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Attaining Excellence in the Arabic Classroom:

Practical Insights for Student Success

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Abstract

Arabic instruction is critical to the curriculum of Islamic Schools. Many parents choose the Islamic School alternative to assure that their child will have a strong foundation in Arabic so as to better understand and be able to practice Islam. Negative experiences with the language are detrimental due to the religious ties and implications. An Arabic program focused on the individualized needs of each student, quality instruction that assures learning, the use of engaging materials, and the development of interpersonal relationships throughout the school, is a key indicator to a student's desire to further study the language. This paper seeks to provide the reader with practical strategies to easily incorporate within today's Arabic classroom. By providing a quality program, all become focused on the needs of the students. Students will then flourish and excel, becoming life-long learners.

Attaining Excellence in the Arabic Classroom:

Practical Insights for Student Success

The Arabic language is a critical component in the curriculum of today's Islamic Schools. Students, by growing up in a country where Arabic is not the spoken language of the majority of the population, and who feel less comfortable with it than they would with English, Spanish, or French (Elkhafaifi, 2005), must have positive experiences with the language to progress into proficient Arabic speakers. The desire for students to learn Arabic is not a mere foreign language requirement, although many high schools have done away with the requirement (Malveaux, 2001; Strauss, 2002), but is taught for a greater reason. Parents desire the instruction in both Arabic and Islamic Studies because they are critical to understanding Islam. Since it is such an emphasis for parents, when not taught effectively, it can also be a great area of criticism for a school. A paradigm shift is needed to improve Arabic instruction, with a focus on the individualized needs of each student, quality instruction that assures learning, the use of engaging materials, and the development of interpersonal relationships. These are imperative, for not only is the student learning Arabic within the classroom, this instruction, because of the religious ties and implications, becomes vital to the identity of the student.

Why Arabic?

Nearly one in five Americans, or those residing in the United States, speak another language other than English (Malveaux, 2001). Surprisingly, there are

fewer languages spoken today than were a decade ago. According to the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages, less than one in 10 students at American colleges major in foreign languages (Strauss, 2002). Only 9 percent of such students learn languages like Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Indonesian, although they are spoken by a majority of the world's population. The Arabic language occupies a central role in the religion of Islam for many reasons, (Dahbi, 2004) and that is why teachers, administrators, and parents desire instruction in Arabic for students. One such a reason is the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, a divine choice as the language of revelation. Also, the miracle of his prophecy was the "art of manipulating the literary variety of the Arabic language that was so highly valued by his people" (p. 630). Arabic is also used in the daily prayers, or salah. Generally speaking, the more knowledge one has in Arabic, the more he or she can learn about Islam. As teachers and administrators, we must strive to provide students with all of the tools and skills necessary to allow them to succeed both in this world and in the hereafter.

The Nature of Arabic

Teaching Arabic can be very difficult, for it is a diglossic language (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Strauss, 2002), in which the spoken form is quite different from the classical and written form, more easily known as fus'ha or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Also, the spoken form varies depending on the region. This causes a dilemma for teachers and administrators because by teaching the MSA, students will not be able to easily carry on conversations in informal settings,

increasing their frustration level. Providing instruction in the spoken Arabic is also difficult for many reasons, one being which dialect does the teacher select? Secondly, a students' ability to read and write can be hindered when focusing only on the spoken Arabic. Overall though, it is easier to proceed from MSA to the spoken dialect than the reverse (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004).

Differentiating Instruction

Other difficulties that arise when teaching Arabic is that students come into the classroom at varying levels, and a teacher must find the means to meet all of the students' individualized needs. Anxiety begins building when students believe instruction is not at their level (Elkhafaifi, 2005). For that and other reasons that include the early development of attitudes towards a language, it is recommended to begin instruction in Arabic at as young of an age as possible, which most Islamic schools are already doing. No matter the area of concern, quality instruction can reduce the disadvantage caused by a lack of knowledge in a language (Alsawaie, 2004).

Anxiety within the Classroom

Anxiety can be found in any foreign language classroom, but especially so when the languages are Arabic, Japanese, Chinese or the like, due to the unfamiliar writing and phonological systems as well as the foreign cultural contexts the languages are taught in (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Anxiety arises from "self-doubt, frustration, and perceived (or fear of) failure" (p. 207). When combined with learning a foreign language, anxiety can manifest itself in varied performance such as decreased test and final grades. Anxious students may

also underestimate their own abilities, diminishing their performance in class (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). Elkhafaifi cited a study (Granschow, Sparks, Anderson, Javorsky, Skinner, & Patton, 1994) whose authors concluded that anxiety is caused by poor foreign language skills.

Other Effects

Students become anxious because they do not have the adequate knowledge or skills to succeed. If severe, anxiety can have ramifications on even a student's academic or career plans. This information is especially critical for Islamic School teachers and administrators, for learning Arabic is usually an introductory component to learning Islam, and may at times be the only exposure a student receives to both. Negative experiences can have more detrimental effects, causing a student to not only lose interest in Arabic, but of greater consequence, their religion. It is essential that teachers and administrators become keenly aware of the ramifications of instruction, and strive to find all means possible of reducing learner anxiety. Actively engaging students in the learning process has been key in significantly reducing tension and anxiety in the classroom (Ryding, 1993 as cited in Elkhafaifi, 2005).

The Arabic Challenge

Learning Arabic is especially challenging to native speakers of English (Elkhafaifi, 2005), who are the majority of the students within Islamic schools. The Foreign Service Institute estimates that to proficiently speak Arabic, Japanese, or Chinese, one needs approximately 1,320 hours within an intensive program compared to the 480 hours of instruction needed in languages like

French or Spanish (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). In instructional terms, where a student receives one hour a day of Arabic instruction, he or she will need almost 5 years in Arabic or the like language instruction to reach the same level of proficiency in 2 years of instruction in French or Spanish. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages estimates that it takes between 2,400 and 2,760 hours for someone with “a superior aptitude for languages” to attain the highest level of achievement in Arabic, allowing them to be good enough to translate or even become a lawyer (Strauss, 2002, pp. 10). This is approximately 10 academic years based on a daily hour of Arabic instruction, and is possible if the focus is on student learning and achievement since students are in school from grades K – 12.

Pushing Ahead

Ryding (1991) notes that many students of Arabic will cease learning the language after only a year or two of study due to their great frustration in their inability to communicate at a skilled level. Their frustration grows because they have exerted a great deal of effort for what they perceive as minimal results. Although this may be an option for university students, ceasing to learn the language is not an option for students within Islamic or weekend schools, for it is a core subject, and one that is critical for them to master. “Practice is the key, and immersion – living in a country where the language is spoken or being in a situation where only that language is spoken – is the best way of learning,” said Dirgham Sbait, professor at Portland State University in Oregon (Strauss, 2002). Providing the practice as well as the immersion activities can easily be done

within the Islamic school classrooms and throughout the Muslim community at large.

Growing Desire to Learn Arabic

Despite the difficulty in learning Arabic, and possibly due to recent events within the United States, new students continue to enroll in beginning level classes at an ever-increasing rate throughout colleges and universities across the United States (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Only 5,505 students were studying Arabic in these institutions in 1998, which was a 23.9% increase from 1995 to 1998. According to a recent survey conducted by the Modern Language Association, a 92.3% increase in enrollment in Arabic classes occurred between 1998 and 2002 (Welles, 2004). As this need has arisen, hiring Arabic teachers and professors has been a great focus after September 11, 2001, with Universities and colleges desiring to improve their Arabic, Middle Eastern, and Islamic Studies departments (Wilson, 2002).

Increases in Islamic Schools

Similar research was not available for students in Islamic schools, but conclusions can be drawn from the increase in the number of these schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, whose most recent statistics reflect 2002, Islamic schools have shown a dramatic increase as well, from 44 in 1991 to 188 in 2002 (Lewis, 2006). Although these numbers do not represent weekend Arabic schools, this almost 430% increase may reflect an increased desire of parents to have their K-12 children learn both Arabic and Islam.

A Study of Jewish Students in Arabic Programs

Arabic is not only taught in Islamic schools, but as a second language, is regarded as one of the valuable goals of the educational language policy in Israel (Ministry of Education, 1996 as cited in Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). Jewish students are to learn Arabic as a compulsory subject for 3 years, in grades 7 to 9. Due to the political ramifications, the Arabic program has proven to be “extremely problematic and suffers from numerous problems” (p. 217). The study investigated the impacts of different changes in the teaching of Arabic on student’s attitudes towards the language, it’s speakers and culture, and the student’s motivation to further study the language. Surveys were distributed to 692 students in grades 4 – 6 and 362 parents from 14 elementary schools. The findings revealed that students who studied spoken Arabic, as opposed to those who did not, reported more positive attitudes towards the Arabic language, its culture and speakers, and also identified themselves as more motivated to study the language. The important role of the parents was confirmed, and contributed one of the predictors of student motivation for learning Arabic. By far though, the most important indicator that predicted students’ motivation was a quality Arabic program (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy).

Findings of the Study

In comparing the data between the two groups of Jewish students, those who received instruction and those who did not, many interesting responses arose. When asked why the students felt that they needed to study Arabic, the top 5 answers that emerged included: “the Arabs surround us, we need to

communicate with the Arabs, we need to learn about their culture and make peace with them, it is instrumental for finding a job, university studies, watching TV, and so on; and we need to fight the enemy” (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004, p. 223). Further analysis reveals that those students who did not have Arabic instruction focused on the need to study Arabic because of the surrounding countries and to deal with Israel’s enemies. Those that studied Arabic were quite different in their responses, citing the need to become familiar with the Arab culture, for the sake of peace, and for pragmatic considerations.

Implications for Islamic Schools

Much can be taken from this study and applied to enhance the Arabic program at Islamic schools. First of all, changing the educational context to better fit the needs of the students brought about positive changes in learner attitudes and motivation towards Arabic. Students who learned the spoken Arabic, as opposed to those who did not learn Arabic at all, were more satisfied with their educational experiences, held a more positive attitude towards the Arabic language and its culture, and were also more inclined to further their studies. Students who studied the language also rated Arabic higher in terms of importance and attributed more practical benefits to knowing the language than those who did not study it. These students focused on using Arabic to enhance peace between Israel and its Arab nations, unlike the control group that did not study Arabic, and were more focused on learning Arabic for military and espionage purposes. When applied to Islamic schools, these results can truly enhance the Arabic program and the educational experiences of students.

Arabic Connections

Many factors can influence a student's attitude and motivation for learning. In the case of foreign language, one needs to examine the "cultural beliefs about the target language, its culture and speakers, the status of the language, and the societal attitudes towards the language and its speakers, including parental attitudes and parental encouragement to engage in language study" (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004, p. 218). Taking these one by one, a great advantage arises for Arabic instruction within the Islamic Schools. In providing examples of the importance of Arabic and its speakers, teachers should incorporate stories from the seerah and the companions of the prophet, as well as the great Muslims of the past. Teachers need to emphasize how Arabic is regarded as a language of high status, for it was chosen by Allah (SWT) to be used for the miraculous Quran.

Improving Student Attitudes and Motivation

When students understand the value of Arabic, and hold it with a higher regard, as the Jewish students did, there will be a greater motivation to learn the language. The study also showed that students, when learning a language they believe has higher prestige, hold more positive attitudes and are more eager to study societal attitudes towards the language and its speakers. These beliefs held by society have actually changed recently with all of the alleged threats of terrorism, but as more and more people are getting to know true Islam, Arabic classes are quickly filling up to meet the needs. As in the study, where parent's attitudes greatly impacted the student's desire to learn the language, parents

within Islamic Schools must encourage their children to learn the language of the Quran and Jannah, a motivator in and of itself.

Implications for Teaching

When teaching Arabic, a teacher must keep many things in mind. Teachers must recognize anxiety within their students, taking proper measures to reduce it. He or she can begin by assuring that the materials used are understandable (Elkhafaifi, 2005). It becomes problematic when a majority of instructional time is spent on drills that are too easy for some students and too hard for others, by doing this the needs of all students are not met. The same is true when using stories that are too difficult for the students, or concepts that they are unable to relate to, learning is hindered and painful memories of reading become instilled in the student's mind (Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005).

Practice Listening

Instruction should also be provided in specific listening strategies to assist students in listening more effectively so that they will be able to recall more of what they heard. Teachers should also schedule in extra time to provide students with opportunities for listening practice in order to familiarize themselves with the tasks (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Students need to be reminded that many mistakes will be made when learning a new language, for that is part of the process, and that it is the student's role to continuously guess and take risks in class. Students need to feel secure within their classrooms, and by speaking and listening to one another, learning will take place. A "language pledge" should be taken, where all

students attempt to speak in Arabic as exclusively as possible (Useem, 2000). By doing this, Nabil Abdelfattah, director of the Arabic School at Middlebury College's summer school in Vermont, states that "Arabic is no longer a foreign language you study only during class. It becomes your first language" (pp. 9). Teachers should also assist their students in overcoming unrealistic expectations of understanding everything that they hear. It is not possible, but students should continually strive and actively listen. Listening and written passages should be at an appropriate level of difficulty, for listening anxiety will be reduced as students are given increased opportunities to experience small successes. Listening strategies should be explicitly taught, and will prove instrumental to decreasing anxiety and increasing motivation.

Positive Reinforcement

Greater self-confidence and lower levels of frustration and anxiety can also be achieved through positive feedback and continued encouragement (Khaldieh, 2000). With this newfound ease, students are more likely to continue their own study of Arabic, as well as encouraging others to learn Arabic. It becomes the teacher's role to foster the development of a supportive and friendly classroom environment, for that is as important to the success of the class as is the curriculum (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Children's development varies, and so must the instructional strategies of teachers, gearing instruction to the individualized needs of students. Teachers must become familiar with a wide variety of approaches, materials, and strategies to enrich the children's understanding of literature (Neuman, 2000a). In general, better language

teaching methods need to be adapted, and new language teaching materials need to be prepared to respond to the needs of Muslim learners of Arabic as well as to the rising demand for the Arabic language in the rest of the world (Dahbi, 2004; Neuman, 2000a).

The Need for a Quality Program

With the increasing interest in the Arabic language, a national need has arisen for greater numbers of qualified teacher than ever before (Allen, 2004). At Universities across the United States, programs have varied from the traditional classroom experiences, to The Arabic Project at Montana State University, an internationally recognized program which allows students to study at a Moroccan institution after completing two semesters of Arabic (Arabic, 2002). In their study Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy identified satisfaction with the Arabic study program as the variable that best predicted students' motivation to excel in their studies as well as to continue learning Arabic (2004).

Critical Components of the Program

They also identified teaching methods, school facilities, materials used, and teacher's personality as influential factors leading to increased student motivation or the lack thereof (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). A language lab should be a key component to the program, where students are able to listen to readings, watch videos, and practice vocabulary. Essays can be written on Arabic word-processing programs, and students should be able to listen to anasheed, Quranic recitations, news and radio shows, and other uses of Arabic on the Internet (Useem, 2000). By providing them with so many listening

opportunities, as well as actively using the language, students will be able to model the language and acquire it easier. Teachers need to be as imaginative, innovative, and creative as they can to assure that the needs of all of their students are met, and that they will succeed (Marcell, 2005). The focus for teachers and administrators in Islamic schools must become developing “vibrant reading programs that capitalize on what students already bring into the classroom: their capacity to move, gesture visualize, draw, sing, chant, analyze, and celebrate nature” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 81).

The K-12 Classroom

According to the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages, it is recommended that an elementary school program include classes three to five days a week for the duration of 30 to 40 minutes in the desired language (Strauss, 2002). Middle schools should hold classes daily for 40 to 50 minutes. Very few public schools do this for even the most common languages like Spanish and French, and Islamic schools do not meet these recommendations as well. To compensate, teachers can provide a print-rich environment filled with books, paper, signs, symbols, and labels for students to flourish in reading and writing (Neuman, 2000b). It is imperative to develop a high quality program and curriculum for the teaching of Arabic in order to raise the level of student satisfaction, thereby increasing learning, as well as to gain parental support.

The Role of Parents

Parents must become involved in the educational process for their child to succeed. Research has shown that the negative attitudes of students and their

lack of motivation towards learning the language can be partially attributed to the parents' perceptions and beliefs. In a recent study, Gardner, Masgoret, and Tremblay (1999) confirmed that parental encouragement is associated with the development of their child's attitudes towards the learning situation as well as their motivation to further learn the language (as cited in Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). Parents, through their effect on children's attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making, provide a form of extrinsic motivation that has been noted as an important motivational source among children (Skehan, 1998 as cited in Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy). Parents need to provide their children with a supportive family environment filled with highly motivated role models. They also must support the efforts of the school, and diligently work to reinforce the concepts and skills learned in the home life.

Need for More Reading and Writing Instruction

When examining research about Arabic instruction, one finds little research related to effective instructional strategies, let alone specific strategies for Reading and Writing. To be able to master any language, one must be proficient in using it not only to communicate, but also to be able to read and write. As teachers and administrators in Islamic schools, we join parents in their desire to have students become functional in Arabic, and for the most part, able to read and understand the Quran. The information presented in this paper was adapted from various sources that related to effectively teaching reading and writing. The ideal learning environment is one in which "a delicate balance"

exists, providing students with “rich, meaningful, engaging content learning within the context of appropriate teaching practices” (Neuman, 2000a, p. 21).

Importance of Being Read To

Most experts agree that children who begin kindergarten with certain characteristics like “an interest in books, a fondness for conversation, a curiosity about the world – are more likely to thrive in school and have productive and happy lives” (Neuman, 2005a, p. 8). Language and vocabulary development forms the foundation for reading and writing (Neuman, 2005a). One of the most important contributors to children’s vocabulary is being read to. An extensive amount of research substantiates the link between being read to and learning to read and write successfully. Reading out loud to children every day is by far the most important thing an educator can do to help build literacy skills (Neuman, 2005b). This is an area where Arabic instruction and teaching in Islamic schools lacks. Walking into a typical classroom, one may find the only things read out loud are the lessons in the book. This is not what the research is referring to, but instead being read to purely for the children’s enjoyment.

Enjoying Books – Beginning, Middle, and End

All children enjoy being read to. Younger students enjoy the silly rhymes, rhythms, and patterns and they love to join in with the teacher as he or she reads (Neuman, 2005b). Older students appreciate the relaxing atmosphere provided when read to. Teachers should select books that are highly engaging and are of interest to students. Reading should begin by the teacher showing students the cover of the book as well as some of the illustrations. For older students

predictions can be made from the title and cover. During the reading, teachers should stop and ask questions, asking the students to guess what the story might be about. No matter the age of the students, interesting new vocabulary should be emphasized, and can even be written in either word cards, or a form the teacher desires. Conversations should occur about the meanings behind being an author or illustrator. It is also good practice to stop at various points to check for student understanding. This is especially critical in Arabic instruction because children's books tend to be written in MSA, and students may require extra assistance to comprehend.

Reflections at the End

After completing the last page of the book, it is critical for children to reflect on what they have read. This can easily be done through a discussion of what they liked most or even least about the story. Students are given opportunities to extend their language skills, show their levels of comprehension, and also bring the story to life, "making these stories their own" (Neuman, 2005b, p. 20). Students can journal about it, synthesize through different projects, or even have book groups to complete the discussion. By doing this, students are given the opportunities to become familiar with the beginnings, middles, and ends, the most basic structures of literature.

Writing Attempts at the Earliest of Ages

Writing has received less attention from researchers than other aspects of early literacy (Neuman, 2004). This is especially true in Islamic schools, with a minimal amount of Arabic instruction spent on writing, and especially reflective or

creative writing. At an early age, and throughout their education, children develop a great deal of knowledge about the alphabet through writing attempts (Neuman, 2005a). Children use writing to communicate with their friends and teachers; these attempts at pretending to write at the earliest of ages are seen as powerful and important activities for young children. One study found that even without formal spelling instruction, preschoolers used their intuitive knowledge to spell words. As they learn to write, they are breaking down the words they wish to spell into the corresponding sounds. It is critical that we focus on the early years, because “literacy for life” is nurtured in the earliest years (p. 8).

Daily Writing

Students thrive in environments that encourage experimentation with writing materials, guided by knowledgeable teachers who are responsive listeners, and even serve as editors (Neuman, 2004). Classrooms should be filled with labels, posters, a word wall, and other resources to help the student in visualizing words. To become proficient readers, a student must be able to recognize many familiar words at a glance as well as decode words they do not know (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2001). Invented spelling is useful for only so long, for viewed over and over can actually interfere with a child’s increasing understanding of word formation. It is the teacher’s role to constantly provide the feedback, corrections, and positive reinforcement throughout the reading process. By setting up an environment that supports and motivates writing, such as journaling, a post office box, a message board, memo and notepads, children will become more motivated to practice and continue their

writing. These materials can be modified to meet the needs of older children as well. Students also need to see writing modeled for them each day (Neuman, 2004). A morning message concisely models daily good writing and keeps students current with the day's activities, and when done properly, will draw students in just to read the message (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2001).

Importance of Relationships

By beginning the morning with a personal connection to the students, the teacher is sending a message to each student that he or she is important and valued. Students are more motivated to learn when there is a relationship built with the teacher. Starting at the youngest age, teachers can provide their students with a strong foundation in reading and writing by fostering a personal relationship with their students and tying the content to activities that are valuable and meaningful to the students (McLane & McNmee, 1990 as cited in Neuman, 2000a). More heart needs to be involved within schools, including the fostering and valuing of interpersonal relationships. With relationships built on trust, respect and collaboration, everyone, students, teachers and administrators alike, will become more meaningful members of the school. Then, and only then, can a true learning community, where everyone belongs and succeeds, be developed. Recognizing that each person can benefit the community is key to building relationships (Doyle, 1999).

Valuing Relationships

Hargreaves (1998) states that 'good relationships are the foundation of worthwhile learning' (as cited in Deimer, 1999). In other words, for learning to

truly occur, relationships need to exist. Sergiovanni (1994) argued that a community is dependent on memories of shared experiences and stability. When leadership is shared, teachers, administrators and others in the school community are more likely to make a long-term commitment to the school (as cited in Doyle, 2004). High turnover rates and frequent transfers of staff send the message that interpersonal relationships are not valued and not important. But, when leadership values relationships, and facilitates in their development, Murphy states that ‘there is as much heart as head’ (as cited in Doyle).

Relationships Are Worthwhile

Although some may not see the value behind assuring that these bonds are built, research shows that over time, it is truly worth the effort (Cunningham and Cordeiro, 2003; Rees, 1994; Smith and Sharma, 2002 as cited in Doyle). As Trafford (1989) states, “Leaders will only be given authority and allegiance if they are perceived as servants of the people. Inspiration, trust and empathy are hallmarks of this approach” (Deimer, 1999). He goes on further to state that, “the climate, the policy directives in terms of behavior and expectations, and the interpersonal relations between staff, students and extended community need to reflect the values of community, faith, hope and courage” (Deimer).

Support for Interpersonal Relationships

Coombs (1999) says schools can become better places for adults and children if they are allowed to experience a sense of belonging similar to that of a family (as cited in Deimer, 1999). Openness, communication, sharing and collaboration should be the basis for these relationships (Doyle, 2004). In a

community, teachers move from being passive participants to key decision-makers (Doyle), and need encouragement, support and professional development to help them adjust to these new roles (Buckner and McDowelle, 2000 as cited in Doyle). When teachers are encouraged and rewarded for taking on leadership roles within the school, they are instilled with a sense of self-worth and confidence, allowing them to achieve at levels which otherwise would have seemed impossible (Deimer, 1999). This in turn reflects a message of respect regarding the treatment of all students and adults within the school, which is modeled by the staff throughout their every day interactions with their caring, understanding and cooperative demeanor (Rubin, 2004).

Islamic schools are critical to the fostering of the identity of a Muslim student. By learning Arabic and Islamic Studies, a student is empowered with the skills and knowledge he or she will need to succeed in future worldly endeavors as well as in the hereafter. The number of Islamic schools in the United States is rising tremendously, and parents seek the Islamic alternative for the instruction in both Arabic and Islamic Studies. Educators and administrators must take a new stance in Islamic schools, where everything is done to make sure the individualized needs of all students are met. As was reported in the Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy study (2004), the most critical factor for students to desire learning the Arabic language was the quality of the program. This is of extreme importance for Muslim children because learning Arabic provides opportunities to increase one's knowledge in Islam. Negative experiences with Arabic or Islamic studies can have detrimental effects on a

student, causing a student to not only lose interest in Arabic, but of greater consequence, practicing Islam. This is what it is fundamentally all about. Nothing less than excellence can be expected from teachers and administrators in Islamic Schools. An Arabic program focused on meeting the individualized needs of each student, quality instruction that assures learning, the use of engaging materials, and the development of interpersonal relationships is the first step on the journey to life-learning and student success.

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