. Another participant who agreed to speak with me was one of the administrators for the boys' school. We arranged a date and time, but when I showed up, he was nowhere to be found. I left the school that day feeling frustrated and disappointed. I cannot explain the responses of these two men, however in reflecting back upon there absence I was left to wonder to what extent religious and even cultural concerns may have played a role in conducting an interview with a female researcher.

The next chapter introduces the historical and social contexts from which *Al-Amal* emerged. In addition, it will present a glimpse into the school's daily practices, the nature of the school, the students, and the physical environment, in order to provide the reader with a sense of the atmosphere of the school. Throughout this chapter I attempt to relate the influences of westernization, modernity, and globalization on the school's educational structure and how such concepts can be negotiated and dealt within an Islamic educational institution.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A case study of a single school in a single country must by necessity begin with a consideration of context: the historical, geographical, and social milieux which work together to shape it.

Basic Facts about Kuwait

Kuwait lies on the northwestern corner of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf, between 46-48-east latitude. The geographical location of Kuwait and its abundance of oil reserves have led to its growth and influence as an economic power. Kuwait is bordered on the north by Iraq, on the south and west by Saudi Arabia, and on the east is close to Iran. The country has an area of 17,818 square kilometers (about 6960 square miles), which makes it roughly two-thirds of the size of the state of Maryland. Its population in mid-1995 was 1,575,983, and this number increased to 2, 041,961 by July 2001 (Atlas.com). Native Kuwaitis in 1995 comprised 45 % of the population, numbering 655,820, while non-Kuwaitis made up 58.4% of the population or 920,163. Essentially, then, Kuwaitis remain a minority in their own country (Abdullaha, 1979; Al-Quisi, 1996; Assiri, 1996; Sharaf al-Deen, 1959). See Appendix D for more facts and events about Kuwait.

The official religion of Kuwait is Islam, while the primary language is Arabic, with English being an unofficial second language. With regard to its general educational system, Kuwait offers both private and public schools, with compulsory attendance mandated until the age of 18. The ladder of public education involves four years of elementary schooling, four years of secondary, and four years of high school. University-level education is free (Lambert & Lambert, 1992).

Education in Kuwait

Historically, Kuwaiti education is bound to its central religion, Islam. As is the case with Islam as a whole, in Kuwait education was first initiated on a large scale in mosques, where people gathered daily to perform their five prayers, recite verses of the *Qur'an*, and learn the basic principles of their religion (Al Namer, 1989; Abd AlGafour, 1978; Al Kandari, Al Rashed, Al Rashid. & Abdu Al Muetee, 1995). Kuwaitis deemed mosques to be a place for worship and practicing their Islamic rituals, and at the same time, places for learning. Most of those who

taught in the mosques were *Imams*, known not just for their deep knowledge of Islamic laws but also for their skill with the Arabic language (Abd AlGafour, 1978).

The curriculum originally taught in mosques focused mainly on explaining the rules and the pillars of Islam, the five prayers, fasting, Ramadan, *zakat*,[10] and the *hajj*, as well as on encouraging recitation and memorization of the *Qur'an*. In addition, some time was spent in the curriculum explaining the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (saas) and covering his basic biography, as well as the basic life histories of his companions and followers.

As expected, mosque-based education in Kuwait underwent gradual changes, both in content and in mode of delivery. For example, in the beginning, oral teaching methods were stressed, while reading and writing were deemed unessential. In 1887, with the rise of the *Katatib*, reading and writing became significant components of the learning process. These *Katatib* were located primarily in the homes of those deemed the most knowledgeable and were of two different sorts: one type stressed reading and writing, while the other stressed the teaching of Islamic principles. The *Katatib* existed solely for the purposes of education; they were private places not sponsored or supervised by the government.

Teaching mathematics in Kuwait spread by the year 1893 when the accountant 'Ali ibn 'Amar deemed its instruction vital. As it assisted them in their business dealings, Kuwaiti citizens quickly embraced this subject (Abd Al Gafour, 1978; Al Namer, 1989). With regard to gender issues, very little attention was paid at this time to the education of females. In 1916, females in Kuwait learned the *Qur'an* orally, with the assistance of a Kuwaiti woman, Amina al-'Umar, while reading and writing were excluded. By 1962, the status of education for Kuwaiti females changed, however, with the establishment of the first *Katatib* specifically for girls. The curriculum in these institutions included reading, writing, mathematics, the *Qur'an*, religion, embroidery, and sewing (Abd-Al Gafour, 1978).

In 1911, Kuwaiti citizens organized the first formal public school, called *al- Mubarakiyya* (Abd-Al Gafour, 1978; Al Namer 1989; Al-Qenaee, 1987), and by 1934 the government had begun to assist with and contribute to the educational process. This year was considered one of hope for the Kuwaiti educational system. Educational plans involved both males and females. Kuwaiti independence in 1961 again brought changes to the country's organized system of

---

[10] Zakat is the obligatory poor dues that a Muslim should pay to certain categories of people in the community, including the poor and the needy (Saleh, 2001, p.121).

education (Al Namer, 1989). As the oil industry brought wealth into the country and the economy boomed, more avenues were opened with other countries—trading partners—for the exchange of educational ideas. Part of the revenues generated by oil were poured back into the educational system. This extended period of growth and economic fortune had a great impact on Kuwaiti citizens educationally, socially, economically, and even culturally (Abd al-Gafour, 1978; Abdullah, 1979).

Like many other countries, after its economic success, Kuwait was forced to cope with the advent of technological developments that affected all aspects of everyday life. Such a change was a natural result of the globalization phenomenon, because no traditional culture can be "insulated from this revolution" (Wheeler, 2000). As a result, the country must deal with its "desire to be globally linked to the latest communications technologies [that] are an important part [of its] national consciousness" (Wheeler, 2000, p. 10). The process of globalization, which includes both modernity and westernization, penetrates into every facet of a nation's consciousness, be it social, cultural, economic, or political; therefore, it will influence any institution and organization of the nation, including the educational system (Bull, 2000). At the same time, though, the Kuwaiti national identity remains strong and is relatively well-preserved (Wheeler, 1998).

The Educational Structure in Kuwait

Despite the fact that, like many other countries, Kuwait maintains an educational system implemented and controlled by the state (Lambert & Lambert, 1992), western educational theories have greatly influenced its form and structure (Ministry of Information, 1997).

The Ministry of Education in Kuwait is responsible for schooling on all levels from kindergarten through high school, as well as for Kuwait University and colleges. The Kuwaiti educational system differs slightly from the western system in attendance requirements, because while four years of elementary school and four of middle school are compulsory, two years of kindergarten and four years of high school are optional. Kuwait aims at developing its educational system by adopting the successes of other countries and by utilizing modern theories and experiences that are suitable for its environment (Ministry of Information, 1997).

Because of the years I spent in undergraduate and graduate courses at Kuwait University, as well as the time I have spent in the United States, I recognize how greatly the Kuwaiti system has been affected by U.S. educational philosophy and psychological theories. Dewey and

Skinner, or the Bloom Taxonomy classifications, are the main references and were constantly mentioned in our classes and adopted in curricular designs. Even as this thesis is being written, the act of referring to the U.S. literature on education in order to understand the Kuwaiti educational structure—primarily to determine how the Kuwaiti structure aligns itself with the concepts introduced therein—indicates not merely the strong influence of the one on the other but also the mutual benefit that could be accomplished through the exchange of ideas and understanding between the two. The curriculum and models of teaching are adapted primarily from the American educational system. However, these adaptations have not eliminated the Islamic identity from Kuwaiti citizens or wholly Americanized them. The aim of education in Kuwait focuses mainly on preserving Kuwaitis' national, Islamic, and cultural identities.

The Aim of Education in Kuwait

The educational structure in Kuwait is based on the policy of a national curriculum (Lambert & Lambert, 1992), wherein the government plays a crucial role in the setting of goals to cope with the changes the country is confronting. As declared by the former Minister of Education, Dr. Ahmad al-Rubiy, the main objective of education in Kuwait highlights the society's belief in the

> Importance of education in the building up of the Kuwaiti individuals and the formation of their personality so that they can obtain a balanced manner of thinking and can share in the building up of a society that enjoys sufficiency and prosperity. (National Report, 1994, p. 6)

This sufficiency is achieved by providing students with the main qualifications they must have in order to meet the needs of society (Ministry of Information, 1997), as well as their own expectations and ambitions.

As do many other societies, Kuwait believes that the main responsibility for the development of a society and its individuals ultimately rests with education (National Report, 1994). This development stems from answering the most common question posed concerning education: What do we want from our schooling? (Kohn, 1998). In more specific terms, it asks what parents, administrators, teachers, policy makers, and students all want from education. Before answering this question, it is necessary to demonstrate the purpose of schooling by addressing Kuwaiti perspectives on it.

Clearly, the purpose of any education can vary greatly: It can be designed to provide students only with academic knowledge. It can be considered an institution the primary purpose of which is socialization, the creation of the model citizen. Or it can be viewed as the means by which a generation is prepared to meet the economic standards demanded by the workforce (Kohn, 1998).

The criteria used to measure educational achievements or goals differ according to each system's philosophy and expectations. Some schools determine success based solely on test scores and the individual student is ignored in favor of the mathematical whole. Viewing schools in terms merely of achievement scores, however, would be an index of the collapse of educational values (Goodlad, 1979). Ultimately, the school is an institution influenced as well as controlled by social, economic, and political considerations that could to a great extent paralyze its ability to accomplish its educational goals.

Kuwaiti schools emphasize and highlight the nourishment of the spiritual domain in students by creating an Islamic environment, providing role models for Islamic character, and integrating Islamic values into most academic matters (National Report, 1994). Al-Hur (2001) and Joseph (2000) indicate that the educational system of any nation will mirror its cultural needs, as well as political, economic, and social considerations. All of these factors will affect a nation's educational philosophies, as well as the development of its educational agenda.

Factors Influencing Curriculum Development in Kuwait

Kuwait's educational curriculum is undergoing the same slow process of change witnessed by other nations. It is impossible to expect rapid changes, especially in educational practices where the outcomes and results are part of a long-term assessment process. The bottom line is that change in education is linked to humans who might or might not accept such alterations willingly. The most significant call in Kuwait concerning education, and specifically the design of curriculum, is to keep

both far from politics (Al-Dawee, 2001).

After the Gulf War in 1991, various changes impacted Kuwaiti society politically, socially, economically, and even educationally. In the post-Gulf War period, the Kuwaiti educational structure needed to be rebuilt and reconsidered. Land (1991) reiterates what Dr. Mohammed Al Khodari then pointed out to UNESCO, that "his war- ravaged

country needs to introduce (radical changes) to the curricula as well as teacher training" (p. 54).

Such transformations and "radical changes" extended to other aspects of

Kuwaiti society. One of the main transformations that occurred in the post-Gulf War period

involved the

> Disagreement between Islamists and liberals and between flexible and conservative
> interpretations of Islam is apparent in the tension between Kuwaiti's palace and
> parliament. Kuwaiti Islamic movements incorporate groups such as tribes and Shiites,
> and thus involve important sectors of society in political participation. (Ghabra, 2001, pp.
> 23, 24)

Since Kuwait society sought to include all these various parties with their various agenda

and needs, it became apparent that politicizing education in Kuwait could lead to dangerous

conflicts among the various political and religious ideologies (Tetreault, 2000). Ideally, it was

stressed that schools should be free from any type of political conflict because they are supposed

to be "clean" and "healthy" institutions that create a context in which educators can be productive

and effective (Al-Shik, 1998).

For example, the Islamic studies curriculum aims to accommodate the Kuwaiti

constitution and the fact that the main religion of Kuwait is Islam (Kuwaiti Constitution, 1962).

Therefore, religion plays a primary role in the education (Rugh, 2002) of all Kuwaiti citizens.

Because the curriculum is thus a national one, the implementation, as well as the implication, of

all subjects of study—including the content of each subject— currently must be supervised and

approved by the government (Bahgat, 1999).

As Joseph (2000) notes, any curriculum will reflect the cultural, economic, social, and

political context of its society. A close look at the Kuwaiti national curriculum, including the

Islamic studies curriculum, confirms this fact. The ideology affecting the Islamic studies

curriculum is based on that of the *Sunni*, who represent about 45% of the Kuwaiti population,

while *Shi'a* represent about 30%, and the remaining 25% consists of Muslims from different

cultures, as well as some Christians (Cordesman, 1997). Although the *Shi'a* represent close to a

third of the Kuwaiti population, their ideology is not included in the Islamic studies curriculum,

because the dominant *Islamic National Alliance* (INA) "oppose[s] using *Shari`a* law to govern

Kuwait" (Tetreault, 2000, p. 116). Moreover, this curriculum is already considered to encompass

teachings that meet with the approval of both groups, *Sunni* and *Shi'a.*

Kuwaiti public schools adopting the *Sunni* approach to Islam also accept students with *Shi'a* affiliation. *Shi'ism* is not taught in public schools, however, because the constitution states that Islam in Kuwait is based on *Sunnism*, though *Shi'ism* can be taught by a private school that has gained government approval. Instead, Islamic studies provide students with the general foundations of Islamic values, practices, and history, and also teach them the rituals of Islam by utilizing the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Scholars in education and Islamic studies—who are all affiliated with *Sunnism*—are responsible for designing the course of study (Educational Committee, 1999). This method for presenting the subject without delving into the various Islamic ideologies prevents religious conflict from encroaching on Kuwaiti's schools. This example indicates that the process of curriculum development is politically controlled in Kuwait, and that the national curriculum is set to fulfill the political, economic, religious, and social demands of the majority of the country. Because the Kuwaiti government attempts to maintain good relations with all political discourses and to avoid conflict, it includes in its major political decisions not just the Islamists and the secularists, but also other discourses, such as that of the *Shi'a* (Al Dawee, 2001). Kuwait's aim to satisfy all discourses within its educational design is commendable, but it seems to be causing some level of difficulty. Kuwait is also dealing with globalization, modernity and westernization, and at the same time, Islamization. Kuwait's response to these pressures and its success in creating a balance between Islamization and western influences will be explored next.

The Position of Religion in the Educational Structure of Kuwait

A survey conducted in some Arab countries, including Kuwait, clarifies that religion is primarily responsible for shaping the identities of Kuwaiti citizens. When they were asked, "Who are you?" students of "both sexes ranked religion first, in their hierarchy of group affiliation, followed by citizenship (Kuwaiti), family, and national origin (Arab)" (Massislas & Jarra, 1991, p. 153).

Islamists in Kuwait consider Islamization the process by which the constitutional decree that *Shari`a* is the main source for Kuwaiti laws can be applied. The growing political power of the Islamic party is obvious: the government currently seeks their support by providing them more political freedom (Tetreault 2000; Al Khaldee 1999). Their influence also appears in educational practices. A good example of this influence is that after the invasion of Kuwait, Prince Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah issued a decision to establish a committee to apply Islamic

laws in Kuwait. This committee called the Supreme Consultative Committee on the Implementation of the Provisions of Muslim *Shari`a* Law, has various goals that are not limited to education, but encompass all aspects of Kuwaiti society, one of which happens to be education. The educational committee set specific goals requested by representatives from the Islamic party. These are summarized as follows: Evaluate the educational actuality to strengthen its positives and provide a treatment for the negatives. Emphasize the Islamic curriculum, its applications, and its influences on Kuwaiti society. Invest in various educational organizations for shoring up Islamic values among citizens' thoughts and attitudes.

Set Islamic regulations that would imbue the educational plans and curriculum presented to entire organizations, both private and public. Highlight the significance of the family and the child's culture for the Islamic educational curriculum. Create an Islamic educational system that accords with Islamic laws and considers the actual educational system (Educational Committee, 1999).

This committee, which is directed mainly by Islamists, has set certain expectations concerning Islamic education, as well as other subjects. For example, it is obligatory to teach Islamic studies at all school levels and necessary for a mosque to exist at each school, because both are considered significant elements in the educational process. In fact, time is allotted each day for the requisite prayers. There is no Islamic restriction or limitation on theoretical empiricism or the applied sciences except where their principles or theories might conflict with faith, thus corrupting Islamic morals and faith. This corruption would at the utmost lead to the rejection of Allah's law (Husain & Ashraf, 1979). The purpose of introducing such non-religious theories into the Kuwaiti schools is to help students develop the critical skills necessary to evaluate and argue with scientific theories like evolution and creationism.

Because of its insistence on "privatizing" religion in all life practices, including education, the secularist movement in Islamic countries, including Kuwait, has led, in the opinion of many, to a disequilibrium within society (Davutoglu, 2000). There are strong voices in the Kuwaiti cabinet who wish to increase the role of religion in society, particularly in the country's educational system. These leaders consider education to be an instrument vital in reconstructing a society with a foundation and values that would develop effective citizens who could both assist in social progress and maintain Islamic identity and cultural grounding (Massislas & Jarra, 1991).

As noted earlier, some critics view such Islamic schools with skepticism, associating them with the 9/11 attacks and with the teaching of hate and hostility toward the west, specifically the United States. Others, however, realize their potential: they "utilize modern education to breed tolerance, and economic development" (Mapes, 2002, p. B7). As an example, one must consider an Islamic school operating in Indonesia, known as *Al-Zatun*, described as "one of the most successful and controversial educational projects in the world's largest Muslim nation" (Mapes, 2002, p. B7). This school has captured the public's interest because it successfully combines two seemingly opposed methodologies: it emphasizes the acquisition of learning skills grounded primarily in western education, and, at the same time, fosters the growth and maintenance of Islamic culture and values (Rugh, 2002). Religious schools in general are, in fact, a universal phenomenon: they exist in all other belief systems and faiths (Al Khatib, 2001).

Accordingly, in order to respond to the skepticism and suspicions that surround Islamic schools, and in order to better elucidate the practices, positions, and values of one such school in Islamic society, I investigated an Islamic private school established six years ago, *Al-Amal*. My primary areas of investigation were not only its Islamic studies curriculum and its purpose and expectations, but also a clarification of its practices as an Islamic school in Kuwait. Many issues are relevant to such an examination. How does such a school maintain focus on both Islamic and western-style curricula? The incentives for establishing such a school identify the complexity of the school's nature. Such issues as these and others, as mentioned in the introduction to this literature review, guided my case study of the private school *Al-Amal*.

CHAPTER 5

ENVIORONMENT

Al-Amal, a private school, exemplifies an attempt at educational change in Kuwaiti education, at least in the private sector. The school aims to reinforce the role of religious "belonging" among students, teachers, parents, and administrators in a modernized environment with a bilingual focus and an American-style curriculum. While the content of the *Al-Amal* curriculum differs to some extent from that of the national curriculum, in the end the two can be viewed as highly complementary and integrated (Al-Mutawa, 2000). Even if their philosophical and ideological backgrounds are different, both curricula have as their goals development of the individual spiritually, personally, and academically.

Historical Background of the Al-Amal Bilingual School

The emergence of the *Al-Amal* curriculum began as the inspiration of the president of the International Islamic Charitable Organization. Through her work on this committee she began to search through Islamic literature, including the *tafseer* (a concordance to the Holy *Qur'an*), *Hadith*, and the Islamic biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (saas) and his followers. Her work culminated in the production of the *Al-Amal* curriculum, which focuses on providing a healthy Islamic environment that would allow applications of the Holy *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* to the development of Muslims' mental and emotional potentials (Al-Mutawa, 1993). Through cooperation between Al-Mutawa and members of the IICO committee, the establishment of a non-profit Islamic private school that utilizes this curriculum as the core of its existence was realized (Al-Mutawa, 1993). As Al-Mutawa (2000) states, "*Al-Amal* is the dream that becomes true in 1996 . . . It started with a small idea just like all great achievements. People with vision have put and are still putting sincere efforts into taking *Al-Amal* to a new horizon" (p. 3).

The Goal of Al-Amal Bilingual School

The *Al-Amal* School is imbued with Islamic principles, but at the same time it is a bilingual school, with a focus on two languages: Arabic, "the mother language," and English, "the science language." Likewise, while it works toward preparing Muslim students to deal with contemporary challenges by equipping them with Islamic and Arabic values, it does so via an American-style curriculum. Simultaneously, then, it teaches students religious values as well as equips them with the academic skills they will need in order to become active participants in

their societies (Al-Mutawa, 2000). Although the *Al-Amal* School is religiously oriented, this does not mean that it reduces the role of academic disciplines for mere doctrinal purposes. Instead, this school encourages any theories that will promote the significance of both religious beliefs and scientific knowledge in Muslims' lives. It also aims to develop each Muslim's personality so that he/she acquires the Islamic morals and ethics that will form constructive as well as creative individuals who understand their roles toward God (Allah), themselves, and their societies (Al-Mutawa, 1998).

In order to better understand the role of *Al-Amal* school and to examine the attempts of the school to create a balance in education between western academic disciplines and the inculcation of Islamic identities and values I sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* define the Islamic schooling they anticipate for their children? What are the main spiritual needs they want their children to fulfill? And what role does *Al-Amal* play in fulfilling those needs?

2. How do spiritual or religious and academic interests intersect within the formal curriculum at *Al-Amal*, throughout the daily interactions between teachers and children?

3. In the midst of increased westernization and globalization, how do the teachers of *Al-Amal* negotiate the influences of western values on their students within the classroom?

Researcher Experience

Even though I am familiar with *Al-Amal* through having a child enrolled there in the past, my attempts to introduce myself to the school for the purpose of gaining research access was not an easy task. The reason for such difficulty was that my initial visit to the school occurred just a few months after the September 11 crisis. As previously noted, after this event, accusations were leveled wholesale at anything labeled "Islamic." Suspicions surrounded any Islamic association, charity, or organization—even Islamic educational institutions, where fears coalesced around the question of what students were being taught, particularly with regard to the west. In an effort to root out the perpetrators of the attack and undertake the broadest roundup of terrorists, the United States did not limit its hunt within its own borders, but instead extended its efforts to several Muslim nations. Such investigations extended as well into situations that would not ordinarily be associated with promoting terrorism, including charities and schools. At the period of greatest

activity, the misconception that the Islamic curriculum promoted hatred against the west reached a height. It was at that critical time that I chose to contact *Al-Amal*.

Initially, I called the school several times to arrange a meeting with its director, and each time I was quizzed by the institution's secretary about my background, as well as the purpose of my project. Each time I called, I would be put on hold, during which I was exposed to broadcasts from the Holy *Qur'an* radio station of Kuwait, either recitations from the *Qur'an* or Islamic lectures. For me these broadcasts represented the first indication of the nature and sphere of *Al-Amal*, as well as what I might expect as soon as I could be given permission to enter the school as an "insider." Each time, though, my information was taken, but I received no response. This process lasted for more than three weeks and resulted in my growing frustration, until I decided to introduce myself personally to the director.

The Physical Environment of *Al-Amal* School

Finally, I managed to arrange an appointment with one of the school's administrators. On the day of the meeting, I parked my car in a lot in front of the building, from which I was able to read the institution's sign: *Al-Amal Bilingual School*. Nothing on this sign identified the school as Islamic. Prior to entering the school's gates, I noticed that most of the visitors that day were female, all of whom were wearing the *Hijab,* a veil covering the body. According to Islamic teachings, an adult Muslim female should cover her whole body, with the exception of the face and hands, in the presence of strangers ('*Ajnabi*) or non-relative males (*mahram*) (Saleh, 2001, p. 33). Women who entered *Al-Amal* were thus attired, which proved indicative of the school's emphasis on tradition, for among Kuwaiti females there is a wide difference in methods of dress. For example, while some women dress in a "western style," with long-sleeved shirts and long skirts, others are more conservative in attire, for they wear the *Abayia*, a black cloth covering that drapes and covers their bodies from head to toe. Even among this latter group, there is a difference: some leave their faces uncovered, while others wear the *Niqab*, which covers the face except for the eyes. Most of the male visitors I saw that day were also conservative: they wore the beards associated with Islamic religious tenets. The external appearance of those visitors entering the school labeled them as conservative, but also indicated something of the nature of the school itself.

The school's entrance was enclosed by two main gates, used primarily by staff and visitors. These gates led to the main office of the school, as well as providing an entrance to the

kindergarten for teaches, parents, and children. Two side gates also existed: one for older male students, one for older females. Within the school, a similar separation occurred: one section is for males, one for females.

Visitors to the building arrived at a central hall, where receptionists sat in a large wooden office. As per school rules, they were dressed in clothing that was not colorful; some covered their faces, while others did not. Above them was a glass sign featuring the school symbol and motto: *When the vision is clear, the target is determined and when the target is determined, the path is clear*. As I waited for the receptionist to announce me to the administrator, I observed those who entered the building. Consistently, female visitors would enter the school, pause for a moment, and then take a seat far away from the males waiting there, despite the fact that there were no signs designating gender-segregated seating arrangements. Clearly, such segregation was dependent upon cultural practices rather than posted "rules": in fact, it plays a crucial part in Islamic belief. The school enforced the segregation policy, as it is considered a necessity to and priority of conservative parents. Segregation along gender lines also extended to the faculty, staff, and custodial personnel. While some of the school's female teachers do teach upper-division courses to male students, no male instructors teach female students. During none of my visits through the two last years did I observe a male teaching females. This is due in part to the lack of male teachers at the school, but its roots derive from religious and cultural principles.

Al-Amal School has been in existence since 1996. In that time, the number of students enrolled there has increased steadily. For example, in 1996-1997, the number of students enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade was 386. By 2001-2002, the total number of students enrolled at the school numbered 1,391. In 2002, the school granted degrees to its first graduating class.

Throughout this time the gender segregation has been absolute and ensured. Only under special circumstances—for example, if, a male and a female each go downstairs to visit the nurse or the main office—would the genders come into extended contact. The same situation is true for the teachers and staff. Should one of the female teachers be confronted by a male within the school, she would traditionally pull up her *Niqab* to cover her face. In return, the male would avert his eyes to avoid accidentally glancing at the female's face.

Al-Amal is staffed primarily by non-Kuwaiti citizens, generally from such Arab nations as Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. Some teachers are from the west, mostly the United States, Canada,

the United Kingdom, India, and East Asia. Very few Kuwaiti teachers teach in the school. The student populations vary according to the level and the grade, with the elementary levels containing the greatest number. In kindergarten and the elementary levels, class sizes vary from 22 to 30. In the higher levels, class sizes decrease to about 20. These numbers indicate adherence to a traditional pattern or practice of parents intent on keeping their children in an Islamic school until they reach the fifth or the sixth grade, whereupon they transfer to a public school for a public education. *Dina*, an *Al-Amal* teacher whose subject is business administration, explains this practice:

> *Parents adopt this practice primarily because they seek to develop a strong foundation for their children in the elementary levels, either academically or religiously or both. Whenever the parents feel the religious and the academic foundations are well established, they then transfer their children to public schools. Due to economic circumstances, too, some parents are forced to transfer their children from the private, more expensive environment of Al-Amal to a public school.[11]*

Eventually, after a period of waiting, I was accepted into the school. Its administrators and teachers kindly and willingly opened for me avenues for data collection, and I was free to travel into every section of the school. Often I would enter an empty classroom in order to write down my notes, update my journal, and record observations, as well as conduct interviews; at other times, I would stay in the computer lab and work on my data. As a result of the participants' openness, I have been able to delve deeply into various aspects of the educational institution. These aspects not only have revealed to me the complexity of the school's philosophy, but also have extended my understanding of the nature of the Islamic school, including the transformation of religious education within a global context and the effect it has on humans involved in such an environment. Just as with any other educational institution, one cannot generalize about Islamic schools. Each school—whether religious school or secular— possesses its own defining philosophy, requirements, and expectations from teachers, administrators, and parents, as well as students.

---

[11] School tuition ranges according to grades. While fees for K.G (pre-K.G., K.G, IK.G, 2 are 1050 K.D (Kuwati Dinar) which equals $3,562.17, fees for Grades from 1-4 are 1440 K.D equals $4,885.65, while the fees from grade 5-8 are 1610 K.D equals $5,462.58 and finally grades from 9-12costs 1990 K.D which equals $ 6,752.07.

A Regular Day at *Al-Amal*

Since in Kuwait the official weekend days are Thursday and Friday, the school week runs from Saturday through Wednesday. My initial observation began by watching students from the first moment they entered the school each morning. Their school day starts with a morning assembly, which began at 7:15 and ended fifteen minutes later. Students line up in two long rows according to their class, accompanied by their teachers. The assembly begins with one of the students reading *Al-Fatiha Sura*, a chapter of the *Qur'an*, which is itself comprised of 114 chapters (Saleh, 2002, p. 102). Then all students recite the *Hadith* that they have been assigned for that month. Then a program prepared by one of the school's departments is presented.

After the assembly ends, students go on to their individual classes. In general, they appear not to be very engaged with these morning activities. For example, I went with seventh grade girls to their gym class, where they seemed to show little enthusiasm, perhaps because of the early hour. In a specified room, they change from their long dresses into long pants and t-shirts. When I asked their teacher about dress codes for gym class, she indicated, that

> *Before I come here to Al-Amal I did not have any prior knowledge or background about the nature of the school. And I wondered that girls were not even wearing shorts in these gym classes even in the hot days. I even asked them to do so, but the girls refused, as they felt it is not suitable to reveal these parts of your body in Islam. After awhile I did understand such commitment from students, which I really admired.*

After attending the girls' gym class, I visited an *Al-Amal* class, which focused on a behavioral curriculum designed to develop students both personally and morally within an Islamic frame. The curriculum, which begins in kindergarten and continues through the upper grades, emphasizes a student's duties toward himself or herself. Through this curriculum, students become acclimated to the expectations placed upon them as good Muslims. This process of acclimation involves teaching students to understand and internalize the concept of *Taqwa* (fear of Allah), brotherhood, mercy, altruism, forgiveness, and courage. This is the first phase. The second phase of the curriculum covers one's duties when dealing with others, such as respecting and fulfilling parents' rights, and respecting relatives, neighbors, teachers, friends, and elders. The next phase is concerned mainly with the etiquette of the Muslim faith and is taught through using examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (saas), such as those involving the courtesy of eating and drinking, as well as communicating with others. The curriculum also

teaches students how to use mutual understanding as a communication tool. The curriculum utilizes the *Qur'anic* style by involving dialogues and examples from history. In addition, various other methods are used to teach communication, including modeling, advice, debate, media, story, technology, and even more. One of the main focuses of this curriculum involves how to treat humans' psychological weaknesses, such as anger, arrogance, egotism, hostility.

In that curriculum class, I was able to observe students in what is called the *Al-Amal* lab, a wide room with six medium trapezoid desks that would fit five or six students arranged in a u-shape. The room boasts a microphone and a television for recorded lessons, while students work at the back of the class. When students gather for an *Al-Amal* curriculum class they meet in this room. They are taught through a variety of activities and discussions, including debates. In the behavioral class, controversial subjects were tackled, and the teachers acted as facilitators to discussions and activities. One of the methods that has been widely utilized in this course is the "You Are the Teacher" plan, wherein students assume the role of educator. This method teaches them to become confident speakers and to communicate Islamic ideals to their peers. Although such a creative method seems out of place in classrooms devoted to traditional topics, like mathematics or science, it is encouraged in *Al-Amal* classes, particularly by the head of the department. She demands such creativity. *Manal*, an *Al-Amal* teacher in her mid-twenties, dressed in a long shirt that almost reached her knees with wide pants. She holds a degree in computer science and thus could work in the corporate world; however, after experiencing the *Al-Amal* curriculum through seminars at the Organization of the school where it initially emerged, she decided to teach at the school in the behavioral department. She describes her work:

> *What we are doing is that we are raising the child Islamically [Tarbiyyah]. When I teach*
> *students these concepts I clarify what they would gain in performing such acts and why*
> *they have to practice these values we are promoting. It is mainly because Allah had said*
> *to do so in the Holy Qur'an or the Prophet Muhammad told us to do so. In this way, we*
> *aim to reach the students, to construct a conviction about the value of these virtues. When*
> *they accept such virtues then we can say that we successfully reached the goal of*
> *internalization and students have become self-motivated to perform such principles. We*
> *do not dictate what they have to do as Muslims, but we want to reach through their own*

conviction to the significance of any of these values we are highlighting. We want them to

conclude the necessity for such themes as a part of their life principles.

After observing the *Al-Amal* curriculum classroom, I made my way downstairs to the elementary classes, where I listened to a group of nine girls who, with their teacher's assistance, sat in a small room and recited verses from the *Qur'an*. The larger class had been divided into two groups: while some remained in the classroom, the others had moved into this small room devoted to *Qur'an* recitation. There, they removed their shoes and sat on the floor around a large low table (about 10 inches high), as they would in a traditional mosque. Their teacher read a specified section, which they were required to memorize, and the students iterated these verses in order to verify their correct pronunciation and enunciation. Their posture and the structure of the learning environment reminded me of the learning circles that can be found in most mosques. During this class students were also were asked to indicate some of the *tajwiid* principles; in addition, the teacher also explained the meaning of the verses through what is called *tafsiir*.[12] The class then ended, and it was time for recess.

Although during recess students are asked not to linger in the halls or in the classrooms but to go downstairs, I observed that some girls, rather than go down to purchase snacks from the cafeteria, sat in their classrooms to eat snacks they had brought from home. Downstairs, in the cafeteria, students were grouped according to class. Girls from the 9th-12th grades sat together in one area, while younger girls sat together elsewhere. Few teachers were around to supervise the recess activities. After eating their snacks, most students were careful to adhere to the Islamic principle that Allah prioritizes cleanliness: they picked up their litter and deposited it in trashcans. Nearby, a kindergarten teacher eating with her students reminded them of the *Duaa'*,[13] After recess I attended another class. Although the teacher covered her face outside the classroom, inside it—perhaps to facilitate the hearing of the lesson—her *Niqaab* was down. However, on this particular day, the school administrator knocked on the door to announce a male visitor, whereupon the teacher pulled up her *Niqaab* and covered her face. In this class I did

---

[12] Exegesis, interpretation: explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic text and / or commenting on it (Saleh, 2002, p. 105).

[13] The supplication or prayer that Muslims should recite prior to eating and also reminded them that at the end of their meal they should likewise thank Allah for the gift of food (Saleh, 2002, p. 17).

not witness Islamic values being integrated with the daily lesson, which is not unusual, in some classes, particularly in mathematics.

After attending a few classes it was time for the second break. By the time of the next break, which was set aside for prayers, the voices of the students could be heard across all the halls. On each floor, a special site was set aside for prayer. Some teachers and younger girls from elementary levels were heading to pray, while others went to the cafeteria for snacks. When I went upstairs to the high school level, I went to the room allocated for prayers. After the break, students headed back to their classes and teachers urged them not to be late. Tardiness is discouraged, as some teachers do not allow latecomers to enter the classroom; instead, they must get a permission slip from the coordinator before they are allowed back into class.

At the end of the day, students headed downstairs, to exit either by the main gates, where they caught school buses, or through the main office, where their parents waited to drive them home. As with most schools, day-to-day activities at *Al-Amal* vary little. With their emphasis on Islamic Studies, the behavioral curriculum, and traditional subjects, each day can be quite exhausting for students and teachers alike.

Aspects of the school's complex nature

Providing the reader with a glimpse into the school's main external features, as well as an indication of its gender-segregationalist policies, serves to lay the foundation within the *Al-Amal* context in which contradictions and complexities abound. One of the primary complexities involves the bilingual nature of the school: where social studies and religion or Islamic studies (*Dien: religion*) classes are taught in the native language of Arabic, while mathematics and science are taught in English using English textbooks. The school is oriented toward Islam and surrounds students with all of its pertinent branches of study, the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *Aqiidah[14]*, *Tawhiid* [15], and *Fiqh[16]*.

---

[14] Faith, belief or something that one has a firm belief in; it is often used to refer to the religion.
[15] Monotheism, Islamic theology or the belief in the absolute oneness of Allah and behaving accordingly in one's supplications and worship.
16 Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh* or *ilm al-fiqh*, which covers all areas related to worship and transactions. The word originally means understanding (Saleh, 2002, p. 7, 22, 111).

This aspect of the school's complexity serves merely as one facet. The philosophical domain in which it was established assures that *Al-Amal* must deal with the multiple backgrounds, needs, and expectations of parents, as well as with teachers who possess awareness of the school's objectives and policies in varying degrees. Such variations in its human resources have created great pressure for *Al-Amal*. The school's philosophy concerning the combination of Islam and bilingualism has created interesting burdens for its founders and administrators. The goals and design of the school, while commendable, have also placed the institution under the microscope of all involved parties. Even those who are outsiders, such as parents who to some extent are thinking of this school for their children, or teachers, who are planning to work with this school follow, *Al-Amal*'s progress, assess its outcomes, and consider whether it has been successful in achieving its expressed mission. Such expectations create a burden that the school's founders expected and willingly shoulder.

Before addressing the complexity of the school's context, I would like to introduce its philosophy and its mission statement. By exploring each of these components, I will be better able to determine which of its goals the school has been able to accomplish and which it still struggles to fulfill.

*Al-Amal***'s Mission Statement and Educational Philosophy**

The mission statement of *Al-Amal* Bilingual School issued May 1, 2002 expresses the desire to help students— through the setting of clear objectives and priorities—acquire the intellectual qualities, attitudes, and ethical values necessary for them to achieve their positive, creative and productive potentials and enable them to carry out their responsibilities toward self, society, and the world, while still remaining within the framework of Islamic beliefs and values.

With regards to its educational philosophy, *Al-Amal* is a bilingual, national, educational institution which delivers instruction in both Arabic and English. The institution is firmly committed to providing quality education to all students, preparing them for higher education and lifelong learning. Students are taught within a learning environment based on Arabic/ Islamic culture, heritage, and values. At the same time, students are encouraged to develop respect for and tolerance of other cultures.

The school aims to develop the student as an individual, as a whole person. By providing them with a stimulating learning environment, the school creates an educational program designed to meet the intellectual, social, ethical, emotional, and physical needs of children

through all stages of their development. The school develops in students a sense of responsibility toward themselves, others, and their environment, which in turn prepares them to be responsible, contributing citizens of the future. This is reflected in the encouragement of students to participate in school life, to be involved in local community service, and to show an awareness of global concerns (Al-Amal mission of statement of the school: May 1, 2002).

With such specific goals and such a precisely defined educational agenda, the school clearly spoke to a particular facet of the community. Those who become involved with *Al-Amal* do so as a result of their beliefs, natures, backgrounds, and the perceptions they hold with regard to schooling in general. The next chapters present the main themes this study revealed as a means for answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 6

THE EDUCATIONAL AGENDA OF MUSLIM PARENTS

The decision to send a child to a specific school- in particular- a private school, is generally a family decision. Initially that decision is made according to the economic status of those parents who are capable for such a type of schooling, in addition to a set of criteria and priorities that the parents anticipate for their child's education. These criteria are related to parents' perspectives concerning which school would be effective for their child's education. Such effectiveness is not merely a concern for parents but also plays a significant role in scholarly discussions of education. The most obvious criterion for measuring a school's effectiveness involves the academic achievement of its students, a tangible assessment because its outcomes are measurable. Such "cognitive outcomes" are viewed as being the easiest components to measure. In addition, generalizing this single aspect tends to affect all other categories of measurement, thus comprehensively defining what is important to the particular school (Coe & Gibbons, 1998). Such an argument can be reflected by a school's guiding philosophy and objectives: what the school expects defines its measurement and evaluation standards. However, when it comes to how parents perceive the effectiveness of a school, such arguments differ, particularly when the school in question is religious in nature.

Religious Education between the Vision and the Actual

In order to understand how parents and teachers assess the effectiveness of a religious school, it is crucial to understand the nature of such an education, not only with reference to Islam but also to all religions in general. According to Copper and Guare (1997),

> Religious education is rooted in cultural, historical, political, and linguistic pluralism. From anthropological theory, it is clear that religion provides people with values, attitudes and beliefs that inform their way of living within the social and the cultural structure…religious education, provides people with powerful symbols which shapes their way of living faithfully within culture. (p. 112)

Geertz (1971) further articulates the relationship between religion and culture, which is particularly important with regard to Islam, where religion, culture and education are indivisible, viewed within the same context. Religious schools are defined by the nature or the context of the society within which they emerge. Of course, since education often falls within the political agenda of a society, in those that downplay religion or seek to suppress the ties between religion

and the state, such schools do not usually exist—or they are solely private institutions. On the other hand, in nations that savor the freedom of religious practices, parallel religious schools often not only exist but flourish. There are many reasons the demand for religious education has grown within various religious and cultural contexts. First, religious education aims to fill a gap in public education, which tends not to concern itself with nurturing students' spiritual and moral development. Second, parents perceive that the side effects of modernity and industrial wealth—such as the loss of a moral foundation—provide powerful incentives for a return to religion.

Manal, a young teacher who is filled with enthusiasm for such schools comments on the spread of Islamic schools in Muslim societies: *"People finally began to realize the problems emerging in our society because they had become distanced from their religion, Islam. When people relinquish their religion, their condition worsens."* Similarly, the administrative head of *Al-Amal,* Nawal, who is in her early fifties and wears the traditional *hijab*, suggested that *"the fact is that all our schools should be Islamic—not the exception that we have Islamic schools. If people did not abandon Islam as their life guidance, we would not need Islamic schools."*

Additionally, religious education should not limit its mission to merely the "religious formation" of individuals, but at the same time it should promote the need for a "human education" that would result in a well-rounded, moral, and ethical individual, a "whole" person. Moreover, to be truly successful, religious education must create a harmonious balance between inculcating religious beliefs and teaching the sort of practical skills that would enable students to become productive, functioning members of their respective societies. Such goals can be fulfilled through providing students with sets of skills, the religious and the prosaic or practical (Connolly, Dowd, Criste, Nelson, & Tobias, 1998). These main skills are universal and can be recommended and called for by any religion.

However, the vision of any school might sometimes fail utterly when it comes into contact with the actual, with the harsh realities of everyday existence. Ultimately, any school's goals, objectives, and mission must originate from or be tied to the degree of satisfaction that those involved with the school deem essential. For that reason it is crucial to understand the highly varied motivations and expectations of parents who have chosen to send their children to *Al-Amal*. In order to understand their decision, a full understanding of their backgrounds, their beliefs regarding various aspects of life (religious, educational, and social), and their degree of religious commitment is essential.

How Do Muslim Parents Define an "Effective" Religious School?

Despite the recent rise in Islamic schools and Islamic curricula, the current educational literature does not provide a great number of studies on the topic. As a result, in order to accomplish my analysis and defend my assertions, it became necessary to refer to studies of other religious schools.

Rose (1988) suggests that parents often choose to send their children to religious schools for very simple reasons: doing so means that they

> Have greater choice, support, and participation in educating their children. Teachers are able to express their beliefs and values more freely and to form more intimate relationship with their students, and religious leaders are able to exercise greater influences over their flock. With mutually reinforcing institutions based on consensus and dictated to similar goals, one can expect more consistent results in socializing both adults and children (p. 145).

Rose (1988) points to a dissertation conducted by Ballweg (1980), which in its study of fifty-six Christian schools in the United States determined that the primary incentive for parents to enroll their children in such institutions involved promotion of them socially and morally. Moreover, parents were concerned about exposing their children to the "drugs, sex, violence and lack of discipline" that often characterizes the public school (Rose 1988). Such concern took precedence over the parents' desire to empower their children's religious beliefs. Rose (1988) adds that while parents also choose such schools as a result of their own religious convictions, they are equally concerned about educational aspects of the institutional environment. Ultimately, there is no single reason parents decide to send their children to religious schools, Ballweg discovered; instead, they are motivated by entwined religious, social, moral, and academic concerns (Rose 1988).

One thing is certain, though: parents who are religious conservatives certainly appear to have higher expectations for their children's education. Their main priorities are maintaining and promoting their children's faith and empowering their religious and spiritual sense of belonging. Gangel (1988) makes these points while identifying the expectations he held for his own child's education:

> The social and the academic climate in public junior high school failed to inspire confidence in my wife and me. The 'anything goes' culture with its loose and conflicting

standards and indefinite guidelines would have left our children confused and uncertain regarding life values. Our Christian schools provide a consistent climate for growth and learning through clearly defined guidelines for values based on the unchanging truths of God's word. The peace of mind shared with us by our children that their well being in all its forms is the chief concern of our school is worth many times more than the cost of the tuition. We send our children to Christian schools to supplement the basic principles they are taught at home in real life situations. (pp. 100-101)

Such statements concerning the value of religious schools define the perceptions and the expectations of conservative religious parents. However, the question I intend to address at this moment is as follows: *Do these schools exclude non-conservative parents and students?* Such a line of inquiry, in fact, has been answered by parents and teachers of *Al-Amal*: I realized that the school attracts not only conservative Muslims but also non-conservative ones. This reality belies what would appear to be the case from casual observation of the visitors, the introductory nature, and the general atmosphere of the school.

Conservative vs. Non-conservative at *Al-Amal*

Al-Amal does not set any requirements or standards regarding the Islamic background of its students, nor is the background of the parents a factor that would determine students' acceptance to the school. Regardless of the fact that the school emphasizes standard values and focuses on strengthening its students' ties to Islam, its creators were adamant that religious conservatism not be a prerequisite to admission. Instead, a student's ability to pass the placement exams is the main condition for admission. The result is an institutional environment that seems as diverse as Kuwaiti culture itself: religious conservatives, moderates, and non-conservatives can be found there. Additionally, *Al-Amal* does not exclude anyone based on affiliation. Although the majority of students are Sunni-affiliated, Shi'a students are also accepted.

Since the parents' background and level of religious beliefs determine their choices of schooling for their children, it stands to reason that most of the parents involved with *Al-Amal* care about nurturing Islamic values and promoting within their children a sense of Islamic "belonging" and attachment. This might mean that the larger number of parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* are in fact conservative. Samia, an elementary English-as-second-language teacher in her mid-twenties who has been working at *Al-Amal* for nearly two years, notes:

61

Most of the parents here are conservative, I would say—yes. That is why they send their children here . . . I think that anyone who puts his or her children in Al-Amal cares about applying the Islamic rules. I think so. Most of the parents here care about the Islamic rules.

One must also realize that whatever I witnessed on my first visit to the school, one cannot judge any institution or individual from first or external appearances. For example, while the presence or absence of a *Hijab* on women might suggest a degree of conservatism or non-conservatism, one cannot know for certain without surveying each individual. The awareness can be surprising at first, but many non-conservative parents choose to send their children to the school for reasons that are quite similar to those expressed by conservative parents. Dina, the teacher for the *Al-Amal* curriculum (behavioral curriculum) notes this similarity:

Sometimes you might find a mother who is not wearing Hijab. Once I had the chance to ask her [one of the mothers], "I really do admire your morals and values as well as the way you treat others, which is wonderful. Though, I am really surprised at one issue," I said. "I mean why did you decide as a mother to enroll your child in this school?" The mother answered: 'Because it is a school that adopts and adapts the Islamic curriculum that would educate and teach my child the correct Islamic behavior.' I asked [the mother] "Are you really concerned about such issues?" she replied, "One hundred percent; I am concerned about my child. I am economically capable of enrolling my child in another private school. The English taught at Al-Amal is not that efficient compared to some of the foreign schools. I could get my child into one of these schools to improve his fluency in English, but I decided not to do that. I decided to bring him here to Al-Amal mainly for the Islamic curriculum, and so he could learn and memorize the Qur'an, and that is really what I want for my child."

Accordingly, Islamic schools—or religious schools in general—attract not only those who are committed to their religion, but also those who are concerned about the moral and behavioral development of their children. The fact that the sign for *Al-Amal* does not even indicate its Islamic nature indicates the school's intention to be inclusive rather than exclusive where religious affiliation and commitment are concerned. By making such a conscious decision, its creators have ensured that the school remains popular among religious conservatives, moderates, and non-conservatives. Those who send their children to *Al-Amal* express similar

reasons for doing so. One such reason is *Tarbiyyah*, which can be defined as "Upbringing, education. In medieval Islam, a proper education for the upper classes included both religious and humanistic disciplines (*adab= forms of manuals for behavior, protocol…also means proper conduct and etiquette*). In the contemporary world [tarbiyyah], refers to child rearing, education (usually secular), and pedagogy" (Esposito, 2003, p. 315).

Tarbiyyah vs. Knowledge

Nora, a mother in her late thirties, has four children in *Al-Amal*, from kindergarten all the way to the high school level. When I asked her about the main reasons for selecting *Al-Amal* for her children, she answered:

> *Knowledge is everywhere . . . schools public and private are spreading and growing. Any school can teach, but what is the use of a knowledgeable son or daughter who might be impious to their parents, or show them disrespect . . . [T]he most significant point that we are concerned about is morals and values. For the knowledge and the academic standard can be amended but when it is related to morals and values it is a difficult mission—you cannot find just anywhere those who would promote these morals and values.*

What Nora defines is the concept of *tarbiyyah*, the moral and ethical training or "raising" of a child. Parents, as well as teachers, addressed the notion of *tarbiyyah* and compared it on many levels to academic achievement. When asked why they chose to send their children to *Al-Amal*, some parents suggested that they felt they had no other viable choice: the negative influences that parents view that abound at public and other schools run counter to the ways they want their children to be raised and educated, and *Al-Amal* provides an unspoken guarantee that children will be "raised right," to use the vernacular. At *Al-Amal*, parents witness the sort of healthy environment that is characterized by a consideration of students' backgrounds, the nature of their families, student behavior, moral values, and religious obligations. Nadia, a *Dien* (Islamic Studies) teacher in her early thirties who was looking for such an environment for her son, at the same time found Al-Amal a suitable place to work. From the way she dressed—in black, with her face covered—she can be identified as conservative. She explains:

> *The majority of parents here are concerned parents even if they are non-conservative families . . . They would have certain values and principles they are attached to . . . The majority brought their children to Al-Amal in order for them to be in a safe environment. Their view is that they would not risk putting their children with [just] any type of student*

63

. . . Students in other schools might have some behaviors that are not allowed or do not exist in Al -Amal school . . . You might deal with some of the behaviors such as disciplinary behaviors that do exist in any other school, but it would never reach the level of dangerous behaviors that we might confront with another [secular] school, such as smoking and vandalism. Most of the students who come to Al-Amal are committed to specific behaviors. Most of the parents would place their children at Al-Amal in their early years, and they continue here until they reach six grade, then they are usually moved to another school . . . The parents want their children to have a well-grounded foundation of morals and Islamic behaviors [before sending them to a secular school].

Al-Amal has determined that *tarbiyyah* holds a place at the core of its philosophy, which assuages the fears of parents concerned that in public schools their children will not find a safe or healthy educational environment.

On the other hand, there are some parents of *Al-Amal* students who oppose this strict view because they believe an educational institution should welcome a variety of thoughts, opinions, and beliefs, even those deemed controversial. Such parents express the belief that *Al-Amal* should not, in fact, attempt to impose a moral component but through a policy of openness satisfy all thoughts and opinions. They argue that teaching morals, ethics, and other personal beliefs is the sole responsibility of the parents. Sara, a mother in her earlyest forties who holds an M. S. degree and is an active member of several Islamic Kuwaiti women's associations, criticizes deeply school administrators, as well as some of teachers, for stressing *tarbiyyah*:

There are a lot of parents who are being patient with the school, because they are holding to the environment of the school. However, some people I know to be highly conservative and at the same time, very concerned parents, took their children from Al-Amal school. Their claim stems from their concern and the high expectations they set for their child's education: "We want for our child to be academically challenged." One mother told me "I am willing to raise my child (Tarbiyyah) at home, I don't want the school to raise him. I am doing that at home. What I want for my child from Al-Amal is a rigorous education. My son is not learning . . . his level and fluency in English is [not what I was expecting]. I had hoped that when my son graduated from Al-Amal he would have reached an academic level that would qualify him for college. I don't feel that Al-Amal helped him reach these expectations, though. I take care of his religious training,

and his spiritual obligation is impeccable. He memorizes Qur'an at the mosque. I want his school to educate him more than what he is getting currently in Al- Amal. That is why I had to take him out and I know that a lot of parents are thinking seriously about doing the same thing."

Shamma (2000) concurs with this argument, noting that *tarbiyyah*—including spiritual and religious nurturing—should remain the province of the family. "It is our obligation and duty as parents to teach our children so that they grow up to be believing, practicing Muslims," she notes. "Sending the child to an Islamic weekend school or to a full time Islamic school is an important, but minor part of their Islamic education. The major 'institution of learning' for each child is his family, and the major professors of this institution are the parents" (p. 1).

Despite the fact that *Al-Amal* bases its entire philosophy on education of the whole person, a process that by its very nature combines a traditional academic education with *tarbiyyha*, some parents find fault with this approach. According to Ms. Wafa, a school administrator originally from Great Britain who converted to Islam and has been working in the field of educational administration for many years in Arabic countries, the school *"does not develop [their] children beyond religion. Parents love the religious aim of the school, but they also love the academic side. They bring their children here in pursuit of high academic standards."*

Which component should receive priority- *tarbiyyah* or academic achievement- is an obvious source of conflict at *Al-Amal*. Regardless, the school was created to be Islamic in nature, to adopt the Islamic tenor and enforce an Islamic studies curriculum that includes memorizing the *Qur'an* and emphasizing *Hadith,* as well as teaching *Tajweed*[17]. In addition to all of these subjects, the school also teaches a traditional curriculum of math and science, among other subjects, and what is called its *Al-Amal* curriculum, basically a behavioral curriculum described by an administrator as a "pastoral curriculum." Some parents believe that by attempting to teach so many different curricula, the school risks overburdening itself and affecting academic outcomes. They argue that with so many obligations to fulfill, *Al-Amal* cannot reasonably fulfill all expectations. As Sara comments, *"The school cannot possibly follow up on all of the goals and objectives it set for itself. How can any one school follow up on all of these commitments?"*

---

[17]The term means "perfection." The word derives from *jawwada* or *jayyid*, which means "good." As a term it has been used to refer to the meticulous enunciation of the *Qur`anic* words or recitation of the *Qur'an*. It is also refers to the science which deals with the rules and methods to be observed in it recitation*.)*

The conflict over whether the main focus of *Al-Amal* should be on *tarbiyyah* or on educating students to reach specific academic standards is likely to remain ongoing. Since parents believe their concerns about the quality of their children's education to be legitimate, it is an issue that school administrators might do well to consider in planning and evaluation. Ultimately, though, one must remember that despite the lack of reference to Islam on its sign, *Al-Amal* is, and has always been, an Islamic school based on the combination of traditional academics with *tarbiyyah*. Some parents deem this, its greatest "selling point" and view it to be their choice because they see no viable alternatives.

Muslim Parents' List of Priorities: What they expect from an Islamic School

With *Al-Amal* used as an example, parents who choose to send their children to an Islamic school generally have a predetermined list of priorities that cannot otherwise be fulfilled by public or other religious schools. The list includes the following:

- Bilingualism
- Support for home nurturing
- Healthy environment
- Concentration on Islamic studies
- *Al-Amal* Curriculum
- *Qur'an* memorization
- Comparison with public school
- Segregation (gender)

Not surprisingly, parents' definition of "the best" varies. Some believe that bilingualism is a measure of a school's success, as several *Al-Amal* parents suggest. Others believe that to be successful, an Islamic school must incorporate a moral and ethical component into its curriculum. The expectations of *Al-Amal* parents differ greatly.

Bilingualism

As a vital element of its philosophy, *Al-Amal* stresses bilingualism: it implements English in such subjects as science, mathematics, and (quite logically) English. These subjects are taught by teachers who are native English speakers, as well as those for whom English is a second language. In such courses, students are expected to communicate—orally and in writing—in English, and when some of the students accidentally talk or ask questions in Arabic, they are reminded to speak "*in English please*." Of course, such a strict adherence to English varies from

teacher to teacher, but in general it is the school's policy that individuals speak English in the classes that are taught and designed in English.

However, bilingualism alone does not seem to be a major priority of *Al-Amal* parents. Although they express a desire for their children to learn English, *Al-Amal* parents expect that this education will occur in the context of an Islamic studies curriculum. Since *Al-Amal* is the first school that focuses both on Islamic studies and the English language concurrently, its appeal to such parents is great. As Samia an elementary English teacher explains, *"most of the parents selected Al-Amal first because of its emphasis on the English language and second because it is an Islamic school and most of the parents here are conservative."*

Naser, a doctor in his late thirties who is also a professor at Kuwait University, is the father of two children who attend *Al-Amal*: his son is in seventh grade; his daughter, in kindergarten. The school's bilingual nature did appeal to Naser, who notes:

> *It is a bilingual school. It teaches English, which is important for preparing students for university. They also teach Islamic classes and concentrate on the Qur'an, which in my view is an important subject for students to study, especially in our Muslim country. Al-Amal has the advantage of being a bilingual school and of emphasizing Islamic studies.*

Support for Home Nurturing

Often, parents who send their children to religious schools are accused of "sheltering those children from the real world" (Gangel, 1988, p. 115). However, such an accusation has been refuted and explained by religious parents who argue that in the "real world" to which they want their children introduced, they must be capable of differentiating between right and wrong. Those parents who are looking for support maintaining their children's religious strength search for schools that would satisfy these expectations and incorporate spiritual development as part of their educational goals.

For example, parents of *Al-Amal* students expect that the school will provide such support by reinforcing the manners, values, and morals they are ingraining in their children at home. They are looking for a context that would be similar to the home environment. The rules, principles, and standards taught in this school would then overlap with what the parents teach. Parents want a school that they can rely on to reinforce, not reeducate, when it comes to morals and principles. With regards to Christian schools, Gangel (1988) supports such a statement:

Most Christian schools [provide] a positive, safe, caring environment for children. Commitment to holistic education extends beyond classrooms, hallways, and gymnasium to the day by day realities of life. Christian schools provide significant social advantages for students in addition to their spiritual and academic benefits. (p. 123)

It is essential to understand that one thing for which parents search is a supportive school environment. Dana, who is in her mid-forties and teaches Arabic on the elementary level at Al-Amal, is also the mother of a third grader at the school. She explains:

If my daughter was not in this school, I am confident that there would be a lot of pressure on me, because any other school than Al-Amal would not enforce an Islamic foundation. Even if the school teaches Dien classes, still there is a great pressure on me following up with my daughter religiously, in memorizing Qur'an, in keeping up with her prayers, and on keeping an eye on her.

Another parent explains her viewpoint:

The school should be supportive for us. You know, with the increase of behavioral problems and crises, I really don't want for my kids to be exposed to such issues. So I looked for a school that would help me in raising my child spiritually and religiously.

Sara, the mother who openly expresses some concern about *Al-Amal's* academic level is nonetheless considering keeping her children at the school. While one of her daughters has been sent to an American school in Kuwait, the other is enrolled at *Al-Amal.* She compares her daughters' schools:

I know the environment there [American school]. I feel more comfortable with the environment that surrounds my daughter in Al-Amal—much more than the one in the American school—for the environment is very different between the two schools. I have seen a lot of schools . . . [and] I know I would not feel the same level of comfort in any other school compared to Al-Amal's environment. I really do trust in the school [Al-Amal].

She adds:

As a mother you nurture values and morals in your child, you are teaching them, and I feel thankful to Allah for the day my kids came to Al-Amal school. I have relied on the school to some extent in some issues. I am not completely reliant on the school in the Tarbiyyah but the school is helping me. Thanks to Allah, the school has shouldered a lot

of the responsibility for teaching ethics and principles. I am not feeling that much
pressure concerning this aspect.

It becomes clear after speaking with a number of *Al-Amal* parents that they would like for their children to be raised and nurtured on the main principles and ethics of Islam. However, at this point, one must ask: Who is primarily responsible for inculcating morals, values, and principles—the parents or the school? Some parents view schools as primarily responsible—and if their child exhibits any behavior that they deem unacceptable, they are quick to blame the educational system. On the other hand, most schools tend to place the responsibility with parents.

In order to explore this conflict it is crucial to assign the role and the responsibilities that are expected from both the school and home. In the case of *Al-Amal,* the issue revolves around the *tarbiyyah* vs. *ilm* (knowledge) conflict.

"We Do Not Have a Magic Wand"

The time students spend in school every day is considerable. Connolly et al. (1998) state, Schools have become responsible for teaching not only academics, but addressing social and emotional issues as well. Without engendering parental support, schools will most likely fail in their efforts to teach children generalizable skills. Parents are their children's first teachers, having taught hundreds of skills before a child enters first year of school. Obviously, they have the most vested interests in the success or failure of their children. All parents have hopes and goals for their children; they differ in how they support their children's efforts to achieve those goals. (p. 132)

Such perceptions help reveal how *Al-Amal* parents define the roles and responsibilities that should be played by both parents and school. Several of the *Al-Amal* parents expressed their belief that the school should shoulder the responsibility of teaching students both academics and religious responsibility. They view the school as a factory for producing a "good child," both academically and in terms of their behavior. The effort the school is expending to ingrain in its students Islamic values is crucial to this argument, for by stressing religious values, *Al-Amal* is setting up all the factors necessary to shape students' religious ethics and personalities.

However, a Kuwaiti proverb states that "one hand does not clap," meaning mutual responsibility for anything is key, especially in religious orientation. While some parents complimented some *Al-Amal* students for showing a high standard of values and religious commitment, the school's teachers are quick to point out that credit for such behavior should be

assigned to the home. Maha, a converted Muslim-American English teacher in her mid thirties, who has been working at *Al-Amal* for two years and has two children enrolled there (her son is in the elementary level while her daughter is in high school) credits parents: *"We have wonderful students, wonderful, but it is not our doing unfortunately. We can't take the credit because they come from very nice homes. The parents really gave them those values."*

Some parents persist, however, in believing that the school is primarily responsible for teaching values. They complain to the school's administrators when their children do not listen to them or when they exhibit behaviors they deem unacceptable, like failing to show respect. Dina, an *Al-Amal* curriculum teacher who has been on the faculty for two years, explains,

> *The mother comes to us feeling angry and frustrated. She says, 'my son does not listen to me! Where is the behavioral curriculum you are teaching? I see no effects or changes on my son's behaviors, there is no use of Al-Amal curriculum that the school is promoting.*

The problem remains that some parents lay the whole responsibility for their child's personal development on the school, ignoring the reality that this effort cannot be accomplished without their equal or greater involvement at home.

Handrich (1995) argues that parents bear the greatest responsibility for moral and behavioral enforcement, but at the same time he ponders the reality that not all parents exhibit such concern for moral and ethical values. Such an opinion is similar to that expressed by Nawal, the head of administration at *Al-Amal: "Families nowadays do not raise their children. If they were concerned at home with such aspects within their children, we would not need such enforcement for our students' morality."* Accordingly, schools should provide such character development for students who might be lacking main values and morals at home. At the same time, it could provide support for parents who are concerned with morals and virtues (Handrich, 1995).

Hayat, another *Al-Amal* teacher who has been working at the school since it was established and teaches the behavioral curriculum, explains:

> *We don't have a magical wand. We cannot move the wand and make your child perfect. What we are doing is educating the children and teaching them, as well as training them to discriminate by themselves what is wrong and what is right. We try to instill what is correct and what is incorrect according to the Islamic Shari'a because it is the main criterion and reference for our lives . . . Even if your child did not apply what values he*

70

or she has been taught in Al-Amal, such foundations will definitely remain and do exist. The differentiation between what is wrong and what is right is there. What we really are concerned about in Al-Amal is that we guide our children and students to comprehend the differences, and we hope that one day they would apply the lessons—they should apply them—because initially they understood what they are taught and hence they can make their decisions.

Mogahed (2002) supports such a claim, noting that "of course the best Islamic curriculum does not guarantee good Muslim children. What it does provide however, is the knowledge and environment needed to be a good Muslim if one chooses to be" (p. 27), although home remains the primary context for formulating and instilling the anticipated behaviors and manners. Such a focus would create a "moral immune system" that would protect children from adverse behaviors.

Some parents of *Al-Amal* students have clashed with the school's administration, but that is normal. On the whole, parents keep their children in *Al-Amal* first because, given their priorities, they believe it is the best school available. Dana the mother states,

I only enrolled my child here because of the behavioral curriculum the school is teaching. When I came to ask about my child in the conference I told her teachers I wanted first to know about her behaviors and morals, then I would ask about her academic achievement. Knowledge . . . every one can get knowledge, but the morals and the values . . . Now our society lacks such concern about values. Her father is very satisfied with our daughter's behavior and with the values she has internalized here. Thanks to Allah that is what I want for my child, and it is good enough for me that my child exhibits such behaviors.

A Healthy Environment: Good Soil for the Tree

Dr. Narramore Clyde, a Christian psychologist, suggests that "a tree planted in poor soil doesn't have the advantages of one planted in good earth. Contrary to some beliefs, we do not grow through resistance. Children do not develop because they resist food. Their growth comes as a result of good food and care" (in Gangel, 1988, p. 124).

By and large, parents view *Al-Amal* as possessing the ideal supportive environment, one that complements their parental guidance. Their main motive for sending their child to *Al-Amal* is the environment, which tends to be conservative. Also, although some parents might at times express

dissatisfaction with the school's academic level, they believe that some sacrifices are worth it, particularly when the payoff means a healthier child spiritually. For example, Sara states, *"What I am really concerned about is that Al-Amal is an educational incubator; it is impeccable. My daughter—through all the years she has been here—thanks to Allah, I did not notice any misbehavior—nothing serious."* Clearly, although she is not satisfied with the academic achievement of *Al-Amal,* Sara prioritizes the conservative and safe environment provided by the school. Like Sara, when it comes to considering the environment in which their children will spend the majority of each day, most parents of *Al-Amal* children believe there is no better alternative.

One of *Al-Amal* parents, Rania, works as a secondary teacher in the Kuwaiti public schools. She recounts searching for and not finding the sort of school wherein she felt comfortable placing her children. Like Sara, she is not fully confident about the academic achievement at *Al-Amal*, yet she has found little to satisfy her concerns elsewhere. She searched for an alternative that would satisfy her expectations academically, but could not find one. She explains:

> *I really cannot find an alternative to Al-Amal, to be honest with you. We are a conservative family, and when I took my son to one of the foreign schools I was not satisfied. The teachers were free in the way they were dressed, and most of them were non-Muslim. Deep inside myself I really was upset and worried. I was really scared and concerned about my son being in this school. The mixing of the boys and girls—you know how nowadays children at very young ages are exposed to almost every thing! Everything is available to them. Deep inside I am really confused . . . I really want for my child to be fluent in English, but I am really perplexed about choosing between these two aspects: the bilingualism and the Islamic environment. I am still searching for a good alternative.*

A similar feeling is expressed by Maryam, a professor at Kuwait University, in her mid forties, whose high school age son is enrolled at *Al-Amal.* She believes that, given her son's age, the best school for him is *Al-Amal.* She feels that the values and morals the school is implanting will be fruitful, and she is certain of the positive outcomes of such teachings. Despite the fact that she is reticent about the school's academic level, she still believes it is the best place for her son because, as she notes, "*He is in a good hands in Al-Amal school.*"

Acceptable Peer Groups

As with other parents, some Muslim parents practice a sort of "open" surveillance of their children, watching out for those they befriend and keeping tabs on their activities. Such surveillance tends to occur more frequently with female children, as one would expect given cultural priorities. Such activity on the part of parents is designed in Kuwaiti culture—as in other cultures—to help children avoid the negative forces of peer pressure (Zine, 2000).

Parents tend to feel their children are safer at *Al-Amal* not only because of the conservative environment and Islamic orientation of the curriculum, but also because the peer groups are less likely to become involved in negative behaviors. Sara compares the experiences of her two daughters, one of whom attends a foreign school:

> *My daughter who is in the foreign school complains that she cannot feel freedom with her school. She tells me, 'I don't get to go with my class to any of their field trips. I told her, "Of course, the school you are in is a different school! I cannot allow you to go on their field trips, and your friends in this school would be only your friends in the school. They cannot come over to our house, and you cannot visit them." You can be only with those I know and feel comfortable with. As to my daughter who is in Al-Amal—her friends visit us and she visits them regularly, because I know the kind of families and environment from which they come.*

Most *Al-Amal* parents believe that the similar backgrounds of other parents and students at the school play a significant role in why they choose to keep their children enrolled. They believe that at all levels, the kinds of students who will be enrolled will affect other students, as well as affecting the reputation of the school. Diema, who has been an English teacher at the school for almost three years and is a mother of two students enrolled there, describes her own concern about the potential effects of negative peer pressure: *"You often can teach them one thing in class and peers are doing something else. Peer pressure will take over, so I like knowing the kids' backgrounds, where they come from."* Some parents would go so far as to set admissions standards to ensure a safe peer environment. However, such suggestions are not acceptable to the school, which prefers to believe that it is doing its utmost to develop students along positive religious, moral, and ethical lines, and that children of diverse backgrounds should not be considered automatically "suspect."

Peer selectivity is central to some parents. For example, Farah, a mother of twins (a boy and girl) in third grade at *Al-Amal*, who last year resigned from her job as an English teacher to be closer to her children, expands on this concern:

> *I am the kind of mother who is very concerned about and protective over my children. I would not allow for them to mix or make contact with other children, because I know they will adopt some behaviors and values that I would not appreciate. In the case of Al-Amal, since it is an Islamic school I am confident that here they will take care of students' behaviors, if there would be any misbehaviors. I have noticed with my own children's behaviors the attention the school pays to children's values and morals.*

In general, parents express the belief that other schools simply do not offer them the sort of "peer protection" they find appealing about *Al-Amal*. Diema, for example, comments on her high-school age daughter:

> *I would keep her in Al-Amal, as there are no alternatives in the field. I mean, you know [she mentioned one of the bilingual schools in Kuwait that is not Islamic but focuses on a mixed education] . . . No way. Because of the mixed environment, I have heard that there are many of drug problems, and I would not send her over there. Even the foreign schools for girls, I would not send her because the backgrounds of the girls there are not the same as the backgrounds of the students here. I am glad she is here, because if I placed her in a foreign school I think I would lose her.*

At the same time that *Al-Amal* parents are selective concerning their children's school and peers, they are concerned equally with how the school emphasizes and enforces religious and Islamic studies education.

Concentration on Islamic Studies

Obviously, one of the strongest drawing points of *Al-Amal* is its emphasis on an Islamic studies curriculum. In general, Muslim parents do not want just one thing for their children—either Islamic studies or a strong academic education—but all of the components that would help make them well-rounded individuals and productive, moral contributors to society. This is in keeping with Islamist principles: Muslims are obligated to work and promote their spiritual and religious needs parallel with developing their lives through knowledge and understanding. Parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* tend to believe that religion should not be separate from their children's daily experiences and practices. Manal, an *Al-Amal* teacher, explains the

idea in terms that demonstrate the value Muslims place on combining religion with their everyday lives: *"Islam is the way of life—it penetrates all aspects of humans' lives, in education, economics, social activities, every thing."* The Islamic studies curriculum helps keep Islam a practice of life through a variety of means, including memorization of the *Qur'an*.

Under the Islamic Studies umbrella there are various branches. One of these branches involves memorizing the holy *Qur'an*. Students are assigned to memorize one chapter per year, a practice that is applauded by some parents who consider it a vital part of Islamic studies. As one mother explains*: "Each summer I enroll my children in mosques to memorize the Qur'an."* The practice of such memorization is a reward in itself, but it also helps a child set spiritual goals that confirm cultural ideals. Parents not only reward their children for memorizing parts of the *Qur'an* but also hire tutors to assist them in their endeavors. Parents expect that memorizing the *Qur'an* will play some role in their children's education at *Al-Amal*. As Alia, a non-working mother who has an elementary child at *Al-Amal*, indicates:

> *What I really like about the school is that they have a curriculum for memorizing the Qur'an. Before I enrolled my children in Al-Amal their father constantly encouraged them to memorize the Qur'an. I used to take them to centers for Qur'an memorization, and they would achieve high levels in the Qur'an memorization contests. I enrolled my children at Al-Amal for the same reasons, for the Islamic tenor and the Qur'an.*

However, some parents expressed the belief that while memorizing the *Qur'an* is admirable, *Al-Amal* tends to "overload" students with this type of assignment. Fatema, a mother of four children who spent five years in the United Kingdom and works as an accountant, explains this concern:

> *My kids complain a lot about memorizing the Qur'an. They experienced difficulty with it. Their teacher would assign a whole page to be memorized each day. I myself was really surprised at such an amount and I told myself that it was really too much. I hope that Allah would help them with such assignments. My oldest daughter always complains about the amount of memorization.*

Regardless of her children's complaints, however, this mother reported that she would simply remind them of the rewards they would obtain from Allah for accomplishing the task, as well as the fact that with their actions they were laying the foundation for the hereafter, not merely for the moment.

Although Sara encourages her daughter to memorize the *Qur'an*, she finds fault with some of the methods teachers use to accomplish the task:

> *I would really love it if the Qur'an were been taught here in a way that would be pleasant for the students, with a more flexible style. The Qur'an became a subject matter, like other disciplines, not an extra curriculum that the students would enjoy and internalize in order to practice it whether in or out of school. I feel that the school was not successful in this point. The Qur'an teachers did not succeed in dealing with students in this regard, and they assigned too much. Students do vary in their abilities concerning memorizing skills. They are not equal. Sometimes the child cries, and for my daughter when the summer break began, unfortunately I could not tell her to memorize the Qur'an. I felt that the memorization had become solely a lesson she was compelled to work on. I really feel sorry that my daughter had such feelings and was not motivated concerning the Qur'an. The school failed in this point with my child.*

Although only a small fraction of parents have complained to the school about the degree to which their children are expected to comply with the memorization assignment, the school has reduced the amount of memorization assigned to students.

Yet, memorization of the *Qur'an* remains a focus of the Islamic studies curriculum at *Al-Amal*. Any visitor who walks through the hallways of the school will hear the soft murmur of students reciting the *Qur'an* as they memorize it, sometimes singly, sometimes as a group. For a Muslim, this is quite touching. Each day I visited the school, I was impressed with the accuracy with which students recited their verses, which indicated to me that the school has worked hard to accomplish this outcome.

Al-Amal Curriculum: the Behavioral Curriculum

One of *Al-Amal*'s philosophical foundations is that it does not limit its focus merely to promoting academic standards and achievement, but also promotes positive behavior among its teachers and students via a method known as the "pastoral curriculum," which is adopted from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Such lessons are based on various themes, but concentrate on Islamic values and morals in an effort to instill in students the best methods for becoming productive, effective Muslims. This curriculum has separate classes for all levels from kindergarten through high school. Teachers must be specially trained and qualified for teaching this curriculum.

The school highly emphasizes this curriculum. Teachers in other subjects are asked to integrate their academic subject matter with this curricular theme. Nawal, the head of the school, explains the reason for implementing such a curriculum:

> *If we were living in the ideal Muslim world, I would not have to enforce such a curriculum. What is supposed to be taught by this curriculum should be initially ingrained by parents, at home. Why do you think we need such a thing as the Al-Amal curriculum? Because Islamic morals and values are diminishing. If I had these foundations, I would not need such a curriculum. Homes that are supposed to nurture are absent; schools that should guide are missing.*

Even though the primary goal of this curriculum is the promotion of students' good behavior, it is not wholly supported among parents. While some parents explain that this curriculum was one of their main incentives for choosing *Al-Amal*, others express concern about the "overload" that is enforced on their children. While one parent believes that "*as a society we are encountering moral crises*" and such a curriculum would help and prevent children from the moral waning, others feel differently. Their criticism is countered by the claims of supporters, who insist that, by shouldering the responsibility of nurturing their children morally, the school has touched on many themes and concepts they had not thought about or would have missed introducing to them.

In general, *Al-Amal*'s efforts exceeded parents' expectations. As one mother noted, *"There are a lot of things I have experienced with my children, more than what is expected in Al-Amal."* Another mother, Maryam, pointed out:

> *What I am really looking for in Al-Amal is support for my children's morals. One of my children—whom I had to remove from Al-Amal due to transportation difficulties—had very obviously declined morally. What I am really looking for an Islamic school is that it supports me in raising my child.*

What parents seek from *Al-Amal* is an "Islamic, supportive context" that they have been largely unable to find in public schools.

Practicing Religion in *Al-Amal*: Facts vs. Behavior

As previously mentioned, parents who choose *Al-Amal* have specific expectations regarding the influence the school will have on their children's moral and ethical, as well as spiritual, development. The school's Islamic studies and behavioral curricula and its environment

are some of the aspects that separate it in focus from public schools. Administrators and teachers would claim that the quality of teaching, the depth, and the expansiveness of the *Dien* classes make *Al-Amal* superior to public schools. As Sana, a young Islamic studies teacher in her early twenties and graduated from the college of Shari`a explains:

> *In public schools Dien classes are very shallow. Dien classes are taught merely as a subject matter, like other subjects. There is no soul in these Dien classes. Teaching religion [Dien] varies from any other subject matter. In public schools teachers are dealing with this kind of knowledge as purely knowledge they want to pour into students' heads. The idea of teaching religion in Al-Amal is based on a different philosophy.*

At *Al-Amal*, teachers are careful to teach religion so that it is internalized, not merely memorized for a test. As Mona, an *Al-Amal* curriculum (behavioral curriculum) teacher, explains, "*Islam is a way of life; it is the curriculum of our lives.*" Her perception refutes the argument that Islamic education focuses mainly on teaching about Islam (information: facts and dates) (Tauhidi, 2002). Instead, in the view of *Al-Amal*, the core of an Islamic studies education should be "being Muslim: transformation." This means that sometimes a shift must be made in what Muslim educators need to know in order to teach the youngest children about their religion.

Religion teachers at *Al-Amal* believe that what they are offering in *Dien* classes is spiritual, not merely chunks of information. They believe that students in the public schools—even their teachers—lack the ability to apply what they are learning to their everyday lives. One of the criticisms that parents, as well as teachers, point out regarding public schools is, as Naser, the doctor and college professor, claims,

> *The level of behavior at public schools is not as good as these new schools. These new schools emphasize those aspects [religions, morals] and subsequently have attracted more people who are conservative and wish to teach their children Islamic morals and behaviors. These schools [Islamic school] came as an alternative to the ordinary government schools.*

Suzan, a social studies teacher who had worked at a private Arabic school before being hired at *Al-Amal*, adds: "*In public schools there is no practice of what has been taught. I feel that the Dien is offered purely as a subject in the curriculum. Why, even some of the Dien teachers in public schools do not relate what they teach to their students' lives.*"

Shamma (2000) describes the dilemma of practicing the religion that is being taught and emphasized in the Islamic schools:

> We expect *Masjed* (mosques) classes to teach our children how to read the *Qur'an* in Arabic, but not to understand what it means. We expect the [Islamic educational institution] to teach our children how to pray, how to fast, but not how to live, how to behave. These are facts, not behaviors. Many children know how to pray, very few feel the need to pray because they understand its importance . . . Islam is a complete way of life (p. 4).

One day I witnessed first-hand an example of how the teachers of *Al-Amal* attempt to inculcate the concept that Islam is indeed a way of life. As I walked down the stairs toward the elementary school for boys during recess, I witnessed two children fighting. They would not listen to any of the teachers who were trying to stop them. Finally, one of the instructors was able to get through to them—not by threatening them with discipline or simply ordering them to stop but by questioning them (and thus reminding them) about what it meant to be a "good Muslim" in terms of behavior. The teacher reminded them how a good Muslim treats others well and how, when two Muslims fight, the first one to offer his hand in friendship and apology to the other is better in the eyes of Allah. Although the boys were panting for breath, their clothes in disarray, they shook hands and separated in peace.

Those who teach in Islamic schools are aware that it is not enough merely to teach the principles and morals of the religion—to accomplish its goals, the teachings must be transformed into behavior by students. Islam is not as much about knowing the principles and morals as much it is about applying them. A "good" Muslim is one who applies the lessons of religion to every action, thought, and moment of his or her everyday life. Accomplishing such success is what conservative parents find rewarding about *Al-Amal*, which emphasizes making Islam real in the lives of its students. They also applaud the efforts by the Islamic school to not shelter children but instead teaches them to maintain the sort of morals, values, and principles that will allow them to face the negative impact and behaviors of the "outside world" with strength, self-confidence, and courage. Thus, parents expect that *Al-Amal* will help arm their children with the notion of right and wrong that will help them be good Muslims and positive, productive members of society. Brucceman & Halt (1996) recall what Hoffman (1963) originally pointed

out about this topic that differentiating between "what is right and doing what is right," would not assure that this person would be apply these morals and behave accordingly.

In their comparison of morals-based teaching and behavioral practices at religious and secular schools in the United States, Bruggeman and Halt (1996) discovered that "attendance at a religious high school does not appear to yield a higher level of cognitive morality. The parochial school students did not appear to have internalized moral values or to make more mature judgment than the secular school students" (pp. 342-343). However, one cannot generalize about all religious schools, particularly due to the varying emphases that might be placed on morals. It is not possible to argue that religious schools all fail to teach moral behavior. One must be aware that in order to help ensure that its students put to use the moral lessons they learn, any religious school would have to rely on a variety of supportive factors: parental enforcement, peer influence, the proper social context (Bruggeman & Halt, 1996).

Al-Amal clearly emphasizes Islam in every aspect of its curriculum, from behavioral lessons to academic matters. How successfully, though, does it teach students to live the lessons they learn? Some incidents reported at the school—such as the aforementioned fight—might cause one to wonder; however, these same incidents occur at most schools at one time or another. *Al-Amal* is not perfect, so one cannot expect its students to be carbon copies, all alike, all perfect in their adoption of Islamic principles and morals. Nor can one expect its teachers to be the same. One of the mothers criticizes the way some teachers have behaved toward her child: *"Where are all these concepts that are being taught in the school? Where is the forgiveness? Where is the empathy?"* Similarly, Diema complains that students are occasionally disrespectful:

> *Students are not applying Al-Amal themes. I think that Islam is not applied in the school. In the school you are saying one thing and you are doing something else. I think that the curriculum teaches those things [Al-Amal themes] but it is more theory than practice. Okay, they are students and they are kids, but when it comes to applying Al-Amal themes in their everyday lives—respecting their teachers, their elders, their neighbors—they aren't really carrying through on the lessons. When such concerns are discussed with the administration, they simply say "Oh, they are teenagers—teenagers don't know how to apologize," but that is against Islam totally. In Islam when the child becomes a teenager he or she is responsible even to Allah, and even Allah gives us punishment and rewards.*

They read the rules but no one really applies them. We get frustrated—we want to apply
them but we don't get the necessary support.

In education, one of the key components for ensuring that students apply the morals they are taught is what Dewey (1909) called an "ethical dialogue." Handrich (1995) adds that through ethical dialogue students are allowed to address moral questions and lines of communication are opened between teacher and student. How such dialogue operates reflects highly on students' morals, values, and behavioral development. Such discussion and communication would result in creating equilibrium in students' lives. To some extent, this process of ethical dialogue is being practiced at *Al-Amal*, but it would be erroneous to suggest that it prevails. Time constraints, curricular pressure, and the sheer number of students often prevent such communication from occurring. Some parents and teachers expect to see the results of the school's educational practices on students' behaviors and acts, and they are disappointed when this occasionally fails to occur,

It is really agonizing that such behaviors would be found in such a school. I feel that Al-
Amal is the school we anticipated and its tenor is what we were searching for. I wish that
all negative aspects of the school were diminished.

Any school, *Al-Amal* or any other institution, cannot realistically fulfill such idealized expectations.

Olivia, an English teacher who is a convert to Islam and works in the school's library, explains the reality of the situation*: "In every school you will find that somewhere there is a*
dissatisfaction because some one did not apply what they were supposed to be teaching or
preaching, so yes it does happen in this school in some instances." Regardless, it must be considered that from all evidence, the teachers at *Al-Amal* do their best to teach Islam as a practice of life and to instill morals and ethics into their students. That it occasionally fails makes it imperfect, but what school is not so?

Al-Amal Schooling vs. Public Schooling

The general absence of such a "supportive context" elsewhere has driven many parents—even those who are not economically prepared for the cost of a private education—to *Al-Amal*. Yet they agree that the moral education their children will find at this private school is worth the sacrifice. One of the parents pointed out the following

It is hard for us to even buy a house since our kids are in Al-Amal. I have been discussing this issue with my husband, whether to continue with Al-Amal or not. The expenses and tuition for the school are high for our economic budget. We have no other financial resource other than a salary. Their father is persistent that the children should continue their education at Al-Amal. His view is that he wants to invest the money he makes on his children's education. I, too, want to ensure that they are raised well . . . My husband refuses the idea of taking the children out of this school.

Rania explains the sacrifices parents shoulder in order to ensure their children are enrolled in a school with a positive environment:

The school's expenses are too high. You know everyone would like for their children to be in the best school and private schools as Al-Amal, but this mostly depends on one's economical ability. Even the middle class working parents, we are troubled economically. For example, it would be difficult for us to buy a home if we decide to keep our children in Al-Amal. We do not regret such decision, however, because we believe that this is an investment in our children.

Al-Amal provides students with an environment and a context that nurtures their academic and spiritual growth. The school emphasizes integrating the spiritual with the academic, which is something parents tend to appreciate. Handrich (1995) referring to Dewey's philosophies advises: "Don't teach about ideas of honesty, purity, kindness. There is nothing in the nature of these moral ideas…. Dewey asserts that we teach morals every day, every moment, of the day…five days a week… through all agencies instrumentalities and materials of the school life" (p. 55). Although it is secular in nature, Dewey's advice is actually far-reaching in its focus and has been established as a goal by *Al-Amal*. One of the activities I attended at the school, called the Friend Festival, was organized and operated solely by students to collect money for people in need. Such activity allows students to practice brotherhood, kindness, giving and sharing—concepts that are routinely taught in the school's classes—while simultaneously arousing in students the sensibility and sensitivity expected of them as Muslims. Thus, the school focuses not merely on teaching such ideas but on implementing them in one's daily life. Whether or not their classroom education is being applied by students in their everyday behavior and actions is a measure of the school's success—and a question that remains to be answered.

Gender Segregation

Since most of the parents of *Al-Amal* students are conservative, they object to mixed-gender education and expect that gender segregation will be mandatory at the school. Parents want their children to understand that Islam places limitations and conditions on the mingling of the sexes. Parents are especially concerned about issues related to dating and premarital relations, which are prohibited in Islam—considered *"Haraam"* or forbidden (Saleh, 2002, p. 31). Diema, the teacher and the mother, explains her concern:

> *My daughter now is a teenager, so I want her to be in an environment with girls who are not running after the boys, and so forth. I mean I could put her in an all-girls school—let's say the foreign girls school—but those girls are coming from backgrounds I don't appreciate. I mean, they come from a very westernized, open-minded kind of background. I meant like open to, you know, the boy-girl thing. I like it here because the girls here are still pretty conservative so the influence on my child will be conservative as well.*

Conservative Muslim parents consistently attempt to teach their children the difference between what is *Haraam* (forbidden) and what is *Halaal* (permissible, lawful: in Islam everything is considered lawful unless it is explicitly or implicitly forbidden by the religion) with regard to relationships between the genders. They are not motivated by a lack of trust in their children, but by general parental concern and by the Arabic proverb, which warns about "putting the oil close to the fire." Accordingly, *Al-Amal* enforces gender segregation, and on the rare occasion when boys and girls face the potential of mingling with each other, they are generally careful to obey the rules. For example, if a boy and a girl both visit the nurse's station, one will wait to enter until the other leaves.

As much as parents are concerned with all previous aspects discussed about their children's education, there is another element they consider essential to the successful inculcation of an Islamic education: the teachers themselves.

CHAPTER 7

TEACHERS' ROLES IN AN ISLAMIC SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

As much as parents are concerned with the backgrounds of students who share classrooms with their children, they are equally if not more concerned with the teachers' backgrounds, particularly their religious commitment. This issue is important not only to parents, but also to the administrators of *Al-Amal*, who are quite selective in choosing teachers for their faculty.

The central criterion involved in the selection of teachers for *Al-Amal* involves their religious background. All *Al-Amal* teachers are Muslims. Additionally, as a means of ensuring that all teachers conform to required standards, all candidates interviewed are questioned about their beliefs and *Aqiidah*. While teachers at *Al-Amal* are expected to be devout Muslims, they are not responsible for and in fact are discouraged from indoctrinating students in their own values and what beliefs they might hold. This is school policy and refutes the assertion of Drs. Moghniey and al-'Ashmawi that religious teachers in some schools go beyond the national curriculum plans and indoctrinate students with their own personal religious thoughts, knowledge, tendencies, and values (Cook, 2000).

Muslim Teachers vs. Non-Muslim Teachers at *Al-Amal*

Parents believe that having a Muslim teaching staff for their children is a necessity. As one mother explains, *"Since it is an Islamic school, it would be difficult to hire non Muslim teachers."* In the view of some parents, Muslim teachers present positive role models for their children. Most parents also express the fear that, due to the tendency of teachers to act as role models, non-Muslim instructors could subtly influence students to adopt unacceptable behaviors and beliefs. As a result, such parents approve of the school's hiring policies. However, other parents are worried that the school's policy of hiring only Muslim teachers—particularly with regard to science, mathematics, and English courses, where language is crucial—could be potentially detrimental to a high academic level. Olivia, an American teacher of high school English who is also a convert to Islam, explains the notion that one must be a Muslim to teach at *Al-Amal*:

> *According to what I know from my experience and working with the Arab world, in a lot*
> *of the schools where the staff is not Muslim, sometimes they don't take some of the things*

that we take in Islam seriously. Take, for instance, some of the holidays that in Islam we follow. We will try to impose this on students, and the students will say we can't do it that way because it is against our religion and they would say oh, never mind about that—it is not important. You have to live in the world today and your religion is not important and so on and so forth. So it does influence some of the students because they feel that their teachers do not care to follow these rules, so then they don't want to follow them either.

Interestingly, while most parents support the hiring of Muslim-only teachers, some express the concern that this policy creates a false or overly ideal Muslim community that is bounded by the context of the school. They suggest that such idealism is unfair to the students, who must sooner or later face the world beyond *Al-Amal,* one that is populated by all manner of individuals, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. And what if students go on to pursue their education in non-Muslim countries? How does this policy help them deal with such diverse communities? The administration's emphasis on this policy could reduce their opportunities of hiring qualified teachers. Maryam, the mother of a high school son, explains

> *The school administrators had deprived our children, because of their decisions regarding specific ideas [such as this], and that I believe is one of the reasons for the retrogression of the quality of the teachers, especially for the scientific subjects, where the school is really lacking.*

Although another mother expresses the idea that non-Muslim teachers are acceptable, she prefers Muslim teachers. She indicates:

> *If the school for any reason confronts difficulty in providing the school with Muslim teachers, then it might be acceptable to have non-Muslim teachers, but with one condition: that the teachers would not promote their own values that could clash with Islamic values and the school's tenor.*

Farah, another mother, expresses a similar viewpoint:

> *Even if the school would hire non-Muslim teachers they should at least be respectful to the context of the school and their tradition and values. This would allow students a chance to be exposed to another culture through those teachers. At the same time, students could preserve their own Islamic values and morals.*

School administrators do not hold such stringent policies regarding non-Muslim teachers alone; in fact, they would refuse to hire any Muslim teacher who embraces beliefs deemed corrupted and potentially offensive to parents and students.

Teacher Qualifications and Role-Modeling

Priorities with regard to teacher hiring are a source of conflict at *Al-Amal*. The administration's emphasis on the religious backgrounds of its faculty suggests to some that the school places this requirement above scholarly or educational qualifications and experience. This concern has led many parents to criticize the quality of teachers and to express the claim that the school's implementation of such a policy does not reflect real life situations. They argue that hiring teachers with weak educational backgrounds but strong religious backgrounds or a fluency in English negatively impacts the quality of their children's education. Parents complain that such teachers are inefficient both in teaching and in classroom management. Such parents view *Al-Amal* with skepticism. Sara, with frustration, described her daughter's experience with teachers who would not treat her with empathy—reflects:

> *It is a shame that such teachers' attitudes would be found in an Islamic school. When I compare such attitudes in Al-Amal with teachers from the American school there is a big difference. My daughter begged me to take her out of Al-Amal and transfer her to the American school—why? For the way the teachers there interact and socialize with the students. Would this happen in an Islamic school?*

However, this mother is still looking for a better alternative for her child, a school she believes can fulfill the expectations held by herself and by her daughter. Rose (1988) points out that teachers in religious schools should reveal "unconditional love to the students," and in fact the best teachers in such schools show concern for and evolve with students, just as they would their own families. A sense of humor also helps in the educational process, leading to a higher sense of motivation among students.

In such an atmosphere, students could feel relaxed and highly engaged in the learning process, not simply exist as passive recipients. I believe that since the school is oriented toward Islam and works to promote Islamic morals and behaviors among students, proper behavior among teachers—such as treating students with love and respect—must be unconditionally required. Teachers who do not adopt Islamic guiding principles would offend the school and the Islamic tenor it adopts, yet teachers who profess Islam but do not behave according to its

principles are to be observed and evaluated as well as reconsidered. Given that expression of belief in Islam alone does not make for a good Muslim—as is the case with any religion—but that proof is required through positive behavior, morals, and ethics, perhaps the administration of *Al-Amal* should consider hiring non-Muslims of good moral and ethical standing. Such a policy could help facilitate the religious dialogue that has been constantly called for in the wake of 9/11 and dampen the potential for "Islamophobia." Such teachers could, quite successfully, be incorporated into the general curriculum, where they could teach science, mathematics, and English, but perhaps not teach religious or Islamic studies. This policy would not contradict the overall focus of the school, but enhance it.

When it comes to Islamic values, the issue of whose values should be promoted occupied a goodly portion of my discussion with parents and teachers. As Olivia states, *"The main values that should be promoted here are the universal morals and values that can be called for in any culture and religion."* Some parents would not mind having non-Muslim teachers for their children, particularly if they were supervised to ensure that they were not inculcating their own religious beliefs. Such parents are hopeful that their children will have contact with other cultures and possess a clear understanding of others from their original perspective. This could help erase misconceptions on all sides.

Teachers' Methods for Instilling Religious Values and Principles

Al-Amal is built on a simple philosophy: it focuses on each student's development of a strong Muslim character that will allow them to become effective and productive members of society and, simultaneously, it attempts to reinforce the values inculcated in children by their parents. The two practices are considered inseparable. Basic Islamic values and principles are integrated not only within academic matters, but also in the children's daily experience and practices. Within the teachers at *Al-Amal*, the level of enthusiasm for these practices varies for several reasons, as indicated below.

Often, a teacher's religious background will indicate or shape the level of enthusiasm he or she exhibits regarding the tasks of introducing and integrating Islamic teachings with the subject they teach. As a result, part of this study must involve discovering what teachers think of having to fulfill this goal. Before doing so, however, it is important to understand the main role the school has created for itself, as well as how the teachers conceive their own roles in this plan. What differentiates *Al-Amal* from other schools is that it focuses not just on a student's Islamic

character but also on his or her academic performance or intellectual development. Handrich (1995) suggests that such schools should indeed place character and intellectual development as equal priorities. In order to provide students with a supportive environment in which they can learn these expressed lessons, however, one must be certain to select teachers willing and capable of shouldering such responsibility. Those teachers should be committed to the school's philosophy and expectations, and be willing to pursue without hesitation the promotion of students' values and Islamic morals. The mission of *Al-Amal* teachers is two-fold: to teach their academic subjects and promote students' religious and spiritual development. As the head of administration explains:

> *Teachers' involvement with our mission and how seriously they regard the school's philosophies varies. I wish that I could rely on every member of my staff to develop students morally and religiously. If I had such teachers, I don't think I would need to implement an Al-Amal curriculum in the school.*

Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik, (1990) argue that religious schools should never exclude teaching students the basic skills of writing and reading, essential educational skills they must develop in order to participate in society and the working world. He adds that such schools must be responsible for preparing their students for the future: they must prepare them to integrate themselves within their societies and cultures while still being true to their own principles. Accordingly, in order to ensure that children reach such levels, they must be taught by teachers who are well trained, dedicated, and can negotiate moral issues within the complex context of the classroom. At this point, as Goodlad et al. (1990) describe, such teachers can be called truly "professional."

Al-Amal teachers can be categorized into three groups. The first group of teachers is supportive of integrating Islamic themes as well as the *Al-Amal* behavioral curriculum into their subjects. The second group of teachers does not integrate these themes at all. The third group of teachers integrate them whenever there is a need to do so, but do not enforce them when they deem them unnecessary.

The religious background of most of the school's teachers can be described as conservative. Most of them originally applied to *Al-Amal* because of its Islamic orientation and the segregated environment its offers. Diema describes her own role as an educator:

It did encourage me that it [Al-Amal] was bilingual and it was Islamic. The setup was Islamic: the segregation of the teachers and the children was important to us. If you went to a foreign school you would have the men and the women hanging out together in the teachers' room. I don't like that kind of environment.

The school ensures that all teachers are Muslims and that they embrace what are deemed the "proper" Islamic beliefs. To that end, the school actually investigates their beliefs to determine whether they conform to expectations. In addition, teachers are obligated to attend a weekly Islamic lecture. Each Saturday, the school releases its students an hour early and holds lectures presided over by the administration which all teachers are expected to attend.   Such lectures focus on the *Al-Amal* curriculum. Teachers express varying responses to these lectures. Some of them praise the lectures as beneficial. Suzan, a social studies teacher in her mid-forties, indicates:

When I miss one of these lectures I really feel sad. When I first attended these lectures I became acquainted with how to integrate the lessons not only in my social studies class. What I really gained from the Al-Amal lectures was not limited to my subject—it also extended to my personal life.

Diema, however, finds such additional duties taxing and unnecessary. As she noted,

To be honest, some of us are not paying attention at Al-Amal classes. They are at the end of the day, and we don't take it that seriously. I am honest with you, not because we know it is not being applied. That is the problem. Actually, I think a lot of lectures are unsuccessful because they are very philosophical, a bit over our heads. Some of it we really don't get it.

Another teacher, Walaa, an elementary English teacher from one of the Middle East countries, who is in her second year of teaching at *Al-Amal,* explains her complaints about these lectures:

Most of the teachers who attend these weekly lectures are very tired of them. It is a religious lecture, and most of what has been introduced is already known. We don't feel that anything new is presented. The other thing is that attending such lectures is mandatory. If it was not for the attendance requirement, I am sure attendance would decline.

When I asked Nawal, head of the administration, about such complaints, she responded:

This is the school policy, and we deem our teachers as our partners in this institution.
Variation in enthusiasm concerning these lectures does exist, but we are trying our best
to develop our staff. At the same time, we aim to promote students' values and morals; we
are doing the same with our teachers through these lectures. Why do you think we teach
Al-Amal curriculum and themes in our school? Because these values and morals are
diminishing and fading from Muslims' lives. If we had a strong foundation of Islamic
values and morals we would not even need to teach the Al-Amal curriculum.

As the administrator explained, one of the main reasons for the lectures and for their stressing of the behavioral curriculum is that not all parents are successful in their attempts to teach *Tarbiyyah*—and some have given up completely. For this reason, the school feels it must shoulder the responsibility of preparing its students for life as practicing, productive Muslims.

Even though that the level of teachers' enthusiasm for infusing Islamic principles into their subjects varies, most view their relationships with students as a matter of great responsibility. Some even view the students as their own children, and they attempt to show their empathy and concern and are very interested in helping modify unacceptable behavior, as would a parent. Suzan describes her work:

I see myself not only as a teacher but more as one who is raising children, and I am
looking forward to raising those youngest Muslims. I believe my responsibility
concerning this perspective would be more than what their real mothers are expected to.

The nature and perception of one's job shapes the way he or she views giving, sincerity, and commitment. These characteristics or traits are crucial components not only of education but also of *Tarbiyyah*. Dedicated Muslim teachers view themselves as responsible before Allah and accept that they should shoulder the responsibility not only of teaching at their best but also of dealing with students as human beings, not just as learners. Rose (1988) points out that teachers in religious schools do shoulder a challenging mission: they are responsible both for academic development and for moral and social development. The "unconditional love" that Rose (1988) pointed out is the key for academic, spiritual, and social development. An inseparable component of their work also involves guiding students to an awareness of right versus wrong. Suzan explains such responsibility in nurturing students morally and Islamically:

I always tell my students that the little tree you all see in the street is surrounded and
supported with sticks, so what do you think those sticks are for? They help the tree grow

90

straight. In our school, that is our responsibility. What you are learning of values and the morals we are emphasizing—those are the sticks that will help you straighten in your life. As soon as you strengthen you will be able to handle your life in a manner that would satisfy Allah.

Methods Teachers Adopt to Promote Students Morally and Religiously

The methods educators use to teach and inculcate proper principles and morals vary greatly and depend a good deal upon the situation as well as the age of the targeted student groups. One of the primary methods used is the simple giving of advice.

Direct Advice

Dedicated teachers take every opportunity to infuse values and are particularly adept at using such direct methods as the giving of advice. For example, if there is a problem in class—perhaps, a disagreement between students—such a teacher would immediately switch the focus of the lesson to what Allah said in the Holy *Qur'an* or what the Prophet Muhammad (saas) might indicate concerning such issues, then they would attempt to solve the present problem through advice or quotations from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. On one occasion, for example, as a teacher distributed quizzes on the day of an exam, she reminded students of the *hadith* by the Prophet Muhammad (saas): those who cheat cannot be part of the Muslim community. One student replied *"Miss, we don't do such things. We have Taqwa [fear of Allah], and if you were not watching us, Allah would be watching us."* The teacher then smiled and said, *"Yes, I know that. I just wanted to remind you!"* As I watched students take the exam, it appeared that they had taken the lesson to heart: I saw no one try to look at her friend's paper.

During their lessons, no matter what the subject, such teachers attempt to make connections between the various academic matters and the *Al-Amal* curriculum (behavioral curriculum) and Islamic Studies. For example, as a social studies class discussed the Gulf Cooperation Counsel, their teacher took the opportunity to bring up the concepts of brotherhood and how Muslims should view the potential relationships that could grow from this concept. She brought in verses from the holy *Qur'an* and discussed how Kuwait as a Muslim country helps other countries in need. When it comes to ingraining such values, teachers choose to demonstrate what benefits both parties would receive, which stresses the concept of mutuality.

Teachers claim they attempt to incorporate both *Al-Amal* behavioral themes and Islamic values into their subjects, but that of the two they believe they should definitely emphasize the

latter—identifying what is *Haraam* and what is *Halaal*. Yet they also suggest that neither focus can be brought in arbitrarily but must be incorporated intelligently, when circumstances warrant. One example is offered by Noor, a fifteen-year-old ninth grader, about how her teachers integrate advice for students whenever there is a need:

> *Once, a girl from another class came in to our classroom and opened the door without even knocking, and our teacher told that girl, "You don't do that in Islam. We should ask permission before we enter." The girl smiled and then apologized for her behavior.*

Diema, the English teacher, explains her thoughts concerning this issue:

> *I am very committed to applying Islam, and I always apply Islam in my classes. I know Dien, I am a Muslim, and everybody should know these kinds of things. We translate hadith. Once we were having trouble in grade six with students misbehaving. They were telling one of the girl's secrets, and I told the girls who told these secrets that Allah observed your bad behavior, even if you are covering for your sister or brother. So when you do something wrong and you don't tell anybody, you have made a mistake, for Allah might reveal those problems. The kids [were amazed] and said, "Miss, you know Hadith!" and I said, "Oh, girls, are you surprised because I'm an English teacher who knows it? I mean we are all Muslims."*

Teaching of Biographies

One of the most fruitful ways to incorporate the teaching of Islamic values into the traditional curriculum is through the discussion of important figures in the history of the religion. Through such biographies, students can be taught that Islam is a lived faith whose leaders immersed themselves in traditional values and principles. The teacher Manal explains her methods in integrating such values:

> *There are a lot of stories in Islamic history and the biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (saas), and his followers or Sahabah (companions of the Prophet Muhammad) that would be a rich source for supporting my attempts to promote such values and reach students regarding internalizing these morals. Utilizing these historical biographies would allow students to construct an accurate conviction because the Prophet Muhammad and sahabah are considered our models as Muslims and their behaviors and acts are a rich reference for moral training.*

92

Utilizing this method of teaching not only aims to instill specific values but also attempts to teach as Kergaye, the principal of an Islamic school called *Iqra* mentioned: "Teach students to be proud of who they are . . . to not be scared to say they are Muslims…" (in Mogahed, 2002, p. 26). Such lessons teach students not merely to understand but to be proud of their Islamic heritage. Such a sense can be generated through teachers who shape students' perceptions within the frame of their religion. This awareness or comprehension should be anchored to what students read in their Islamic history and *Sahabah* biographies. At the same time they study works original to their faith or read about such figures as *Ali Bin Abi Talib*, students at *Al-Amal* also become aware of traditional literary forms and cover Shakespeare, as well as other important authors. Such a blending plays an important role in contributing to the formation of the Muslim student's identity (Mogahed, 2002).

The use of biographies is crucial to the development of a student's Muslim identity because it provides role models worthy of emulation. However, the providing of role models does not end there; instead, it extends to the very individuals who teach the courses, the teachers themselves. Teachers are invaluable assets in the shaping of student's awareness of their responsibilities as good Muslims. Since teachers can be so influential in the lives of their students, however, care must be taken to ensure that they are providing the correct behaviors, that they do not, in fact, teach students behaviors and principles that are at odds with the tenets of Islam.

Teachers as Role Models

The school demands that all of its teachers represent good Muslim role models in the way they act and teach, as well as the way they interact with students either in class or out. It is not enough in Islam to be knowledgeable—what really matters is the application of these religious principles and values[18].

Islam is not made up solely of rituals; instead, it is a living religion that emphasizes how one should deal with or respect others. Accordingly, the practicing of such behaviors in an Islamic institution is simply expected. Implementing Islamic behaviors among students is, however, a great responsibility, and in order to help students internalize such values, the

---

[18] Allah said to the Prophet Muhammed, (saas) "It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over [their faults], and ask for [Allah's] forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs [of moment]. Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust [in Him]" (Al 'Omran, 159).

modeling of such behaviors by *Al-Amal* teachers is an important component—perhaps the most important component of all.

Shamma (2000) explains that role modeling plays a critical role in teaching values to young children, whether done so intentionally or unintentionally. If such modeling were misrepresented it unfortunately would dismantle the most significant and desired morals and virtues. Children learn in a very hidden way. For example, some teachers would be the first ones to head to the mosque when the prayer break starts, while others remain outside, picking up litter around the grounds in an effort to make the environment clean. On one occasion when a teacher entered her classroom and stopped to begin picking up paper that was on the floor, her students pitched in to help her. Although the teacher never asked them to help—and some teachers would not believe asking was acceptable—it was clear that the students participated out of respect for their teacher and as an act and practice that Muslims should adopt and implement. Allah has sent many people to serve as their role models. Selecting the most effective person to serve as the role model is crucial to ensuring that students adopt Islamic morals and behaviors accurately.

Al-Amal calls teachers' attention to the significance of integrating Islamic principles and morals not only into academic subjects but also into daily practices. The main incentive for the school's administration to infuse such integration stems from the fact that, traditionally, the two areas are separated, mutually exclusive. Additionally, it is obvious that those who design most of the popular curricula intentionally eliminate from it the potential for spiritual integration simply because for most institutions, such integration is not called for. In "regular" curricula, religious and spiritual aspects have been marginalized, if not eliminated altogether. Ashraf (1993) points out that

> The main job for religious education . . . is to help children attain that spiritual cognition of that innate norm . . . [I]t is this norm that should help scholars formulate basic concepts for all branches of knowledge. Only then will we realize that they can never be neutral, nor can they be completely segregated into separate hierarchical units. (p. 17)

In order to accomplish its goals, *Al-Amal* is confronted by many challenges. It must create harmony between the religious Islamic curriculum and the American-modeled curriculum (which covers such subjects as mathematics and science). It must ensure the integration of Islamic morals and values into all of the traditional subjects it teaches, as well as into the textbooks it uses, whether they are written in Arabic or English. While the school's teachers take

94

their responsibilities in this program seriously, they point out how difficult it can be to successfully accomplish all of these goals, particularly given constraints of time, curricular focus, and daily tasks. Some teachers find it easier to integrate religious values into their subjects, as do the social studies teachers, who in discussing social dilemmas can refer to examples from the *Qur'an* or another vital source. Dien, Arabic, and English classes and even science integrate these lessons more easily. However, mathematics teachers have a generally harder time of integrating some of these Islamic or religious concepts. As one math teacher notes:

> *Compared to other subjects, it is hard sometimes for us, especially in math, to integrate into our lessons the Islamic values and principles. In other subjects, such inclusion is smoother. However, I tried to include some of the Islamic principles such as Zakat, and build some of the math problems upon such concepts. Math basically is very pure knowledge, not so much value-based, except for the values we as teachers try to bring to our students as advice for their lives.*

Regardless of the subject they teach, however, *Al-Amal* teachers must make a concerted effort to activate students' Islamic conscious (Momentum, 1994).

Through role modeling, teachers provide a primary method for helping ingrain Islamic values and principles into their students' everyday lives. Handrich (1995) points out that gifted teachers by their very nature bring positive values and virtues into the classroom, and that it does not matter in the least what type of subject they teach. My observations at *Al-Amal* indicate to me that while some teachers watch their behavior because they are keenly aware of being observed as Muslim teachers in an Islamic school, others simply believe in and embrace Islamic values and hence bring them naturally into the classroom.

Teachers' Performance and the Image of the Islamic School

As a result of the philosophical foundation it has adopted, *Al-Amal* faces some significant pressures from those who have for a variety of reasons put its curriculum under a microscope. Those outside the school—casual visitors and those who are intentionally watching events there—maintain certain rigid expectations about what the school is and what it teaches, and they often judge it harshly. They expect specific Islamic behaviors from administrators, teachers, and students. Should anyone from any of these groups be discovered to have "misbehaved," outsiders often take the opportunity to question the efficacy of applying Islamic Studies within

the educational context. By asking "Why would such values be taught but not practiced?" they assert that Islamic values are taught but not practiced.

By their very nature, religious schools shoulder a great responsibility with regard to discipline, behavioral teachings, and moral issues—far greater than their secular counterparts. They are expected to ensure that all involved behave accordingly. The main reason for such attention to this aspect is that a religious school has a far different context, as well as aims. As O'Brien explains, "Behavior is viewed in moralistic terms. The evangelical mission of religious schools influences teachers to view behavior in moralistic terms and to recast issues within a moral framework" (in Denig, 1996, p. 13). In this respect, the viewpoints of Christians and Muslims overlap.

Although teachers at *Al-Amal* are expected to conform to expectations regarding behavior, I witnessed some behavior indicating that while Islamic values were taught, they were not always practiced. Obviously, this could affect the Islamic mission of the school. Since the teachers are expected to dress conservatively at school, the casual observer might expect that their behaviors must likewise be conservative—clearly erroneous, since the assumption is based solely on exterior appearance, which is a faulty measure, but nonetheless a prevalent viewpoint. When I attended class, I tried to imagine myself as a student being shaped by some of the teachers' demeanor and personality. Sometimes, particularly in the high school classes, I witnessed responses from some teachers that were not in keeping with Islamic principles. Dealing with teenagers in any context can be difficult—whether the school is religious or secular—but when one adds to that the stresses of classroom management and curricular demands, it often proves impossible to maintain composure, empathy, and respect, behaviors that are important to a good Muslim character. Occasionally, most certainly as a result of these pressures, some *Al-Amal* teachers lost control.

Obviously, even the best teacher can have a bad day. During my observation I noted some teachers acting in ways that by some Muslims could be construed as not aligned with Islamic values. Handrich (1995) relates how students obtain profound and high-quality levels of learning when their teachers allocate more effort and time to promoting values and virtues that intersect with their subjects. I was able to observe that the "humanist"[19] (Denig, 1996) teachers at

---

[19] Denig (1996) points out that "humanist" teachers influence students behavior in positive ways and thus affect discipline through example and respect, while "custodial" teachers simply attempt to control, often through fear.

Al-Amal were far more attentive to students and actively engaged with them than those who might be described as merely "custodial" (Denig, 1996).

During the two school years I visited *Al-Amal*, I met with teachers who would not show any sign of empathy with their students, or even smile in their classes. For example, one day during one of the classes, a teacher caught a girl writing in her notebook rather than taking notes. The teacher addressed the girl in a harsh tone: *"I thought you were copying what I was explaining!"* She then shot her a look of blame and grabbed the piece of notebook paper from the girl, keeping it. The entire classroom fell into silence, and the students glanced sideways at the offending student to gauge her reaction. This same teacher rarely smiles at her students and even when students ask important questions, she shows little interest in helping them. I sensed no sign of empathy or feelings from this teacher; the relationship between the people in the class was always as impassive as the lesson itself.

Even when I approached that specific teacher to ask her for an interview, she did not smile. When I met one of the mothers whose daughter is being taught by this teacher, she addressed this issue in a very low tone mixed with sorrow:

> *This is an Islamic school. It is encouraged by Islam to treat others well and show them empathy and at least smile. Why, if we visit an American or British school or any other foreign school we would immediately compare their behaviors with this school! We compare the welcoming and the smile in these schools with Al-Amal. It is a disappointment for us as Muslims. [She then recites the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (saas)]: "Smiling at your brother's face is a kind of charity." Where is the application for such behaviors that have been promoted by the Prophet Muhammad (saas)? For us as conservative parents we considered Al-Amal to be our hope. Unfortunately, this hope faded with the reality that our children are facing within the school.*

One mother I interviewed described one of her daughters' teachers in this way: *"That teacher. You should put an X on her."* This mother's gesture indicated her opinion that the teacher was ineffective in dealing with students and might even view them as a threat.

In any type of school, teachers who exhibit strict, tough personalities in the classroom create communication boundaries between themselves and their students that often cannot be overcome. It is obvious that discipline is one of the major concerns for both teachers and parents—and that often the most effective way to ensure discipline is to exert swift and harsh

control. Such a concern for discipline is not limited to public schools but exists also in religious schools. Denig (1996) adds that in religious schools—his study focused on Catholic schools—teachers tend to be more humanistic although "no explanation for this phenomenon was proposed" (p. 5). Yet, from my observation at *Al-Amal* I can say that custodial teachers also exist, even at a school where the administrators have made every effort to find instructors who will positively influence their students. Such teachers tend to view students as adversaries, and in order to eliminate the potential threat they represent, they attempt to exert control through fear and anger (Denig, 1996). Denig's analysis is confirmed by the statement of that teacher, who explains:

> Last year I gave the students a chance and tried to communicate on a more personal level with them, but they misused the situation, and they were out of control. They misunderstand such a relationship; they are not used to it. So this year I have changed my attitude on how to deal with them in the classroom.

In addition to the personality that an Islamic school teachers should adopt, it is also necessary to consider the academic and the educational levels of those teachers. What I noticed during my presence at *Al-Amal* was that there was no discernible difference between the teaching styles in the Islamic studies courses and those in other areas of the curriculum. Islamic schools typically depend on traditional methods of teaching mainly on memorization; however, at *Al-Amal* such a strategy is found not only in the Islamic studies classes but also in all others. Ashraf (1993) comments that religious education teachers should be characterized by specific qualifications and abilities. One of the most crucial of these abilities is guiding learners toward what he calls "religious sensibility," an idea that encompasses all aspects of learning, including the material, spiritual, and ethical dimensions.

Islamic education must be handled in a very delicate manner. My experience teaching this subject indicates to me the degree to which it is indivisible from our lives as Muslims; however, teachers must also focus their lectures around material that will help students prepare for tests, so there is also a certain amount of formality to its teaching. Some teachers try their best to relate to students' daily experiences, but doing so is not a priority; what is a priority is delivering the information first, just as would be the case in a mathematics or science classroom. As Sara explains,

The methods and the teaching styles adopted by some of the teachers here at Al-Amal are very traditional, although there are some teachers who are really well-liked because they adopt very interesting methods, and at the same time they show their students love and friendship.

Tauhidi (2002) criticizes how often in Islamic education teachers focus mostly on information that they expect students to memorize rather than concentrate on promoting students' personal development. If such an approach is used in Islamic studies, it could result in distancing students from their religion and in encouraging them to view it as irrelevant to their daily experiences and not worthy of adopting as their "life curriculum." As Tauhidi (2002) has warned, shifting the focus in Islamic studies from morals, values, and social development to merely memorizing dates and names can fail to provide students with the main spiritual and religious skills that would support them in their lives and help them interact productively with their societies. Despite Tauhidi's (2002) criticisms concerning some of the pedagogical methods that have been adopted for use in Islamic studies, they are still used.

However, at *Al-Amal*, teachers seemed to make a concerted effort to model what might be called proper Islamic behavior. They would smile, banter with the girls, and if they witnessed any unwanted behavior, they would whisper in order not to offend students and avoid embarrassing them in front of the class -admirable behavior to many. The teachers are considerate of students' feelings and personalities in this way. One example is Sana, a Kuwaiti religion teacher in her mid twenties whose body is covered in the traditional black cloth, leaving only her face bare. When I observed her eighth grade class on a test day, the first thing she asked students to do upon entering the classroom was to make their desks orderly. She picked up some of papers and pencils from the ground and put them on the desks herself. Such behavior would be worthy of modeling, even if it was not intended to be so. During the test, Sana did not separate the girls' desks, as I witnessed other teachers doing. She trusted her students and believed that they would fear that Allah was watching their behavior, as she later explained to me. From my observation, Sana's students were on task working on this test and did not attempt to cheat by any means.

Simultaneously the school emphasizes the significant role that religious inculcation should play in the everyday lives of its students and teachers. However, the level of religious involvement and attention to Islamic standards and principles demanded by the school

can, in some cases, differ markedly from what is expected by parents. The next chapter introduces similarities and differences between the values the school attempts to highlight and the values that parents anticipate that the school will ingrain and promote in their children.

CHAPTER 8

VALUES PRIORITIZED BY PARENTS

One of the main points made by all parties involved with the school, from administrators to teachers, parents to students, is that they view *Al-Amal* as a shelter from and shield against the negative values of the outside world. Haneef, Yousof, Amin, & Noon (2002) indicate that "values are reflected by behavior and that religion plays an important role in [a] Malaysian's values formation" (p. 58). Haneef's quote is remarkably similar to the sentiment expressed by Nawal, who said: *"Religion is considered to be the main source of tarbiyyah. Islam, with all its values and virtues, is a divine instructor to humanity."* *Al-Amal* curriculum, the behavioral curriculum that stresses Islamic principles and morals, is considered a crucial step toward reformation of the students' social behavior. The values inherent in Islam involve the religious, the social, and the personal attempt to create the basis of each student's development of a positive Muslim character that influences his or her behaviors and actions (Haneef et al., 2002).

Thus, in addition to empowering students through religious education, *Al-Amal* attempts through its behavioral curriculum to strengthen them morally and ethically. The behavioral curriculum, including both classes and personal activities, trains students to develop themselves externally (observable actions) and internally (consciousness). Both kinds of training—external and internal—involve promoting such virtues as love and justice and stress a constant following up of lessons in everyday life (Haneef et al., 2002). As a result of their study of the relationship between values and social problems in Malaysian teenagers, Haneef et al. (2002) was able to determine that "good values terminal and instrumental lead to less involvement in social problems" (p. 72). Solid religious understanding helps create a healthy, balanced and moral society, but in addition the individual must internalize appropriate values and virtues (Haneef et al., 2002)

Although that *Al-Amal* stresses what it believes to be a relatively comprehensive curricula involving religious and behavioral education, some differences exist among parents regarding what they believe should be stressed or de-emphasized by the school. While they can all agree that values, ethics, and proper behavior, as well as faith should be instilled in their children, the emphasis they place on each component varies in degree.

Parents' Values vs. *Al-Amal*'s Values: A Comparison

Even among conservative Muslim families, variations exist as to which values and morals are stressed. Regardless of their differences, however, parents of *Al-Amal* students agree that Islamic values form the cornerstone for establishing and developing their children spiritually and socially: they all agree that such values and principles are important and should be taught and enforced. The sphere of learning and enforcement does not stop with the home, but should extend to the school. Since the parents I interviewed tend to agree that *Al-Amal* should reinforce the values and principles taught in the home, interesting questions arise: Is there a difference between the morals and values stressed by conservative and non-conservative parents? What sorts of values do they expect the school to emphasize and promote?

Parents' Values

The main value that any Muslim parent impresses upon his, her children would be *Taqwaa*, a term which means variously *Allah-fearing*, righteousness, and piety (Saleh, 2002, p. 108). Parents believe that strengthening such a foundation within their children from their early years helps them develop the personality of a good Muslim. Nadia, the thirty-years-old and Islamic studies *Dien* teacher for elementary classes teacher, expands on this:

> *Most of the parents I deal with want their children to be raised with a fear of Allah, but in a moderate way, not radical. My experience shows that these values have already been implanted in the children. They actually do understand the meaning of the fear of Allah and, driven by this understanding, they know they should anticipate Heaven (Jannah) and fear Hell (Nar).*

Al-Amal attempts to strengthen the parents' emphasis on *Taqwaa* by promoting it from the kindergarten level in Islamic studies classes, in the behavioral curriculum, and in other courses. By its very nature such an education involves stressing the conception that a devout Muslim must fear Allah. This fear must be internalized, as it provides the faithful with the ability to develop self-censorship. Sixteen-year-old Nora, the high school student, indicates that what she most appreciates from the school is *"studying Al-Amal curriculum [which] shelters us even from ourselves when sometimes we might be driven away from righteousness."* This is the core of the Muslim's goal in life: to do what Allah asks and avoid what He would find displeasing. Securing this value lays the foundation for other values that parents esteem, such as respect, brotherhood and sisterhood, universal values, and enthusiasm for their religion, among others.

Respect for Parents

Most of the parents I interviewed believed it crucial that their children learn to be respectful not only of their parents but of all elders. Respecting parents and showing them loyalty are manifested socially by Muslims through the acts of kissing the mothers' and fathers' heads and lowering their tone of voice when they speak to their parents. *Al-Amal* highlights these themes, including in its curricula specific sections on how to show respect, how children's duties are defined, and how children can best please parents. Such lessons are vital because in Islam, Allah's satisfaction with his servants relies in part on their ability to respect and get along with their parents. *Al-Amal* extends these lessons beyond the parents, however, to include teachers, extended family members, and neighbors—anyone worthy of respect with whom the children come into contact. The lessons seem to be having an impact. Tybia, a mother in her mid-forties, consistently repeated the impact of the school on her children:

> *What I have noticed with my daughter is that she has learned more about respecting her parents and elders. When she gets out of the car every morning she kisses my head and my hands, and her father's as well. And if once in awhile she might forget to do that she always returns to the car and tells us "I did not kiss you today." Then she does it! I am really happy with such acts, such examples of kindness, love, and respect . . . Yes! Thanks to Allah.*

Respecting Brotherhood and Sisterhood

Islam also emphasizes the ability of individuals to love their brothers and sisters—literal ones, as well as metaphoric ones. To treat their birth siblings and other "siblings" in Allah with respect, kindness, and love extends their understanding of true Islamic principles. Tybia indicates that she highly values the evidence that her children love each other:

> *I don't like for my kids to fight, or quarrel with each other. I always tell them that they are brothers and sisters, and thanks to Allah Al-Amal really did promote such values through teaching them the concept of brotherhood.*

In order to truly develop feelings of sisterhood and brotherhood, children must learn to appreciate such values as sharing, forgiving, empathizing, and helping each other. Again, *Al-Amal* seems to be successful in this endeavor. Farah noted, for example:

> *My son who is in the second grade, used sometimes get into fights with his twin sister then he would revise his attitude. He would tell me "Mom, I have brotherhood and I will*

share with my sister.' It is really a good feeling to hear my son say that and have such values."[20]

Like most parents everywhere, parents of *Al-Amal* students want first and foremost for their children to be good human beings. Thus, they want their children to be honest, cooperative, giving, generous, and merciful, among other traits. However, their interpretation of what makes a good human being is invariably shaped by Islamic principles, so all of these universal values must be framed through and by an understanding of the roles they play in Islam. Diema notes, *"I would like for my children through the Islamic curriculum to know the basics about Islam, which—thanks to Allah—they are learning. Actually, they are learning more than the basics!"*

Enthusiasm for Their Religion

Another crucial value emphasized by *Al-Amal* parents is the development in their children of a passion for and attachment to their religion. Diema explains her desire for her child to be an enthusiastic Muslim:

> *I really want for my child to come around in his religion, and I want him to have a strong enthusiasm for knowing more about Islam. As a Muslim mother, I know that children do come with Islamic values, morals, and knowledge of how to treat and behave with others. Besides that, though, I would love for them to have enthusiasm for Islam. This is what I really, really, really want in my children. Because maybe, being a convert, I have that enthusiasm. Especially in the beginning, you know, when you first come to Islam, you are really enthusiastic and you want to do all those Dawah [call, invitation: calling people to Allah or to Islam, or any religion]. And I would love for my child to have the same passion.*

Respect for Rituals: Prayer

Rituals are vital components of Islam. Teaching and performing them begin at an early age. For example, children are trained in prayers from the early age of seven, even though their understanding is incomplete and their actions might be considered to be of the puppetry stage according to the Prophet Muhammad's (saas) *hadith*. Conservative parents most definitely follow the tenet of teaching their children to pray and making them accustomed to the ritual obligation, since in Islam, prayer is one of the components by which the individual is

---

[20] Such values are enforced by the Qura'nic verse of: "The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two [contending] brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy" (Hujraat **10**).

"measured" in the hereafter. Conservative Muslim parents anticipate that their children will eventually move from performing the prayers by rote to performing them out of a deepening sense of faith. Such an evolution involves faithful engaging in the daily prayers (Haynes, 1998).

If such parents emphasize prayer at home, then they most certainly expect the religious school they choose to place equal importance on the ritual. *Al-Amal* has made significant contributions to this basic component of its students' faith. The school assigns a break for the *Duher Adhan* (call for prayer), and the call goes out to the entire school through the public address system. Sometimes the prayer call is led by a male teacher, but sometimes the radio is used for the purpose. At the elementary level, the school includes a very nice practice: all of the boys between the ages of seven and ten lined up in the hallway in two long lines to pray as they do in the mosque with one of them situated or designated as an *Imam.*[21] Elementary school girls were holding *hijab* to wear in the school's mosque.

On each floor of the school, special rooms are designated for prayer, either in groups or individually, informally or formally (as with the *Dien* classes, wherein students learn the correct rituals regarding prayer). No student is allowed to remain in class during the prayer break: they must either go into a room for prayer or go downstairs. When I asked some of the girls who did not pray why they chose not to, some responded that they preferred to pray at home, but others indicated they were unable to pray because they were menstruating[22].

When I entered the prayer room for girls, I noticed that while some of those in attendance prayed individually, others prayed with their teachers. This strikes me as a perfect example of how *Al-Amal* attempts to teach its students that Islam is not a lesson to be taught but a faith to be lived and experienced. With its teachers providing examples, *Al-Amal* shows its students that the rituals impressed upon them by their faith have a meaning in everyday life. Clearly, the lesson is sinking in. One day, as time neared for the kindergarten class to be over, I observed a mother enthusiastically talking to the principal. She was talking about how her five-year-old daughter would imitate her every time she prayed. The mother said,

---

[21] A leader or head: the person who regularly leads congregational prayer in a mosque, whether officially appointed or not (Saleh, 2002, p. 40).

[22] In the *Hadith*: (*Sahih Al Bukhari*Book *003, Number 0662*) *Mu'adha said: I asked 'A'isha: What is the reason that a menstruating woman completes the fasts (that she abandons during her monthly course). But she does not complete the prayers? She (Hadrat 'A'isha) said: Are you a Haruriya? I said: I am not a Haruriya, but I simply want to inquire. She said: We passed through this (period of menstruation), and we were ordered to complete the fasts, but were not ordered to complete the prayers.*

I really cannot describe the feelings I have each time I see my child want to pray. I am really happy with that. Thanks to Allah, the principal was listening and smiling back and saying "Thanks to Allah! May Allah bless your girl in her life."

Respect for Rituals: Fasting During Ramadan

Another ritual Muslim parents want their children to perform is fasting during Ramadan. The atmosphere adopted by *Al-Amal* during this period encourages students to conform to expectations regarding such rituals, as the entire schools fasts except for kindergartners, first, and second graders. Although Muslims are not held accountable for fasting until they reach the age of puberty, the adoption of this practice at *Al-Amal* is meant to inculcate in students from an early age the principles and tenets of the Muslim faith. Even younger children, who are permitted to eat during the period, show respect for those who are fasting by not eating in front of them. As Maryam explains,

The context here at Al-Amal requires that even those who are not fasting would not eat in public in the school. Most of the school is fasting and at home all of the family members are also fasting. So, thanks to Allah, the child spontaneously would take up such a practice when he or she grows up. What I basically expected from an Islamic school was that my children at least would learn the basics, the prayers, reading the Qur'an, and fasting during Ramadan. Everybody fasts together and here it is the norm, whereas if you are in a foreign school probably the question of whether you should fast or not would be raised. You know? It would be strange. [In such a school] my daughter would be standing out and facing incredible pressure, whereas here, thanks to Allah, this is like so normal. This is like a regular way of life.

Respect for Rituals: Wearing the Hijab

Another ritual or rule emphasized by the school is the females' wearing of a *Hijab*, a practice that must begin when they enter seventh grade. When in the fifth grade, girls begin preparing for the stricter dress codes of conservative Islamic practice by adopting a school uniform that consists of a long dress. The long dress and the *Hijab* are meant to promote the female students' sense of decency. In Islam the *Hijab* is mandatory for females as soon as they reach the age of accountability—essentially puberty, when they begin to develop physically. While in school, they are taught not to wear styles of clothing that reveal any part of their bodies. This does not mean that they must wear the *Hijab* outside school; in fact, some girls would wear

106

it the moment they enter the school each day and then remove it when they leave. Yet the school attempts to enforce the rule within its walls as a means of promoting the female students' involvement with and understanding of Islam. One day during an observation, I sat behind a girl who was not wearing her *Hijab*—just the long blue dress with its white long-sleeved shirt. However, on another day I went to the main office, where I again saw the girl wearing her *Hijab*. It occurred to me that she did so on that occasion because she might run into a male student or teacher. Later, I had a chance to interview her mother, who told me the following story:

> *Her father constantly asks her why [she is] not wearing the Hijab, and she replies to her*
> *father, "I am still not at the age where I have to wear it. It is not required at my age."*
> *Her father said that there are girls younger than you who wear the Hijab, yet you do not.*
> *She said, "No, I am not wearing it until I reach the age [where she is accountable]."*

Regardless of this student's resistance to the *Hijab* on general occasions, the school is quite strict regarding the rules of *Hijab*, even obligating teachers, staff, and female janitors to wear one.

Clearly, the school attempts, through its Islamic Studies curriculum, to modify and reform students' behaviors according to the principles of their religion. Such modification involves teaching students to develop the sense of "self-censorship" that will permit them to become responsible and accountable for their actions. However, attempting such a monumental task is not always easy—or successful—even if the child comes from a conservative religious background, which emphasizes the same principles and morals. Children are individuals, and they often act contradictorily to what they are taught. Maryam describes this difficulty:

> *It is very, very, very hard to instill, very hard because my children are born Muslim and,*
> *thanks to Allah, my daughter wears the Hijab, she prays, and everything, but still just a*
> *little bit. The full flame is not there. But in anyone born a Muslim, such behavior is just*
> *the way of life for them every day.*

In general, the parents with whom I spoke view *Al-Amal* as a school which creates the sort of productive, nurturing environment their children need in order to grow up strong in their faith and develop spiritual stability. Even the students themselves explain the influences of such an environment on them and how it affects their decision to wear the Hijab forever. Malak, a ninth grader wearing a white *Hijab* explained some of her friends' experiences with the traditional covering:

You might see most of the students do wear Hijab, but not all of them are committed to wearing it outside the school. They wear it inside the school just because of school policy. Even though most of us do wear it during the day, after awhile we found out that those girls decided by themselves to commit to wearing the hijab forever, and they would announce such commitment in front of the class. We celebrate such an act with our teacher, because that decision is valuable.

Family Values vs. School Values: Variations and Contradictions

The fact that *Al-Amal* is a religious school means that occasionally it will emphasize values that are not being stressed at home. Inevitably, what might be informally called "value variation" occurs. Often, this is preferred, because then the school can cover for its students Islamic principles that they are not learning at home. Sometimes, though, it can provoke problems, particularly when parents find problematic the school assuming the "parental" role. Ideally, parents who send their children to Islamic schools share all of the principles and morals that will be emphasized by the educators there; however, this is not always the case.

Despite the fact that both school and home desire to promote within children an Islamic foundation for the development of morals and principles, the two sides do not always agree on which morals and principles should be stressed or to what degree. It would be hard to find extreme contradictions in how the two sides view these values, but some difference does occasionally exist. For example, sometimes at home parents will to some extent be lenient or easy-going about certain aspects of Islamic training and bend the "rules"—such as girls wearing the *Hijab*—while *Al-Amal* requires students to conform to the same rule while they are on school grounds.

One such instance of conflict arose when the school reserved an amusement park for a field trip for its female students. Most of the students refused to attend the trip because they objected to the fact that the school had imposed a dress code for those girls who intended to go, despite the fact that no males would be present. A staff person visited the eighth grade class I was observing to tell students that

If you want to come you have to wear a long dress with pants under it, with your Hijab on your head. No pants with shirts will be allowed, and if you come with these clothes you will return home. And if you do not come to the field trip you will be considered absent from school that day.

After this announcement had been made, one could tell simply by observing the students' facial expressions that they were disappointed. Some of them whispered to each other, with frowns on their faces, that they would not go to the park. The staff person who announced the dress code did not entertain questions or in any way discuss student complaints. Later, one of the mothers told me the following:

> *My daughter did not want go, and she said it is too much, you know. She is a teenager and likes to dress and show off—that's normal. Her father told her to follow the school rules, and I told her if you want to go, do not take off your Hijab. Be careful. People will mock such behaviors. Finally she went, even though she was not convinced about the dress code the school enforced.*

Despite her basic disagreement with the school's restrictions on this occasion, the mother did not contradict, question, or deride the dress code, at least in front of her daughter. On the contrary, this mother wanted to show her daughter a situation of familial correspondence with the school's philosophy. She was also motivated by a mother's concern: she wanted her child to have fun and if doing so meant she had to conform to the dress code, then so be it. She did note, however, that her older daughter—who also attends the school—chose not to attend the field trip because of the restrictions. On the whole, parents seek to bring their own views into harmony with school rules and conditions—even though some view the rules as "*exaggerated*"—because to do so created less of a sense of confusion for their children.

This is not the case with all parents, however. Some disagree with some of *Al-Amal*'s rules and inform their children of this disagreement, which can, at times, make the teachers' jobs complicated. *Al-Amal* teachers tend to accept this attitude as the parental prerogative, no matter how much they might disagree with its potential results. As one explains:

> *In this school we teach the children about, for example, forgiveness, and we as Al-Amal teachers guide the students and train them in these values, in order to help them to internalize them. Sometimes, though, we find out that the parents, on the other hand, inculcate in their child a different view of forgiveness. For example, some teach that if a child is hit, he or she should hit back rather than forgive.*

The teacher expressed her frustration, as well as her sorrow, with such a method of child rearing. Teaching forgiveness is one of the primary goals of teachers at *Al-Amal*, and to see it so contradicted by a parent is disheartening. Yet, they refrain from telling students that their parents

are perhaps misleading them in their views. A *Dien* Islamic studies elementary teacher explains the touchiness of the situation. She notes that some of the children in *Al-Amal* come from

> *Free, non-conservative backgrounds. Even some of the mothers do not wear Hijab. In class, we explain to students the typical dress for a Muslim woman. The child then goes home and questions his or her mother about why she is not wearing the Hijab. Such contradictions can lead to embarrassing situations.*

Another *Dien* Islamic studies secondary teacher states:

> *The values and principles we are teaching students are the basic foundation of Islamic morals that would represent the ideal Islam, which is adopted from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. However, the implications of these principles can at times lead to controversy within the family.*

Since *Al-Amal* is an educational institution that has chosen to shoulder the significant responsibility of shaping students' Islamic characters, every effort must be made to educate parents about the school's foundational philosophies and objectives. Only in this way can the school attain its aims. It is not a case of determining who is the more efficient in teaching such values—parents or the school—but in accepting that as an Islamic school, *Al-Amal* must by its very nature prioritize such teaching in order to ensure that it allows its students' "religious sensibility" to flourish. In addition, *Al-Amal* is invested with a tremendous responsibility beyond educating: by balancing an Islamic studies curriculum with an American curriculum, it has the potential for illuminating the outside world as to the true nature of Islam. Being able to balance all of these tasks requires a great effort.

Al-Amal: Between Hope and Disappointment

When parents decide to enroll their children in *Al-Amal* it seems clear that they do so out of concern and as a result of their own experiences. Such parental concern stems from their desire, as Rose (1988) explains, to help their children be "at home in the real world" (p. 197). Quite simply, parents seek a way to help their children succeed in life yet still maintain a firm grounding in proper morals and principles. Parents clearly peer into their children's future and attempt to determine how they can best achieve for their offspring the expectations they have set. At the same time, they must ask, "What does society require, and how do those expectations influence our parental choices?" (Rose, 1988).

The school's philosophy plays a great role in answering these and other questions parents might have. Those who created *Al-Amal* are realistic: they know students have varying abilities, personalities, and academic skills, while parents themselves have different expectations, desires, and goals. How can a school answer everyone's needs? In order to succeed, it must take the middle course. In other words, the school should not promise to "recreate" the personalities of children but to prepare and guide them to interact and function successfully in the real world. Such a goal could be accomplished through preserving their religious ideals and empowering them with the main skills, qualifications, and values to deal with whatever they might face "out there" (Rose, 1988).

Conflict or frustration is an expected fact in any educational institution for one simple reason: together, under one roof, are gathered individuals, each of whom has a different personality, different conception of the world, different abilities. Various thoughts, traits, personalities, ideals must coexist. Inevitably, they will clash. To paraphrase something one of my interviewees noted, not even *Al-Amal* possesses a magic wand. However, it must attempt to live up to its expressed goals whenever possible.

The notion of conflict exists at various levels in such an educational institution. At *Al-Amal*, administrators must deal with conflict not only within and among those parties involved in the school, but also between the values and principles emphasized there and those which attempt to intrude from without. Such factors as globalization and openness can challenge the school's goals and objectives. The next chapter discusses the main challenges the school faces, particularly with globalization, and assesses how it can maintain its religious orientation while negotiating the impact of globalization on its students' lives.

CHAPTER 9

MAINTAINING HARMONY: FACETS OF THE BALANCE

To include both religious and secular training; to prioritize religious teaching as well as mathematics, science, and English; to blend behavioral and academic curricula, *Al-Amal* must juggle a number of competing demands.

Islamic Curriculum vs. American Textbooks.

As has been discussed previously, one of the reasons parents choose *Al-Amal* is that its curriculum is bilingual. Granted, there are other bilingual schools in Kuwait, but what makes this one special in the perceptions of those who are involved with it is that it attempts to blend or combine focuses without prioritizing either. In other words, *Al-Amal* attempts to harmonize between the Islamic and the American curriculum, and its ability to maintain such balance relies for its success on both teachers and parents.

In general, parents view English as the language of today, the language of the workplace, technology, and the larger world. As Diema, the English teacher, explains to her students,

> *Speak their language [English] not only for the sake of speaking it, but for a good reason—meaning that there should be reasons like eventually making Dawah or maybe getting scientific knowledge that you need from the speaking of it. The goal there shouldn't be just 'Okay, we want to speak English and want to be cool. We want to be westernized.' No, I would like to instill in the children the knowledge that you can learn English but there must be a reason you are learning it.*

However, Lewis (1997) argues that:

> what most of the Middle East …need [s] is modernization without westernization—that is to say, accepting, or, rather acquiring the products of western material culture, perhaps also the science and technology that produced them, but without the cultural baggage and false values and depraved way of life attached to them (p. 116).

On the other hand some parents are being criticized by other parents because they emphasize the English language almost to the exclusion of Arabic, which can be detrimental to the development of an Islamic curriculum because it divides students from their native language. One parent articulates this concern:

> *Unfortunately, everybody cares and worries about English, and in the meantime we grow distanced from the Qur'an. For myself, I would like for my children to learn English. I*

> *would like really for my kids to acquire another language, but that should not come at the*
> *expense of ignoring their own language, the language of the Qur'an.*

This mother's explanation calls to the foreground the issue of how parents prioritize elements of their children's education, but it also indicates the very difficult job faced by the school in its desire to create a balance between a bilingual education and an Islamic one. By its very nature, a bilingual or American curriculum includes references to globalization, so in order to maintain the balance for which it strives, *Al-Amal* stresses imparting to students the concept of self-censorship.

The Limits and Difficulties of Teaching Self-Censorship

In order to create harmony between its Islamic studies and American curricula, *Al-Amal* must teach its students to develop the sort of deep self-awareness that will automatically guide their decisions regarding behavior. One of the crucial elements emphasized by Manal, the behavioral curriculum teacher, is

> *Knowledge . . . When you educate someone how to utilize his or her innermost awareness*
> *to guide himself or herself to the right path whenever one applies the values and morals*
> *that have been implanted, then one will be able to recognize the different paths open to*
> *them and which they should take according to Islam. They become aware of what would*
> *be helpful and what would be damaging, what consequence they would shoulder for their*
> *choices.*

In essence, by adopting a bilingual curriculum that brings the world into the classroom, the school assumes the responsibility of educating its students with the sort of essential knowledge necessary for them to deal with and overcome negative outside influences. In order to accomplish this goal, educators emphasize the fact that Islam should be the main reference point for all decisions made by students—before they act, speak, think, they should ask whether what they are about to do is in keeping with their religious principles. Although *Al-Amal* does stress this in its teachings, concerns arise regarding self-censorship. The following section explores censorship issues within the school context.

School Censorship: Limitations and Extents

Al-Amal occasionally relies upon school-based censorship to maintain the desired balance between its diverse curricula. For example, such censorship might address issues such as the pictorial representation of nude women or sections of novels that deal with descriptions of

physical love. Such censorship might take the form of excising pages from a text or gluing the pages together so students cannot see the offending images or passages. This censorship extends to the textual presentation of other religions.

This occurs for a simple reason: the Islamic perspective of the school, which draws directly from the religion, deems such messages inappropriate for children's eyes and thoughts. Such censorship is not seen as restrictive but as protecting the values and principles of the students.

During my visits to the school, several incidents occurred that involved the censoring of other religions. One day, an English teacher was revising some of her students' worksheets when one of the girls brought up a story, about which she wanted to ask several questions. The teacher skimmed the story and, with wide eyes, told the student that it was about a Jewish girl. The girl indicated that she didn't see anything in the story related to religion, but the teacher seemed disturbed and indicated that she would cancel the book from the list of readings.

A similar situation occurred in the English classroom of another teacher. The teacher asked each girl about what she read and graded her comprehension of the story she had been assigned. I noticed that some of the pages of the story were glued. At one point, however, one of the girls said to the teacher, "*Miss, these pages aren't glued.*" The teacher then told her to glue them together. My researcher's curiosity at a high point, I asked the girl if I could see the pages that weren't glued, whereupon she gave me the book. The story was about a Jewish girl, but the book also contained stories about other children in history and from different cultures.

Such incidents not only raise one's curiosity, but also prompt the need to explore and seek to explain the perspectives held by these teachers. Although in the west an opposition to censorship prevails, in other countries and cultures censorship is often accepted as a protective mechanism. Such incidents as the ones I observed at *Al Amal* stir questions concerning the limitations and boundaries enforced by the school on what its students can learn. I decided to further explore these issues and talk to both parents and teachers regarding these restrictions.

Several situations I experienced during my visits to the school confirmed that dealing with or teaching about other religions is not acceptable. In fact, anything that deals with other religious beliefs is censored. Students are not exposed to alternative belief systems. However some teachers disagree with this practice. As Olivia, the English teacher, exclaimed,

No, I don't agree with this. I think students should have knowledge about other religions. It should be . . . you know, explained to them. They should try to see the differences

114

between their religion and other religions, so that they have some sort of idea of what

people believe in, what the other religions are in the world.

According to Farrell (1994), students need to know about as well as understand other religions, beliefs, and cultures. Muslim educators should not merely avoid mentioning or acknowledging other faiths but explain them with reason and logic which is the best method for dealing with religious issues.

Diema explains her belief that

Students need to know about other religions, not in order to relate to other religions or to embrace them. The main incentive for such an education is to introduce them to what is out there. And they need to learn that we as Muslims should respect people who embrace other religions—they exist, as do we. Our religion demands that Muslims respect others and treat them well.

I wondered whether religious or Islamic schools practice censorship as a means of protecting their students beliefs, despite the mission of wanting to promote, within their students, an ability to think and a sensitivity to the needs of other. Jackson (1995) addresses the concept that students need to study religion comparatively, because such a course of study will enable them to identify the differences and similarities among these various religions as a means for understanding and accordingly create a scene of respect for others.

A converted English teacher points out that

Muslims in general are lacking about how to make Dawah. They have their Dien classes, but they don't know how to deal with somebody who is not Muslim. They don't know anything about others' religions. I would like to be able to incorporate lessons about other religions: a little bit of Hinduism, of Christianity, just your basic information. You know the history of Christianity, for example, is very interesting. Just having such knowledge does not mean that I am going to memorize the Bible, but it is important to have an awareness of the Bible.

Even some parents believe that learning about other religions would be beneficial to their children, as long as they have a firm grounding in Islam. As Farah notes, *"I don't mind my child knowing about other religions, but before that my child must know his own religion and develop a strong foundation in Islam."*

Because of the September 11 tragedy, Islam has been under attack from many quarters. Educators should not exclude other religions for fear of perpetuating distorted images. Instead, teaching that Islam and other religions can coexist—as they do in real life—could help close the gap between West and East, Muslim and non-Muslim. Students would benefit from learning about other religions and cultures so that they do not grow up in an atmosphere of misunderstanding and misconceptions, especially since they come from a religious background that has been the target of such itself. In my opinion, *Al-Amal* should embrace the philosophy of providing students with an understanding of the world and its diverse cultures and religions. Only then can students realize ideal Islamic values and morals, such as empathy and understanding, which are supposed to be core values of *Al-Amal.*

Such an aspect of the school's censorship might not be accepted by some. Mogahed (2002) defends such actions by viewing them as methods of protection. He uses a metaphor to explain:

> I often ask parents . . . If they would allow their baby to play in the middle of the highway so he can learn to defend his life by dodging cars? The answer of course is absolutely not! . . . How can we justify taking this kind of chance with our child's faith? . . . The point is that it is just wrong to knowingly and deliberately expose our children to so much potential harm. (p. 27)

Such acts of censorship provoke various reactions from parents, teachers, and administrators. In an effort to balance an Islamic education with purely secular subjects, like science and mathematics, the school must often make such decisions. An additional area of concern is the textbooks that students use. Responses are divided as to whether such textbooks are "value-free" or inculcate students with some western ideas and philosophies.

Censorship and Textbooks

Some parents and teachers agree on the notion that American textbooks are value free. For example, they might conceive of science books as containing "pure science," a subject that contains no values that would harm students' Islamic faith. Sara responds to this idea:

> *The American curriculum the school is teaching is only pure knowledge, and the science they are learning does not include any values—like math, for instance, no values in it. On the contrary, we are infusing the American curriculum with our Islamic values, and Al-*

Amal themes within these curricula. So there are no values in these textbooks that would contradict our religion.

Beyond the science and mathematics classrooms, though, "American" textbooks often make reference to what might be interpreted as values; however, there is one concept they cover that would seem to please those who teach at *Al-Amal*: multiculturalism. A mathematics teacher who speaks English fluently, and lived in the United States for awhile, makes reference to this:

Most of the American textbooks that Al- Amal uses were initially designed for American society. It is known that American society is a multicultural society, so most of these books would not value one single culture over another. Accordingly, most of the values would be cross-cultural values that can be found and adopted universally.

Given that the textbooks are often the best means for transmitting information about a subject, how does *Al-Amal* ensure that the books used in its classrooms are acceptable? Initially, heads of departments choose the American textbooks that are assigned to be taught. (*Al-Amal* deals exclusively with Harcourt). When the books are selected and assigned, the next step in the process occurs: regardless of whether it is printed in Arabic or English, each book is reviewed by teachers for topics, pictures, themes, or values that would be deemed offensive to Islam. As noted earlier, offending information is either excised or the pages glued together. As a result, when students receive these books the school can be assured that they have been emptied of anything that does not fit Islamic principles and values.

Some parents and teachers consider such "filtering" a safety measure. One of the parents confirms such a belief: *"I am certain that what would be censored or canceled would not be appropriate and suitable. I am very satisfied with how the school does this."* On the other hand, some parents object to the very fact that censorship exists in the school. Several mention that they believe the school simply takes the process a bit far, eliminating everything, whether it would be truly harmful or not. Diema explains her concerns as a mother:

They censor a bit more than I would censor for my daughter. However, I can't say no to such censorship because Islamically this is the correct way. I may be a bit easygoing with my daughter regarding what she reads, and what she watches, but at school I think that they should be rather strict. I mean you can't say to girls 'No boys!' and then show them a movie about people falling in love. That would be a double standard! What they do at home is something different. Most of their parents are more easygoing than is the school,

> *but as a school we have to stand for certain sets of values and I think the censorship is*
> *acceptable.*

This mother's perception that as academic institutions need to be more "strict" with their students sounded as a refrain through this research. *Al-Amal* in particular is expected to set certain standards of morals and behavior for its students, as part of its operational philosophy and goals. I believe that for parents, such strictness on the part of the institution represents a "safety mechanism" that will keep their children safe from loose morality and unwanted actions, in accordance with Islamic precepts. Even censorship is usually accepted because it helps keep the children safe.

Flight Rather than Fight

Some parents are quite strict and thus welcome the rules placed on their children by *Al-Amal*. One parent describes her beliefs thusly:

> *I would not allow the satellite [television] in my home. Even the computer, and usage of*
> *the Internet, should occur with strict adult supervision. I put the computer in the living*
> *room so I can check on my children each moment. You know the idea that each child*
> *would have his or her own computer in their rooms is impossible—you know the*
> *temptations of Satan, and what consequences that would lead to.*

In general, parents tend to place complete trust in the fact that *Al-Amal* will teach and preach what they expect and desire. Their main reason for such confidence stems from the tenor of the school, but they also realize that the school's administration is conservative. How, though, would teachers deal with the situation of "non-Islamic" values cropping up in their classrooms? Some teachers, as well as some parents, agree with the school's unwritten but still present policy that "forbids from the beginning," allowing no discussion on such topics as other religions. Some topics are labeled "prohibited" by their very nature. One mother explains such a thought:

> *I am the kind of a mother who would love for her children to be exposed to the kinds of*
> *lessons that would teach them to identify as well as distinguish between accepted*
> *[Halaal] and what would not be [Haraam]. However, their father is extremely concerned*
> *and worried about this subject, and he is convinced that children should be given rules*
> *about what is forbidden. Our children have been raised on this forbidden list, although*
> *sometimes they are not satisfied with us telling them 'no.' they question why not.*
> *Honestly, I believe that it is their right to get some explanations.*

Such parents and teachers believe that there is no necessity in exposing children to specific kind of values or concepts that would tie in directly with Islamic foundations. So in order to avoid any of potential clash between Islamic and non-Islamic values and topics, they simply do not allow inquiries from children. *Al-Amal* finds itself in a particularly touchy position with regard to this situation, as its curriculum automatically deals with opposing conceptions (bilingualism, Islamic Studies vs. secular topics), a situation which brings both autonomy and control. *Al-Amal* must walk a fine line. Whereas it encourages students to express themselves—and this is even taught in the behavioral curriculum—it also places limits and restrictions on expression so that students do not "overdo" it. Teachers are also placed in a quandary: they are encouraged to be creative, but are fully aware that they operate under general restrictions.

When it comes to the topic of censoring textbooks, the school and many of the teachers stand firm on the general policy that students at that age do not have to be exposed to such issues. In the end, though, one must realize that such censorship is not exclusive to *Al-Amal* but exists in many other religious-based schools. For example, Rose (1988) describes a similar situation that occurred in some Baptist schools. As he notes, "the Baptists tend to avoid conflict if at all possible. Flight rather than fight characterizes their approach" (p. 139). She adds that the Baptists

> Want to purify the curriculum and weed out what they consider to be corrupt ideas, rather than expose their students to all sorts of ideas and teach them to analyze their validity and weigh their merits. They prefer to censor the curriculum strictly and protect their children from conflicting, confusing their thoughts. (p. 179)

Thus, what might at first appear to be a hard-line stance at *Al-Amal* is actually par for the course at religious institutions.

Those who support censorship at *Al-Amal*—whether teachers or parents—often find themselves at odds with those who express concern about it. While this second group would never question the school's policies in front of their children, they still have doubts about them. One of the mothers comments on this issue:

> *Yes, we are a Muslim society, but now we are in the era of satellite television and openness through technology. What I really want to implant initially is the correct basic foundations of Islam, so the children would grow up with the ability to know what is right and what is wrong. We should not give our children only pure Islamic knowledge.*

> *Children have a lot of questions, and Muslim parents are obligated to answer such inquiries, with explanations grounded in Islamic principles.*

Rugh (2002) demonstrates that a fair amount of Islamic content is presented through the Arabic/Muslim curriculum, such as history, social studies, and Arabic. Such an educational strategy does not rely on doctrinaire practice as much as on the deeply held belief that Islam is considered to be a life curriculum that individuals need to adopt into all aspects of their existence.

For example, Amira, a science teacher in her mid forties who speaks English with a strong accent and once taught college-level Chemistry before deciding to become a stay-at-home mother, became immediately attracted to the idea of working at *Al-Amal*. Now a teacher at the school, she indicates that when her lessons touch upon a matter that might run counter to Islamic beliefs, she does not avoid it or ignore it but deals with it in a way that will not be offensive. She notes:

> *If there is a conflict, I explain it according to Islam. I have had situations where there was a lesson that relates human beings to the monkey, so I explained the Islamic viewpoint that Allah created us [human] with most perfect features, citing the idea that 'We have indeed created man in the best of moulds' (Al-Teen **4**]). So, I explained the theory found in the American textbook. What I mean is that I gave the students the information and did not put so much focus on it, I explained both theories and just concentrated on the Islamic view.*

Such a method as adopted by this teacher utilizes *Qur'an*ic theories and evidence to explain contradictory ideas (Rugh, 2002).

Where science is concerned in particular, Kuwait's Educational Committee of the Supreme Consultative Committee on the Implementation of the Provisions of Muslim *Shari`a* Law (1999) deliberately excludes some scientific theories. The reason for such exclusion is that from the Islamic viewpoint there should be a differentiation between scientific theories, which are apt to change and are open to criticism, and *Qur'an*ic theories, which are considered to be well established. Moreover, subject matter that contradicts the foundations of Islam and disagrees with the Holy *Qur'an* would also be prohibited. This does not mean that scientific theories are not taught in the Kuwaiti schools. Instead such theories are taught and discussed, but then refuted with statements and evidence proven by facts in the Holy *Qur'an*. Similarly, at *Al-*

Amal, not all teachers follow the same philosophy concerning how to deal with scientific theories that could contradict the lessons offered by the Holy *Qur'an*: some teachers support teaching such alternative viewpoints, while others oppose it.

While Amira the science teacher attempts to deal openly with ideas and concepts that run counter to Islam, other teachers avoid this type of clash by concealing such information from students. They simply refuse to discuss these themes and concepts contradictory to the Islamic frame, even if doing so could help illuminate students. Some teachers respond, *"Why do students need to know that? There is no necessity for it."* Rose (1988) criticizes those teachers or parents who would impose full censorship over their children. She comments:

> The irony is that by purifying the curriculum, they are also simplifying the curriculum in ways that may take it difficult for their children to be able to question and evaluate ideas that they may be exposed to later on (p. 179).

If one of the main objectives of *Al-Amal* is to help the young develop spiritually and intellectually, they must be encouraged to develop analytical and critical skills. This means that they should be introduced to conflicting ideas in order to differentiate among them. That would give them the opportunity to understand what other values are out there, values that might not overlap with Islamic ones. Accordingly, we should remind students that as Muslims our references should be always the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Students would be able to determine what to believe in and what to argue according to their Islamic context. The proverb that "everything that is prohibited is wanted and desired" might well be considered by parents and teachers who believe that full censorship protects. If *Al-Amal* attempts to develop in its students a strong self-censorship mechanism, then it must trust that this mechanism will itself guide their perspectives. *Al-Taqwaa,* or fear of Allah, the self-censorship factor that reminds Muslims that Allah sees their every action and reads their every thought, would be the true safety valve for all, children and adults. All of this is complicated by the fact that, regardless of how they feel about censorship, the school and parents generally agree on the idea that the children should be protected from factors that negatively influence their beliefs and *'Aqiidah*, and thus they tend to accept the notion that limits and boundaries must be set.

While censorship of American-style textbooks does exist at *Al-Amal*, this does not mean that the school shies away from or shuns everything that comes from the west or from American society. *"Not all that comes from the west is not good,"* the head of the administration confirms.

Dealing with the West while Maintaining Islamic Values

According to some educational theorists, the idea of relying on modern western education while setting aside the Islamic educational philosophy is causing a dichotomy where western ideas that might suit other countries cannot be reconciled with traditional Islamic values and ideas (Cook, 2000). The following section examines to what extent this "schizophrenia" exists at *Al-Amal*.

At the same time *Al-Amal* uses American textbooks, it also allows and encourages students to use modern technology: its students type their lessons on computers and use the Internet for research and other projects. The director of the school states that

> *We try our best to prevent our students from being exposed to inappropriate concepts that would not suit their religion or the tenor of the school. I believe that there is no need for such exposure because such concepts and values might be implanted in the unconscious that would lead the child astray. It is not easy for a child to say no or to know automatically the difference between what is good and what is not. The matter is complicated by the stories they read, which are often eccentric or expressive of ideas that run counter to Islam.*

However, the same director articulates that not everything derived from the west or western society is problematic. She explains, *"There are wonderful values in the west and if their values do match and suit our Islamic values, why not adopt them, and extend it out in a very straightforward style to the students?"*

Islam in general is not against other civilizations or other religions, although the west in general seems to be imbued with misconceptions and distorted images about Islam. Indeed, there is no denying that the acts of some Muslims have caused the world at large to develop these misconceptions and images. As a result, the school adopts the stance that it must help students work their way through such conflicts and misunderstandings, that it must teach them—regardless of how Islam might be viewed by some—to rise above disrespect and hatred directed toward their religion to accept and respect other religions and cultures. Quite simply, they are taught to "take the high ground."[23] Such verses guide Muslims to respect others as well as their

---

[23] This is in perfect keeping with the lessons of the Holy *Qur'an*, wherein Allah said "O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other [not that ye may despise each other]. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is [he who is] the most righteous of you. And Allah has full Knowledge and is well-acquainted [with all things]" (Al-Hujorat **13**).

beliefs and belongings. This belief has been stressed at *Al-Amal.* As Diema, the American teacher, notes,

> *We will always have a lot of western influences, some of them good and some of them not so good. So what we are trying to do [is] balance, balance the negative points with the good points. What we are trying to do is teach to students that everything in the West isn't wonderful, but everything in the West isn't bad either. So we are trying to balance the way they think, to help them choose the good from the bad.*

This teacher's argument takes us back to the idea of emphasizing self-censorship, as previously discussed. By empowering this aspect in students and in Muslims in general, one can diminish any fears about moral deficiency and teach respect for others.

The school deals with the concept of westernization in a very moderate manner, even as it implements censorship. Educating Muslim students to maintain their basic values and morals, while urging them to *"get the best of America or the West and then leave the rest,"* an English teacher states*,* is key to dealing with potentially undesirable influences on them of westernization. Ultimately, the school hopes to expand to many countries, which would most definitely require dealing with other societies and cultures on their own turf. Economic exchange by its very essence brings the exchange of other components—values, cultural elements, and various other things—that would be difficult to deem forbidden. *Al-Amal* is not a self-contained school, and therefore it does not forbid such interaction with other cultures, although it does impose some limitations that outsiders might consider strict. What the school hopes to achieve is a situation wherein it can afford its students exposure to other cultures but help them retain a strong Islamic identity.

Merging but Retaining an Islamic Identity: Islam, Modernity and Globalization

By its very nature, globalization might suggest the universality of western culture; however, such does not actually mean that other cultures must subordinate themselves to western values, ideals, and principles. Those who created and are involved with *Al-Amal* recruit from other cultures just those aspects that suit their purposes, aspects that can be incorporated into an Islamic framework without damaging its basic structure. Muslim parents, as well as teachers, do not support the idea that Islam is inferior to any other culture; at the same time, however, they would prefer not to create a context of "us vs. them," whereby Islam is separated and isolated from those with different ideals.

"Having my own values does not mean isolating myself from the modern world," an *Al-Amal* social studies teacher notes, as she explains the balance the school attempts to achieve. Additionally, and importantly, the Islamist party does not refuse to adopt western technology and sciences, as much as they aim to achieve what is similar to Bull's (2000) assessment

> That much of what is done in [Islamic nations] is westernization without any real modernization. Education can overcome such naivete and hence, … the aim is to train modern people (arts and sciences students) with traditional values. People so trained will be able to lead the nation so that it can engage in globalization and forge a new national identity consistent with an Islamic heritage. (p. 33)

Contrary to some misconceptions, Islam is not opposed to modernity; rather, it encourages development as a positive force. The history of Islam provides solid evidence that the religion itself has always retained openness. Also, it would be incorrect to consider that technological innovations are the only benefit Islamic countries can gain from the west. Granted, the west is characterized as technologically superior, while most Muslim nations are somewhat behind in this area, yet this is not the only benefit that exchange could bring (Al Yaseen, 2002). The "dialogue of civilization" (Ahmed, 2002) and the opening of communications channels should be mutually beneficial to both the west and to Muslim nations. Such a dialogue would facilitate the process of exchanging ideas and experiences—whether political, economic, or social—and of comprehending each other's cultural contexts. The most crucial aspect of dealing with the west is the creation of communication channels that will assist not merely in the exchange, but also in the understanding of these "other" cultural values (Berbenaty, 1999).

Although administrators, parents, and teachers who are involved with *Al-Amal* embrace this same philosophy concerning mutually-beneficial exchange, the question remains: how much openness, exchange, and adaptation are acceptable at *Al-Amal*? The school prioritizes the development of its students as good Muslims, and encourages them to follow the Islamic *Shari'a* (laws), but it also expects them to respect other cultures and civilizations. Some believe that the school cannot do both—that in order to achieve the first goal, it must restrict students' exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives. To make matters worse, "outsiders" often perceive Islam as an isolationist religion that restricts its followers and turns them inward. Tamimi (2000) refutes this point of view and calls for an objective and accurate look at Islam. He claims that Islam is a religion that encourages liberation of the mind, ensuring freedom of thought as well as worship.

Islam encourages Muslims to adopt and benefit from the scientific progress of western civilizations, but at the same time maintain their Islamic faith, cultural identities, and values (Tamimi, 2000; Owais, 2002; Berbanty, 1999). Exchange and understanding are central to the mission of *Al-Amal*, as they are to Islam in general. Suzan explains her perspective on this:

> *We should return to our religion, to our Islamic culture. We should not defer to other nations, nor should we pretend they are not relevant. We cannot state that we are not relevant to them nor are they relevant to us. It is an issue of mutual interests. Today the whole world is as one village. In one hour, you can find yourself in another country. Definitely, though, I would adapt from them what works for me. At the same time I would not lay back, put my hands on my cheek, and wait for what I would get from them. Why not take what we deem necessary? At the same time, I would utilize the modern technology appropriately, in a way that suits my Islamic terms. I am the one who will hold the remote control in my hand and hence I am the one who will decide what I will accept and what should be eliminated. I would benefit from their cultures as well as their developments, but within my Islamic frame.*

Muzaffar (2002) indicates that "One can perhaps say that globalization can . . . be a liberating force in our quest to develop a more holistic morality in public life. But whether it frees the mind or stultifies the soul, a great deal will depend upon the individual" (p. 106). For Muslims, the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* must still define the morals, values, and the virtues, either personally or publicly, regardless of the nation in which they live or the arena in which they work (Muzaffar, 2002).

The crucial issue to consider with regard to what *Al-Amal* should permit and what it should prohibit is to what extent forbidding something actually invites someone to investigate it. The forbidden often becomes quite inviting. As the associate director of the school, Ms. Wafa, explains:

> *The minute you say no, no, no, you know that gives them the license almost to go and find these things. You know not saying no can also be a problem. Perhaps the best lesson is to tell them, "You are going to go out into the whole world, so get the best because even the Americans, British and Europeans feel the same we do."*

And Sara the mother adds,

We cannot lock our children into cages. Our kids are exposed to almost everything. They watch the TV, satellite channels, and navigate the Internet, everything. If you make your children aware religiously, thanks to Allah, they will be able to recognize and identify their main reference points—the principles they should act according to. Then by themselves they would develop a sense of Islamic criticism about what is allowed and what is not according to what beliefs they embrace.

There is one thing upon which every parent and every teacher in *Al-Amal* can agree: their enthusiasm for teaching the children the best, either with regard to religious belief or academically. As a result of its decision to implement a bilingual curriculum, *Al-Amal* must face the fact that what it teaches is neither value free or value neutral (Anees & Fuller, 1998). The struggle with which *Al-Amal* as an Islamic school must deal on a daily basis involves creating a balance between preserving their students' religious identities and opening them to the scientific and technological development vital for the progression of their society (Siddiqui, 1997). The school's main goal is not in indoctrination, but in developing its students religiously as well as academically to meet and face the challenges they will undoubtedly confront in this global arena.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

As this study evolved, the world in which it was written continued to change politically, socially, and economically. The fact that such widely-experienced challenges exist and will continue to shape international relationships has guided and motivated me to study what it means for *Al-Amal* to be an Islamic educational institution. My study examined a variety of entwined components—the philosophy, practices, as well as the expectations—of Islamic schools in the modern era. Since much of what has been presented in the media about Islamic schools unfortunately does not relate to reality, my hope is that this research will provide readers with a new perspective on Islamic education.

Throughout this study I worked toward answering these research questions:

1- How do Islamic parents who send their children to this school define the spiritual and/or religious needs they want their children to acquire, and what role does the school play in fulfilling those needs?

2- How do spiritual/ religious and academic needs intersect within the formal curriculum at the school throughout the daily interactions between teachers and children?

3- In the midst of increased Westernization and globalization, how do the teachers of this school negotiate the influences of western values on their students within the classroom?

Such questions were formulated in an attempt to understand the nature and context of the Islamic education, its practices, goals, and expectations. The goal of this study was to paint a portrait of *Al-Amal* in order to give readers a glimpse into how one school attempts to reconcile spiritual with academic goals, Islamic with Western values. Additionally, in the wake of globalization, westernization, and modernity, it is hoped that some outsiders to and opponents of Islamic-style schools might as a result of this study come to view them in a different light—a development that would certainly lessen the very task such schools shoulder. The capability of these schools to answer the demands of globalization yet still provide a curriculum that stresses both critical development and Islamic ideals is one of the most daunting tasks they face, but the fact that they are at least attempting to do so is remarkable (Cook, 2000).

The findings of this study imply that Islamic schools possess their own unique contexts and natures. Even all those who are involved in such educational institutions have their

own perspectives and expectations. For parents, one finds that their religious backgrounds highly impact the decisions they make regarding their children's education. Parents who turn to such Islamic schools are looking for specific elements that would fulfill their anticipation for higher levels of education as well as for an environment that focuses on religious teachings. Even conservative parents who wish first and foremost to promote their children religiously and spiritually seek high standards for them academically. In general, parents focus on two entwined aspects: empowering

their children's religious sensibility and developing them academically. They seek a healthy environment that emphasizes gender segregation and the importance of religious rituals, such as accustoming girls to wearing the *hijab*.

As for the school, clearly there exists a concern for promoting students religiously, so that they become productive, effective Muslims in their societies. Such a focus is illuminated through the rules and conditions the school sets for teachers: they must be Muslim, wear *hijab*, and possess a healthy faith not corrupted by ideas that run counter to the standards of an ideal Islam.

The teacher is one of the main instruments by which an Islamic school fulfills its goals, as well as parental expectations. As a result, all teachers must present good Muslim role models. Any misbehavior on the part of teachers-intentionally or unintentionally-might destroy what the school is trying to accomplish. For that reason selectivity is a priority when it comes to hiring teachers.

Finally, this study aimed to answer how the school copes with the openness that accompanies globalization, a phenomenon that has become impossible to control or even prevent. This school dispels the notion that Islam is against modernity or openness. Instead, such a school attempts to develop students' religious sensibilities in order to help them deal with such openness. Thus properly educated, students use their religion to filter what is acceptable from that, which is unacceptable.

After reading literature about Islamic educational institutions, it becomes clear that most of what has been written focuses on the fear of radicalism. As a result, such schools have been either oppressed or held in check by their governments. The fact that one would describe himself or herself as being a religious conservative is not, however, necessarily a sign of radicalism or extremism—in Islam or any other religion. Granted, some religious conservatives are radicals or extremists—and some who claim an affiliation to Islam do hold extremist beliefs—but a

wholesale description of Islam as a radical religion is completely inaccurate. Those who espouse Islam and tout violence distort the very essence of the religion according to the majority of Muslims. Islam is a religion of peace and moderation. The Prophet Muhammad (saas) himself emphasized a call for moderation in Islam and its practices.

My choice to study *Al-Amal* for this thesis was by no means accidental. I wanted to touch on various elements of an Islamic school that would help the reader understand the complex nature of such institutions and explore how, accordingly, they are being transformed. I believe that *Al-Amal* represents an example of the newly transformed Islamic school. Accordingly this case did not aim to present a snapshot of the school that would simply capture its nature as much as present the case based on an understanding of the social context from which it emerged. Throughout this study I attempted to present what I learned about the school including all of the contradictions and complexities such an institution would embody within its social context. In other words, I adopted the philosophy of Wolcott (1994), who said "I do not go about trying to discover a ready-made world; rather, I seek to understand a social world we are continuously in the process of constructing" (p. 368).

In this study I have attempted to demonstrate that the widespread generalizations adopted by outsiders regarding Islamic schools have led to stereotyping. Accordingly, the urgency with which I felt the need to explore such an institution, its philosophy and mission, its educational agenda and practices, was highly motivated by a desire to address such misconceptions and unfair generalizations. Islamic schools in general have been accused of teaching and preaching hate and of producing terrorists whose aim is to destroy anything western or non-Islamic. Such generalizations have helped create a phobia against anything one can label "Islamic."

The Fruitful Experience of *Al-Amal* in the Global Arena

To fully understand the place and role of Islamic schools, one must first realize that such institutions exist in various nations, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Moreover, such schooling is not a new phenomenon that developed from a void. On the contrary, the Islamic school system is centuries old and has undergone various transformations throughout history, particularly during periods of political change, such as that which accompanied colonization. In addition, such school systems also attempt to revive Islamic education as part of the Islamization Movement, the goal of which was to minimize the influence of westernization and secular educational systems that spread across Muslim countries. This attempt at revitalization has been criticized as

being "unfruitful."   For example, Cook (2000) describes the educational attempts of these nations as falling below standards: "On a programmatic level, modern Islamic nations still struggle to meet the scientific and technological changes demanded by the modern period. Modernity and development in the minds of many Muslim policy makers are still closely linked to western modes of doing things" (p. 343).

Another criticism aimed against Islamic schools comes from those who hold more liberal viewpoints and believe that an Islamic education as other religious education "[aims] to inculcate specific kinds of dispositions in children is to mould them into certain sorts of creatures" (White, 1982, p. 126). One point that would refute liberal claims is that currently in Muslim nations the concept of Islamic education largely has been marginalized, which lessens its impact on students. Such marginalization has reduced significantly the stature of an "Islamic education." During the years I worked in public schools as an Islamic teacher, I experienced firsthand the marginalizing of Islamic education. Students largely viewed the subject as secondary compared to other components of the curriculum.

Several factors are responsible for disempowering Islamic education. One is a methodology that approaches the subject as merely information students need to learn for a test (Shamma, 2002). Another is the absence of a clear vision by teachers and administrators concerning the expectations for such an education. Largely, a vision that would promote "religious sensibility" is not deemed a priority even among some of the Islamic studies teachers whose role it is to shoulder such a critical responsibility. Additionally, time allocated for Islamic studies in most schools is not sufficient. Last, but not least, a political environment that is more open to the voice of secularizing education also prevents Islamic education from gaining a foothold in the curriculum.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that not all schools in Muslim countries share the same philosophical foundation and educational agendas. While some of these schools exclude the teaching of Islam as merely religious indoctrination, others take another direction and do recognize its value as a part of a "whole" curriculum for the Islamic student. Being labeled an Islamic school does not guarantee that all such institutions follow the same philosophy and adopt similar practices. Having a close and profound understanding of the dynamics of these schools, as well as their goals and objectives, helps determine the outcomes each would anticipate from an Islamic element in the curriculum.

Some Islamic schools can be described as "traditional," while others adopt a more "contemporary" methodology. The latter type of Islamic school was the main interest of my research inquiry. Such schooling systems are Islamically-oriented and highly focused on the foundation of Islamic themes, values and principles, but also attempt to equip students with elements of a secular education that will promote them academically and develop vital workplace skills. One of these examples—"Pesantren," a religious school in Indonesia—was presented by Bull (2000). I believe that such schools refute the arguments by secularists that Islamic school systems cannot function effectively when combining secular and religious education into one curriculum. Bull (2000) explains that such schooling in Indonesia is not similar to other educational institutions where religious education is separated from the secular, as in Iran and Turkey. The Pesantren schools in Indonesia demonstrate how such schools refute claims concerning Islamic schools. Bull (2000) states, "The Pesantren in Java have succeed in creating a hybrid system of education combining religious instruction and scientific and technical training. This hybrid system is a reflection of a different model of interacting with modernity than that which is encountered in many other places in the other world" (p. 44).

Al-Amal, the bilingual Kuwaiti institution that is the focus of this study, presents another example of a contemporary Islamic school. I believe that *Al-Amal* provides a vision of the extent to which Islamic schooling and education can be transformed. The school has made great strides in erasing the distorted image of Islamic schools that have been widely and extensively presented by the media. To a great extent, *Al-Amal* is shouldering the complex responsibility of introducing both religious and the secular knowledge in an Islamic environment. Although the innovations of the school have resulted in some conflicts that must be negotiated among administrators, teachers, and parents, its efforts to combine a religious education with a secular one can be described as "fruitful."

Al-Amal focuses on instilling in students a level of religious sensibility while also developing in them the sort of academic skills they must possess to succeed in a global arena. Such a combined effort fulfills the demands of concerned Muslim parents. With luck, *Al-Amal*'s educational philosophy can help diminish the stereotypical image of the Islamic school as devoted to producing fanatics bent on destroying anything that is not related to Islam. Hopefully, it can also reduce the clamor of voices that would argue it is impossible to

successfully combine Islamic and secular education, that suggest such a system "destroys social cohesion" (Cook, 2000, p. 354).

Al-Amal demonstrates effectively that Islamic schools are not solely conservative. The school has succeeded in attracting parties—whether on the level of teachers or parents—with widely differing levels of religious commitment. At *Al-Amal* one can find strict and conservative Muslim parents, but also those who are more liberal and open to western conceptions of life and society. In addition, the school does not impose any sort of religious affiliation. Due to its philosophical foundation, those of *Shi'a* as well as *Sunni* affiliation can find a home at *Al-Amal*.

Religious Commitment among Conservative Parents

Conservative Muslim parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* possess varying levels of religious commitment. Some appear to be far more conservative in their attitudes toward dress and behavior, as well as the depth of the spiritual foundation they would promote for their children and accordingly would expect *Al-Amal* to nurture- for example, the issue of *Qur`an* memorization. Among conservative parents, some support memorization and want their children to memorize as much as they can, even more than the school would assign. Other parents, however, view the process of *Qur`an* memorization as overloading students with extra work. Yet, both kinds of parents find that *Al-Amal* meets their children's spiritual and educational needs, primarily because *Al-Amal* has made a conscious attempt to fulfill a variety of parental expectations. *Al-Amal*'s strenuous attempts to nurture students' " faith '*aqiadah*' and promot [e] the *tarbiyah* in its education and methodology would develop in students a psychological force capable of positive contribution and creativity" (AbuSulayman, 1998, p. vi).

With a complex nature that combines modernized, technological components and a strong grounding in the religious within its curriculum *Al-Amal* is considered an innovative experience in the field of education. Such is verified by the increasing enrollment figures. Moreover, *Al-Amal* attracts even parents of moderate economic status who willingly shoulder such an economic burden to ensure an educational environment that is both secular and Islamic-based—a choice they consider "*the best investment for their children.*"

Negotiating Western Values at *Al-Amal*

Al-Amal makes a great effort to negotiate and strengthen Muslim students' identities not only through its religious education but also through integrating Islamic values and principles within the American textbooks it adopts. As the head of the administrator states, "*There is*

nothing to be worried about in the American textbooks. We even integrate our values within these books." Even though criticism has been leveled at *Al-Amal* for adopting some measure of censorship toward its textbooks, I believe that the issue can to some extent be negotiated and regulated. Such a process can be achieved through allowing dialogue and opening channels of communication with all those who are involved in the school and anticipate its development.

Al-Amal's Enforcement of Behavioral Teaching and Morals Development

Even though most of the parents who send their children to *Al-Amal* can be considered well- or highly-educated, the school does not take the parents' educational background for granted when it comes to the matter of the students' *tarbiyah*. After all, the parents' educational background does not guarantee that the child has come from a family in which their *tarbiyah* was stressed. As a result, the school attempts to nurture students morally and behaviorally within an Islamic perspective. Although parents might have differing expectations regarding their children's education, *Al-Amal* also has its own educational agenda that must be addressed. The key dilemma is how the school negotiates its own agenda with that of parents and students.

Establishing an Islamic School: Burden or Challenge?

The Islamic orientation adopted by *Al-Amal* by its very nature places on the school a burden of juggling various, often conflicting, components simultaneously. It is a difficult, if not impossible endeavor to at once apply its educational philosophy, fulfill Muslim parents' expectations, and attempt to improve the distorted image such schools possess. Accordingly, in order to present the best image and to negotiate successfully all diverse elements, *Al-Amal* has had to adopt a philosophy that considers all aspects.

An additional key component in applying its goals is the teachers. The school puts extra effort into selecting the best instruments by which to apply its philosophy. The faculty and staff of an Islamic school must be not only highly qualified academically, but also above reproach with regard to morals, values, behaviors, and beliefs. Any misrepresentation by teachers could harm the school's effort to produce a good example of Islamic schooling that emphasizes moral and religious development.

In such an organization as *Al-Amal* there should be consensus among all teachers, as well as administrators, regarding the main goals and objectives of the school. Compared to teachers in public secular schools, those in Islamic schools shoulder a dual responsibility: they must promote students academically and develop their "religious sensibility" (Ashraf, 1993, p. 15). As

a result, the school provides constant supervision over teachers, as well as mandatory lectures and seminars that touch on the integration of Islamic principles into classroom management and pedagogical approaches. The school will face difficulty when the time comes to select new teachers, as the job demands a high level of religious commitment from teachers: they must internalize as well as practice ideal Islamic behaviors and morals. *Al-Amal* is working hard to modify any deficiency it might discover among its teachers by implementing a series of religious lectures and courses in which instructors must participate. The school reasons that since its primary goal is to promote students morally, such a responsibility cannot be accomplished unless its teachers—the main instruments for such a mission—are above reproach.

Implications

Bringing this study to a close does not mean ending it. It is not an easy task for me to deem this study "closed," because I have experienced and lived it for such a long time. My intention has not been to coerce the reader with my interpretation, but instead to address the understanding I have constructed throughout this inquiry (Wolcott, 1994). I believe, as does Geertz (1973), that "it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something" (p. 20).

Through this experience I have attempted to reach the audience through focusing on a single case; however, I also believe that at the same time a single case can evoke "resonant universal themes" (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14). The questions that guided this study have revealed even more than I anticipated and touched upon themes that are indeed universal in nature (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Implication for a Renewed Vision of Islamic Schools

One of the main implications for this study is a renewed vision for an Islamic school in the global arena. Such a school would differ from those constantly presented as typical Islamic school systems in Muslim nations. Stereotyping these Islamic institutions as producing extremists does not further their goals beyond religious indoctrination.

My experience with *Al-Amal* provides a mechanism for preventing one from falling into mass generalizations about Islamic education. However, readers must realize that each school, whether religious or secular, possesses its own unique agenda, context, and philosophical foundation that would form the dynamic for its practices and application—as well as its own cultural context. *Al-Amal* happens to emphasize a curriculum that blends both religious and secular aims. Such a

134

renewed vision is not, however, a result of external international pressure to modify the Islamic curricula; it is, on the contrary, a result of the demands of concerned, open-minded Muslim parents who believe that in order to become productive members of their societies, their children must receive an education that is both secular and religious in nature. Such a school bears implications for all involved.

Implication for Administrators

Administrators must realize the varying needs of parents. Empowering Islamic education is a priority for conservative Muslim parents, although most would not search for a school that focused solely on religious education. Instead, they would search for the best of both—secular as well as religious education. One of the parents describes *Al-Amal* as having *"the advantage of being a bilingual school, but with an emphasis on Islamic studies."* Such parents search for a school that sets high academic standards and challenges their child's abilities. They simply prefer that this education is imbued with a religious sensibility that will qualify their children both educationally and religiously for being a good, productive Muslim. Parents want *Al-Amal* to promote students' Islamic morals and behaviors by teaching them how to internalize the tenets of their religion—in other words, to practice in their daily lives what is preached.

Another need that administrators must answer is the creation of a precisely selected teaching staff. Islamic schools are supposed to implement Islam in their pedagogy, practices, rules, and human relations. Accordingly, any misrepresentation of these anticipated Islamic practices would harm the school's overall nature. In addition to being experts in their fields, teachers in Islamic schools must act as good Muslim role models: they must behave as good Muslims in their relationships with students and others in the school. Careful selection and constant evaluation of teachers' performance, both academically and behaviorally, play crucial roles in meeting the demands of parents.

Implication for Islamic Schools Amid Globalization

Another implication of this case involves the challenge faced by *Al-Amal* as an Islamic school in a global arena. Like other Islamic schools, *Al-Amal* must follow a path of creating open channels of communication with the outside world in order to dispel misconceptions and permit "outsiders" to understand more accurately ideal Islamic practices. Essentially, *Al-Amal* shall define for those who observe it what precisely Islam is and what tenets it emphasizes. This is a heavy burden that all Islamic schools must recognize and shoulder willingly. Opening dialogue

with others, as well as introducing their own students to others, would eliminate the skepticism and answer inquiries that might exist. Removing the barriers that currently exist between Islamic and non-Islamic would be a great step forward that *Al-Amal* should initiate.

The philosophy *Al-Amal* should implement concerning teaching about other religions should be as Cook (2000) indicates: "not to teach religion, but about religion " (p.353). And as one of *Al-Amal*'s teachers recommended, *"our children need to know about the others."* I believe that such a practice would not affect students' religious identity; on the contrary, it could strengthen their love for and pride in their religion and culture. Creating a healthy Islamic environment based on mutual acceptance and understanding of other religions could help dispel the misconceptions of critics.

Implications for Further Research into Islamic Schools

Further exploration into Islamic schools is crucial. Such research would be beneficial not only with regard to its educational goals and findings, but also with regard to the insights it could offer on the political, social, and cultural planes. Since much of what has been perpetuated through the media about Islamic schools is distorted, Islamic schools that have undertaken a renewed vision of education are particularly worthy of future study.

Further research would enrich the experience I went through as well as add other voices and perspectives to the issue of Islamic schools. Such research could also bring to light other types of Islamic schools that are spreading across Muslim nations. I am convinced that my religious background was the main incentive for such study and inquiry. My study has been conducted at a very critical time, the post-September 11 world, where almost everything labeled Islamic has been viewed with skepticism and accusation. In this world, *Al-Amal* faces a very spirited challenge, where the school has worked hard to reduce any type of intolerance that might appear to surface. It aims to develop students morally and behaviorally by grounding them in the tenets of Islam. I believe that *Al-Amal* can be deemed a successful example of a transformed Islamic school that has revitalized Islamic education by intersecting within it both secular topics and religious teachings (Tauhidi, 2000).

Such an educational focus requires an Islamically-oriented character development that would help students develop an emotional attachment to their religion. At the same, it also empowers students academically by bringing into the curriculum the best and latest technologies—without challenging Islamic ideals or identity-development (Al-Otabi & Rashid,

1997). In general, Islamic education is not centered on information, facts, or dates. The era in which we live demands that such an education must be transformed and utilized on a pragmatic level. Such pragmatic application can be accomplished by helping students internalize and practice the tenets of the religious education they are receiving (Tauhidi, 2002; Shamma, 2002). *Al-Amal* attempts to do just that.

With its modernized philosophy that combines Islamic education with contemporary secular knowledge, *Al-Amal* faces a challenging mission. To be considered a steppingstone toward development of the Muslim identity within the global arena, it must maintain a clear vision that will permit it to negotiate any emerging elements that might conflict with its nature and goals. Determination and enthusiasm for such a renewed vision of Islamic schools are crucial for its success.

REFERENCES

Abdullaha, M. (1979). *The ideological and literal movement in Kuwait*. Kuwait: Rabetat Al
    Odabah.

Abd AlGafour, F. (1978). *The development of education In Kuwait: 1912-1972.* Kuwait:
    Maktabat Al Falah.

Abu Sulayaman, A. (1998). Islamic education reform: Top priority in intellectual Islamic work.
    The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, *15*, V-VII.

Ahmed, A. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making sense of Muslim history and society*. London:
    Routledge.

Ahmed, A. (2002). Ibn Khaldun's understanding of civilizations and the dilemmas of Islam and
    the west today. *Middle East Journal*, *56*, 20-45.

Al Abrashee, M. (1980) *Islamic education and its philosophers.* Cairo: Dar Al fekr Al Arabee.

Al-Attas, S. (1977). Preliminary thoughts on the nature of knowledge and the definition and aims
    of education. In S. Al- Attas (Ed.), *Aims and objectives of Islamic education* (pp. 1-19).
    Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University.

Al-Dawee, K. (2001). Has the enthusiasm of the Islamic political party retreated? *Alwatan*, *9150*,
    18-19.

Al Hur, A. (Guest), & Kurishan, M. (Presenter). (2001, December 17). Changing the Arabic
    curriculum under the Americans' demands. *Ola Horob Al Qaren [the first century's
    war].* Qatar: Al Jazeera network.

Al Kandari, J., Al Rashed, S., Al Rashid, H., & Abdu Al Muetee, Y. (1995). *The educational
    system in Kuwait.* Kuwait: Kuwait University.

Al Keelanee, M. (1985). *The development of the Islamic educational theory.* Damascus: Dar Al
    Turath.

Al-Khaledee, S. (1999). *The Islamic political parties in Kuwait: Shi'a, Ikhwan & Salaf*. Kuwait:
    DarAl-Naba.

Al Khatib, H. (Guest), & Kurishan, M. (Presenter). (2001, December 17). Changing the Arabic
    curriculum under the Americans' demands. *Ola Horob Al Qaren [the first century's
    war].* Qatar: Al Jazeera network.

Al Misiri, A., & Al Azmah, A. (2000). *Secularism under microscope*. Lebanon: Dar Al- Fikr.

Al-Mutawa, N. (1993). A vision for Islamic, educational, social, and cultural curriculum (The women educational conference). *The Supreme Consultative Committee on the Implementation of the Provisions of Muslim Shari`a Law*. Kuwait: Al-Ryada Press.

Al-Mutawa, N. (1998). *Al-Ru'ya bilingual school*. Kuwait: Al-Saqabi.

Al-Mutawa, N. (2000). *For thoughtful tourists in Al-Ru'ya, curriculum.* Kuwait: Help your Muslim brother every where committee publication.

Al Namer, S. (1989). The educational journey for teaching mathematics in Kuwait. Kuwait: Educational Ministry.

Al- Otaibi, M., & Rashid, H. (1997). The role of schools in Islamic society: Historical and contemporary perspectives. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 14, 1-18.

Al Qarazawee, Y. (2001). *Radical secularism in confrontation with Islam: Tunis & Turkey models*. Lebanon: Badayel.

Al Qasem, F. (Presenter). (2002, October 19). Changing the Arabic and Islamic curriculum. *Al Etejah Al Muakis [the opposite direction]* Qatar: Al Jazeera network.

Al Qenaee, Y. (1987). *Pages of Kuwait history*. 5th Ed. Kuwait: Dar Al Salasel.

Al Sharqawee, E. (1985). *The philosophy of Islamic civilization*. Beirut: Dar Al Nahda Al Arabia.

Al Sheebanee, O. (1993). *Foundations of Islamic education.* Tarablus: the Open University.

Al-Shik, A. (1998). The personal characteristics for the Kuwait citizens. *The moral and behavioral characteristics that surface within the desirable identity of the Kuwaiti citizens. Lectures of the Educational Research Center* (pp. 65-76). Kuwait: Kuwait Ministry.

Al Sibaee, H. (Guest). (2002, October 19). Changing the Arabic and Islamic curriculum. *Al Etejah Al Muakis [the opposite direction]* Qatar: Al Jazeera network.

Al Yaseen, J. (2002). Muntdaa Al Fekr Wa Al Hadara. *Alwatan, 9364/3810*, 33.

Anees, M., & Fuller, G. (1998). Does Islam have an alternative to globalization? *New Perspective Quarterly*, *15,* 44-45.

Anzul, M., Evans, J., King, R., & Robinson, D. (2001). Moving beyond a deficit perspective with qualitative research methods. *Exceptional Children, 67*, 235-249.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ashraf, S. (1993). The role of religious education in curriculum designing. *Westminster Studies in Education, 16*, 15-18.

Bahgat, G. (1999). Education in the gulf monarchies: Retrospect and prospect. *International Review of Education*, *45*, 127-136.

Berbenaty, R. (1999). Islam and the west: Common cause or clash. Trans. Mohammad, A. *Islamiyat Al Ma'rifa*, *20*, 11-60.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bruggeman, E., & Hart, K. (1996). Cheating, lying, and moral reasoning by religious and secular high school students. *The Journal of Educational Research, 89*, 340-344.

Bull, R. (2000). Teaching morality: Javanese Islamic education in a globalization era. *Online Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, III, 26-47. Available: http://www.uib.no/jais.v003ht/likens1.htm

Center of strategic studies; report about the future of the religious curricula in the Arab and the gulf area. (2002, March 16). Al-Syeyassah, 8.

Charif, M. (2002, March 12). Reaching the next Muslim generation. (reforming madrasas). *The New York Times*, A29, A27.

Coe, R., & Gibbons, C. (1998). School effectiveness research: criticism and recommendations. *Oxford Review of Education, 24,* 421-438.

Cotchemnet, A., & Spirit, S. (2002, March 12). Islamic schools between fundamentalists, and moderates. *Newsweek*, *12*, 40-48.

Connolly, T., Dowd, T., Criste, A., Nelson, C., & Tobias, L. (1998). *The well managed Classroom: Promoting student success through social skill instruction*. Nebraska: Boys Town Press.

Cook, J. (2000). Egypt's national education debate. *Comparative Education*, *36*, 477-490.

Copper, B., & Guare, R. (1997). Cross- national analysis of religious schools. In T. Hunt & J. Carper (Eds.), *Religion and schooling in contemporary America* (pp.107-138). New York: Garland Publishing.

Cordesman, A. (1997). *Kuwait: Recovery and security after the Gulf War*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Davis, J., & LightFoot, S. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Davutoglu, A. (2000). Philosophical and institutional dimensions of secularization: A comparative analysis. In J. Esposito & A. Tamimi (Eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (pp. 170-208). New York: New York University Press.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1994). Consejos: the power of cultural narratives. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 25*. 298-316.

Denig, S. (1996). *Discipline in public and religious elementary and secondary schools: A comparative analysis*. (Paper presented at the Annual of the American Educational Research Association). New York.

Educational Committee. (1999). *The educational system*. Kuwait: The Ministry of Media.

Eckholm, E. (2001, Jan 15). Struggle to control what Islamic schools teach. (madrasa in Pakistan). *The New York Times*, A9-A8.

Eickelman, D. (2000). Islam and the language of modernity. *Daedalus, 129*, 119-135.

Eickelman, D., & Piscatori, J. (1996). *Muslim politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Esposito, J. (1980). *Islam and development: Religion and sociopolitical change*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Esposito, J. (1995). *The Oxford encyclopedia of the modern Islamic world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Esposito, J., & Tamimi, A. (2000). *Islam and secularism in the Middle East*. New York: New York University Press.

Esposito, J. (2003). *The Oxford dictionary of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ezzat, H. (2000). Secularism, the state and the social bond: the withering away of the family. In J. Esposito & A. Tamimi (Eds.), *Islam and secularism in the Middle East*, (pp. 124-139). New York: New York University Press.

Fandy, M. (1999). Cyberresistance: Saudi opposition between globalization and localization. *Society for Comparative Study and History*, *41*, 124-147.

Farrell, J. (1994). Place, religion, and curriculum design. *Curriculum Inquiry: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 24,* 402-406.

Flick, U. (1998). An introduction to qualitative research. London: Sage.

Friedman, T. (2001, November 16). Breaking the circle. *The New York Times,* A23, A25.

Gangel, K. (1988). Christian school education. In W. House (Ed.), *Schooling choices: An examination of private, public, & home education. (pp.89-170).* Portland: Multnomah.

Geertz, C. (1971). *Islam observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures.* New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Gellner, E. (1992). *Postmodernism, reason, and religion.* London: Rutledge.

Ghabra, S. (2001). 10 years after: Embracing reform in Kuwait. *Middle East Insight,* June-July, 23-26.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity.* California: Stanford University Press.

Goldberg, E. (1993). Private goods, public wrongs, and civil society in some Medieval Arab theory and practice. In E. Goldberg, R. Kasaba, & J. Migdal, *Rules and rights in the Middle East democracy, law, and society,* (pp. 248-271). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Goodlad, J. (1975). The dynamics of educational change toward responsive schools. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Goodlad, J. (1979). *What are schools for?* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Goodlad, J. (1979). *Curriculum inquiry.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Goodlad, J., Soder, R., & Sirotnik, K. (Ed). (1990). *The moral dimensions of teaching in* places *where teachers are taught.* San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Griffin, K. (1999). Culture and economic growth: A general argument with illustrations from the Islamic world. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, *10*, 126-141.

Gross, R. (2000). The place of the personal and the subjective in religious studies. In S. Moch & M. Gates (Eds.), *The researcher experience in qualitative research.* (pp.163-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Handrich, J. (1995). *The just and caring school.* (Klingenstein Project) New York: Columbia University Press.

Haneef, M., Yousof, S., Amin, R., & Noon, H. (2002). Values and their relationship to social problem in Malaysia: An Islamic framework. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 19,* 58-78.

Haynes, C. (1998). Muslim students' needs in public schools. *Update on Law-Related Education, 22,* 6-10.

Hays, P. (2004). Case study research. In K. deMarrais & S. D.Lapan (Ed.). *Foundations for Research: methods of inquiry in education and social sciences*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hefner, R. (1998). Multiple modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a globalization age. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27, 83-104.

Hodder, I. (2000). The interpretation of documents and material culture. In Denizen, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 703-716). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hussain, S. (1977). A plea for modern Islamic University: Resolution of the dichotomy. In S. Al-Attas (Ed.), *Aims and objectives of Islamic education* (pp. 91-103). Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University.

Hussain, S., & Ashraf, S. (1979). *Crisis in Muslim education*. Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University.

Huwaidi, F. (2001, December 20). Enhom Yoredonaho Islam Muadel [They want it a fixed Islam]. *Al Watan [The home], 9287/3733*, 9.

Jackson, R. (1995). Religious education's representation of 'religions' and 'cultures'. *British Journal of Educational Studies, XXXXIII,* 272-289.

Jackson, B., & Ives, E. (1996). *The world observed*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Johnstone, B. (2000). *Qualitative methods in sociolinguistics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Joseph, P. (2000). Conceptualizing curriculum. In P. Joseph, S. Bravmann, M. Windschitl, E. Mikel, & N. Green, (Eds.), *Cultures of curriculum* (pp. 1-15). Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Kaplan, A.(1997). Scientific research methods in educational research. In J. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research methodology, and measurement: An international handbook* (2nd ed., pp. 112-118). Great Britain: Pergamon. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Khalil, E. (1991). *Introduction to Islamization the knowledge*. Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Kurishan, M., (Presenter). (2001, December 17). Changing the Arabic curriculum Under the Americans' demands. *Ola Horob Al Qaren [the first century's war].* Qatar: Al Jazeera network.

Kinzer, S. (1997, May 19). With possibly fateful results, Turkey debates Islamic schools. The *New York Times*, A6.

Kohn, A. (1998). *What to look for in a classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuwaiti Constitution. (1962). Kuwait: Dar Alqortas.

Lambert, L., & Lambert, E. (1992). *The other Kuwait*. Ohio: Lee Lambert & Associates Publishing.

Land, T. (1991). Kuwait to rebuild system. *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, *4.5.91*

Lewis, B. (1997). The west and the middle east. *Foreign Affairs*, *76*, 114-130.

LightFoot, S., & Davis, J. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lincolon, Y., & Denzin, N. (2000). The seventh moment. In Y. Lincoln & N. Denzin (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1047-1065). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Malek, B., & Al Kandari, L. (2002). *Our educational heritage*. Kuwait: Maktabat Al Taleb Al Jamee.

Mapes, T. (2002, May 22). School promotes Islam and modernity. (Al Zaytun, Indonesia). *The Wall Street Journal*, B7A.

Massislas, B., & Jarra, S. (1991). *Arab education in transition*. New York: Garland Publishing.

Marie, P. (1994, Oct. 21). Islam shows its diverse identities. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 13.

Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative research design: an interpretive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (1995). Theory to practice. What can you tell from an n of i: Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Journal of Life Long Learning, 4, 51-60.*

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: a qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, D. (1994). *Modernity: an ethnographic approach*. Oxford: BERG Publishers.

Ministry of Information. (1997). *Facts and figures: Kuwait*. Kuwait: Press and Information Sector.

Mogahed, D. (2002, October / November). Islamic curriculum and urgent need. *Al Jumuah, 14*, 22-30.

Monshipouri, M., & Motameni, R. (2000). Globalization, sacred beliefs, and defiance: Is human rights discourse relevant in the Muslim world? *Journal of Church and State*, *42*, 709-736.

Munson, H. (1993). *Religion and power in Morocco.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mursee, M. (1983). *Islamic education: Foundations and development in Arabic nations*. Cairo: Alem Al Ketab.

Muzaffar, C. (2002). Morality in public life: the challenge before religion. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 19,* 90-110.

National Report From the State of Kuwait. (1994). *The development of education*. Kuwait: As-Salam Printing Press.

Omara, M. (1987). *The Arabs and the challenge*. Damascus: Dar Qutaibia.

Owais, A. (2002). Yes for Islamization. *Al-Alamyaa*, *142*, 30-31.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Paul, S. (1989). *The taste of ethnographic things: the senses in anthropology.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Quttb, M. (1979). The role of religion in education. In S. Al- Attas (Ed.), *Aims and objectives of Islamic education* (pp. 48-63). Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University.

Reagan, T. (1996). *Non-western educational traditions*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rose, S. (1988). *Keeping them out of the hands of Satan: Evangelical Schooling in America*. New York: Routledge.

Rugh, W. (2002). Arab education: tradition, growth and reform. *Middle East Journal*, *56*, 397-414.

Saad Al Deen, M. (1995). *The Islamic school in the middle ages*. Beirut: Al Mktabaa Al Asreia.

Saleh, M. (2001). *A dictionary of Islamic words and expressions.* Al-Riyad: Adwaa- Albayan.

Schwandt, T. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry (2ed).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Shafiq, M. (2000). Secularism and the Arab-Muslim condition. In J. Esposito & A. Tamimi, (Eds.), *Islam and secularism in the Middle East* (pp. 139-150). New York: New York University Press.

Shamma, F. (2002). Teaching your child about Islam. A paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Islamic society of North America, Chicago, 2000. Chicago.

Sharaf Al Deen, S. (1959). *Kuwaiti between yesterday and today*. Beirut: Dar Al Abad.

Siddiqui, A. (1997). Ethics in Islam: Key concepts and contemporary challenges. *Journal of Moral Education*, *26*, 423-431.

Snow, D., & Anderson, L. (1991). Researching the homeless In J. Feagin, A. Orum, & G. Sjoberg (Eds.), *A case for the case study* (pp.80-120). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Stake, R. (1998). Case studies. In N. Denizen & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp.86- 109). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strater, E., & Sunstein, B. (1997). *Field working reading and writing research*. Upper Saddle River, N. J: Blair Press.

Sturman, A. (1997). Case study methods. In Keeves (Ed.), *Educational Research, methodology, and measurement* (pp. 61-66). U.K: Pergamon.

Talbani, A. (1996). Pedagogy, power, and discourse: Transformation of Islamic education. *Comparative Education Review*, *40*, 66- 82.

Tamimi, A. (2000). The origins of Arab secularism. In J. Esposito & A. Tamimi (Eds.), *Islam and secularism in the Middle East* (pp. 12-28). New York: New York University Press.

Tauhidi, D. (2002). A renewed vision. *Islamic Horizons, 31,* 62-68.

Tetreault, M. (2000). *Sorties of democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tibi, B. (1995). Culture and knowledge: The politics of Islamization of knowledge as a postmodern project? The fundamentalist claim to de-westernization. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12, 1-24.

The Constitution of the State of Kuwait. (1962). Kuwait: Kuwaiti Government Press.

The Teacher: Shaper of Conscience. (1994, August/September). *Momentum, 25,* 32-35.

Walton, J. (1992). Making the theoretical case. In C. Ragin & H. Becker (Eds.), *What is a case?* (pp.121-137). New York: Cambridge University Press.

146

Way, N. (2001). Using feminist research methods to explore boys' relationships. In D. Tolman & M. Miller (Eds.), *From subjects to subjectivities* (pp.111- 129). New York: New York University Press.

Wheeler, D. (1998). Global culture or culture clash: New information technologies in the Islamic world—a view from Kuwait. *Communication Research*, *25*, 359. Available: http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/946

Wheeler, D. (2000). New media, globalization and Kuwait national identity. *The Middle East Journal*, *54*, 432. Available: http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/946

White J. (1982). *The aims of education restated*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. www.Atlas.com

Wolcott, H. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park,CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. London: Sage.

Wolcott, H. (1995). *The art of fieldwork*. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press.

Yin, R. (1989). *Case study research: design and methods* (revised ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zine, J. (2000). Redefining Resistance: Towards an Islamic subculture in schools. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 3,* 304-316.

PROTOCOL TO ACCOMPANY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Project Title: Islamic School: Challenges and potential in the 21st Century: A Case Study of *Al-Amal*, a Private School in Kuwait.

Principal Investigator: Kalthoum Al Kandari, Ph.D. student, Teaching and Learning.

Justification of the project:

This study focuses primarily on exploring a private school in Kuwait. It is a bilingual school as well as an Islamic educational institution that emphasize Islamization in its application. The main incentive for selecting this kind of a study is the September 11 crisis. Since September 11, the mass media have paid much attention to Islam and to Muslim society, particularly to its educational system, which has usually been viewed with skepticism (Rugh 2002; Charif 2002). Such misconceptions and assumptions have provided the main impetus for this research project, which will aim to refute erroneous representations and clarify the true nature and philosophy of Islamic school. The goal of my study is to explore the potential for such a school in Kuwait.

I have chosen this single school as my subject because of the complexities and contradictions, which characterize it. It is a bilingual school that adapts and implements a curriculum designed by United State educators in three main academic majors (English, science, and mathematics), while at the same time it focuses extensively on an Islamic studies curriculum. The school not only teaches the national Islamic curriculum—a requirement of the Kuwaiti private educational sector—but it is also adapts two aspects of an Islamic curriculum such as: *monotheism* and *jurisprudence*. Exploring this school gives insight into how an institution can adopt and adapt simultaneously such varying curricula.

My study will utilize the example of this school in order to investigate a number of related research questions: How do Islamic parents who send their children to this school define the spiritual and/ religious needs they want their children to acquire, and what role does the school play in fulfilling those needs? How do spiritual/ religious and academic needs intersect within the formal curriculum at the school throughout the daily interactions between teachers and children? Finally in the midst of increased Westernization and globalization, how do the teachers of this school negotiate the influences of western values on their students within the classroom? It is important to provide the reader with insight into the nature, philosophy, and context of one Islamic school, so they can better understand how those involved with such an institution cope with the various challenges they meet in the global sphere.

Procedures

Since the study will investigate this particular Kuwaiti bilingual school, all the participants would be from this school, including parents and teachers. I will conduct semi-structured interviews. No more than 25 interviews will be conducted with parents and teachers. I plan to provide the participants with written questions that will give the participants clues about

the nature and purpose of the conversation and study. These questions are designed to be modified as the interview progress and necessity dictates. Interviews with all participants will be held at their convenience and will last approximately 60-90 minutes—longer if necessary and/or agreed to by the participants.

An additional procedure involves observation. I plan to attend and observe classes at this school as well as any other activities that might be held by the school. Accordingly, I plan to contact the school in order to obtain their permission about the purpose and the nature of my presence during the observation procedure.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks anticipated from this study. The participants will be provided with consent forms that will protect their rights and release them from any obligations or responsibilities. Transcriptions for the interview will be returned to participants to read in order to decide what they want to include or exclude from the study, which will be negotiable.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

The identities of participants will be kept confidential. Only I, the researcher, will conduct and transcribe interviews. No one except me will have access to the recorded tapes, which will be locked, in a safe place. I will ask to keep these tapes. If the participants require that the tapes be destroyed or erased, their request will be respected and fulfilled.

Freedom to Withdraw

All participants have the freedom to withdraw from the study without any kind of questioning or responsibilities. Those who have agreed to be interviewed also have the freedom to refuse answering any question, and if they do not want to continue, they can withdraw from the study at any time they choose.

Informed Consent

The consent form for this study (attached to this request) will be given to each participant prior to the beginning of the interview.

Biographical Sketch

Kalthoum Al kandari

Curriculum and Instruction

Department of Teaching and Learning Currently I am a Doctoral student working on my dissertation. I graduated from Kuwait University with a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction. My academic advisor is David Hicks, Assistant Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning.

Project Title: Islamic School: Challenges and potential in the 21st Century: A Case Study of *Al-Amal*, a Private School in Kuwait.

Principal Investigator: Kalthoum Al Kandari, Ph.D. student, Teaching and learning.

I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the research known as *Islamic School: Challenges and potential in the 21st Century: A Case Study of Al-Amal, a Private School in Kuwait.*

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I will be asked about my experience related to questions of this Kuwaiti bilingual school.
2. I understand that I will be asked to participate in at least 1 interview, which will take no longer that 90 minutes, and I can withdraw from the study and the interview at any time without penalty of any kind. In the event I withdraw from the interview or the study, any tape made of the interview will be either given to me or destroyed.
3. I understand that I will receive no compensation for my participation in this study, thought I will be given a copy of the transcript for my own records.
4. *I understand that there are no risks to participating in this study beyond what you experience on daily bases. I also understand the benefits of this study are great in providing insight about the nature, context and practices of this Kuwaiti private bilingual school.*
5. I understand the interview will be audio-taped. In the interview, and my identity will remain anonymous and confidential through out the transcripts and tapes and references to any information contained in the interview.
6. This study has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Teaching and Learning.
7. If I feel I have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that my rights as a participant in this study have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact Dr David Moore, Chair IRB, Research Division, Virginia Tech, Dr David Hicks the academic Advisor, or Kalthoum Al kandari the investigator of this study, at the phone number listed below.
8. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and agree to be interviewed according to the terms outlined above. I have read and understand the informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

Signature
Should I have any questions about the research project or procedures, I may contact: Interviewer name/phone   kalthoum Al kandari (540)-951-2881
Dr. David Moore: (540)-231-4991   /   Dr. David Hicks: (540)-231-8332
PARTICIPANTS WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OR DUPLICATE ORIGINAL OF THIS CONSENT FOR

Appendix B
OBSERVATION LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

A permission for conducting Observation in (Al-Amal) Bilingual School

This letter has given to notify that Kalthoum Al Kandari is conducting observations as part of her research at the Bilingual School. The school administration allowed Kalthoum Al Kandari to attend classes as well as other school activities.

Students " Code of Behaviour "

As students in ᷉ ⸲ ⸲ ⸱ Bilingual School we want everyone to enjoy studying in a safe, healthy and happy atmosphere.

In order to achieve this we have a number of rules and a " Code of Behaviour" that we are all expected to follow.

Our "Code of Behavior" is simple and easy.
- **consideration to others at all times .**
- We use only good language in Arabic and in English.
- We listen to what others have to say, whoever they may be.
- We arrive to school on time and wearing the correct school uniform.
- We come prepared for all lessons.
- We **walk smartly** and **quietly** around the building, keeping to the **right hand side** on stairs and along corridors.
- We walk carefully up and down stairs.
- We take care of our property, the school property and the property of fellow students.
- We eat and drink only where it is allowed.
- We **do not** eat or drink in **class** or around the school **corridors.**
- We never eat chewing gum in school!
- We don't bring "walk man", radios, mobile phones and other distractions to school! We know that they will be confiscated.

START OF LESSONS :
- We are on time.
- We enter every classroom quietly and sensibly.
- We go straight to our work place and take out our books, pens and equipment.
- We remain silent for the teacher to begin the lesson.

Continue school Document:

THE MISSION STATEMENT

May 1.1 2002

The Mission Statement

The Mission of [the school] is to help students acquire the intellectual qualities, attitudes and ethical. values necessary to achieve their positive, creative and productive potential through clear objectives and priorities which enable them to carry out their responsibilities towards self, society and the world, within the framework of Islamic beliefs and values.

Our School Philosophy

[The school] is a bilingual, national, educational institute which delivers instruction in both Arabic and English.[the school] is firmly committed to providing quality education to all students, preparing them for higher education and lifelong learning. Students are taught within a learning environment based on Arabic/Islamic culture, heritage, and values. At the same time, students are encouraged to develop respect and tolerance of other cultures.

[The school] aims to develop the student as an individual and as a whole person. The school provides an educational programme designed to meet the intellectual, social, ethical, emotional and physical needs of children through all stages of development by providing stimulating learning environment for students, staff and parents.

[The school] develops in students a sense of responsibility toward themselves, others and their environment, preparing students to be responsible and contributing citizens of the future. This is reflected in the encouragement of students to participate in school life, to be involved in local community service, and to show an awareness of global concerns.

Title _____ What do plants need ?

Materials ____ W. S. about parts of the plant.

Procedure

- Review information about plants & photosynthesis
- Review parts of the plants by asking ss to label them.
- Explain the main idea of the lesson by asking ss ; What do plants need ?
- Accept responses like ;
  * carbon dioxide * water * soil * sunlight * chlorophyll
- Make inference between the way humans get oxygen & the way plants get carbon dioxide.
- Elicit that plants get C. dioxide through tiny holes called " stomata ".
- Elicit also that nutrients are needed for plants to grow.
- Plants get " nutrients " from the soil.
- Doing W. S. 1 on P 1 of the activity book.

Intergration to __ Curriculum :
        (Co operation) Brotherhood
As humans cooperate together, parts of the plant cooperate together to make food
Open discussion will be held about parts of the plant and their functions & how can they help making food

Evaluation :
Time was not enough to do the W. S. So, we'll do it next time.

SAMPLES OF LESSON PLANS (IN SCIENCE) 2

/ Dec / 2001	Period 4 2,4	Class / 4B 4H, 4A	Unit ω , secam L Step Lesson 3

Explain what happens to animals that are caught in an oil spill.
'After the spill'

damage, swallow, poisonous, pollution

Illustrations in the text book

Procedure . Review with students how oil spills
. Encourage students to List oil products and explain how
oil products made our life easier and then tell students
that also oil is harmful when it spills
. Ask students :
    1. What happens to the fish where the oil spills ?
    2. what would happen to animals in the area
       of the oil spill ?
Accept students responses
. Explain that :
    * Fish and sea birds became sick and might
      die in the area of the oil spill.
    * Oil stick to feathers of birds making them too
      heavy to fly.
    . Oil seeps into the fur of the sea otters making
      it difficult for them to stay warm.
. Emphasize on that oil spills are poisonous and can
damage our environment.
. Integrate the   curriculum " _Mercy___ ", so
we should save the seas and oceans from possible contamination
with oil in order to maintain our water resources. Tankers' captains
and crews must excersize maximum care to avoid accidents

155

APPENDIX D

GLANCE AT KUWAIT: CRUCIAL DATES AND EVENTS

2003: War on Iraq

2002: Coeducation was banned only in Kuwait University.

May 4, 2000: The government issued several landmark decrees dealing with women's suffrage, economic liberalization, and nationality. The national Assembly later rejected all of these decrees as a matter of principle, and then reintroduced most of them as parliamentary legislation.

May 4, 1999: The Amir dissolved the parliament, this time, however, it was done through entirely constitutional means, and new elections were scheduled for July 3, 1999.

1999: The Amir gave Kuwaiti women the right to vote and run for parliament; however, parliament defeated the ruler's decree.

October 1994: Iraq massed elite troops along the border with Kuwait, but it removed them when Kuwait and the United States moved forces into the area.

October 1992: The general election viewed to be a success for supporters of a return to Islamic law.

November 6, 1991: Last of 75 burning or damaged oil wells were capped.

March 14, 1991: Kuwaiti's Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al- Ahmed Al –Sabah, returned to his homeland after seven and a half months in exile.

March 11, 1991: Iraq renounced its annexation of Kuwait in a letter to U.N Secretary- General Perez de Cuellar.

February 27, 1991: Kuwait liberated from Iraqi occupation.

February 23, 1991: Coalition military forces initiated a land campaign against Iraq.

January 16, 1991: Coalition military forces declared war against Iraq and initiated a massive air campaign.

November 1990: The United Nations authorized use of "all necessary means" to remove Iraq from Kuwait after January 15, 1991.

October 1990: The Kuwaiti people's conference was conducted in Saudi Arabia.

August 2, 1990: Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait.

July 17, 1990: Sadam Hussein accuses Kuwaiti of oil overproduction and theft of oil from the Rumaila oil field.

July 1990: Elections were held to establish a new Consultative National Assembly.

1989: Iraqi president accused Kuwait of flooding the international oil market and consequently forcing oil prices down.

July 1987: The United States "reflagged" Kuwaiti oil tankers as a protective measure against random Iran –Iraq related violence.

January 1987: The fifth Islamic conference was hosted by Kuwait.

February 1986: The silver anniversary (25th) of Kuwaiti independence was celebrated.

May 1985: An unsuccessful car bomb assassination was attempted on his highness the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed al- Sabah.

August 1982: Crash of Souk al-Manakh (secondary stock exchange market) sent Kuwait economy into severe downturn.

February 1981: Elections were held to establish the national assembly of Kuwait.

May 1981: Kuwait joined the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

August 1976: The national assembly of Kuwait was dissolved.

March 1975: The Kuwaiti government acquired total ownership of Kuwait oil Company.

1971: The Kuwaiti institute for scientific research (KISR) was opened.

April 1969: The Central Bank of Kuwait was formed.

November 1966: The Kuwait University was officially dedicated.

1966: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia agreed on the boundaries for the Neutral Zone.

May 1963: Kuwait joined the United Nation.

January 1963: Kuwaiti's first elected National Assembly was convened.

November 11, 1962: The constitution of Kuwait was ratified by his highness the Amir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al- Sabah.

July 1961: Kuwait becomes a member of the Arab league.

June 19, 1961: Kuwait declared its independence from Great Britain.

April 1961: the Kuwaiti Dinar became the Kuwaiti official currency.

1960: The Organization of Petroleum Exploring Countries (OPEC) was established with Kuwait among the founding 13 nations.

1957: All of Kuwaiti ancient protective walls were demolished. Only five massive entry gates were preserved.

1952: The first Kuwait master plan was developed.

May 1951: Kuwait radio began operation.

June 1946: the first shipment of Kuwait crude oil was exported.

February 1938: The massive *Burqan* oil field was discovered.

1932: The modern boundaries between Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the State of Kuwait were set to be consistent with those originally delineated in the May, 1922 British sponsored conference.

1920: The third and the final wall around Kuwait city was built.

December 1911: Kuwait opened its first formal school, *Al- Mubarakiyah* School.

January 1899: A friendship and cooperation treaty (known as the exclusive agreement) was signed with Great Britain.

1886: The first Kuwaiti Currency was minted in copper and distributed.

1773: Kuwait was a victim of an epidemic that killed more than half of its inhabitants.

1756: A Danish traveler, Karsten Niebuhr, placed Kuwait (refer to as "Grane") on the map.

1756: Sheikh Sabah ibn Jaber was elected as the first ruler (Amir) of Kuwait.

1710 (approximately): The *Utub* tribe and the al- Sabah family arrived in Kuwait.

* Dates and events were taken from various references such as Lambert & Lambert (1991), BBC network site www.Bbc.com, and Kuwait information center (USA) www.kic.com.

Kalthoum Al Kandari

Home Address:

14405 Stroubles Creek Rd   (540) 951-2881
Blacksburg, VA, 24060   kkandari@vt.edu

Education

Ph.D. 2004   Curriculum & Instruction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA

Dissertation: *Islamic School: Challenges and Potentials in the 21st Century: A Case Study of Al-Amal, A Private Bilingual School In Kuwait.*

M.S. 1997   College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait

B.S. 1991   College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait

Professional Experience

An Islamic Studies teacher: Secondary level, Kuwaiti public school
Taught six years and half in public schools.

Awards and Scholarship

Scholarship from Kuwait University 1999 for obtaining the Ph.D. degree in Education
Member in the Kuwaiti Teachers Associations
Awarded for one of the best teachers by the year 1998 from Gharb Al Fintas Middle School

Research Interest

Qualitative research   Case studies
Oral history   Islamic schooling & Democracy

Professional Presentations

Symposia and conferences

Lahman, M. E., & Al Kandari, K. (2001). *Cross cultural explorations: A researcher experience.* CHRE Graduate Student Research Day, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Uttech, M., Alkandari, K. et al. (March 2001). *A collaborative collection of oral histories from the Christiansburg institute alumni* (A Multimedia presentation). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.