

ISNA 2006 Educational Forum

‘Islamic Education: Strengthening Faith and Enhancing Quality’

Strengthening the Islamic Identity Through the History-Social Studies Curriculum

Fawad M.S. Yacoob, Educator – Orange Crescent School

Introduction

Social studies teachers and educators often look to history as the center of a school’s curriculum. Its ability to touch and reach a variety of academic disciplines and subjects throughout the course of a year is remarkable. One of the major pitfalls in underachieving history programs is that they emphasize too much on names, dates and events without creating links, associations and connections. They rely extensively on memorization techniques for teaching. Hence, students get easily bored and cannot relate to the topics being discussed.

Islamic Schools and Muslim educators are in a position today to strengthen the Islamic Identity of their students by focusing on enhancing the quality of their history programs. For example, students studying the origins and foundations of the U.S. Constitution and government can compare and contrast it with the Constitution of Madinah. Furthermore, they can relate the ideals of these two historical documents to the realities of their respective environments. In this way, they are achieving the benefits of understanding the history of the country they live in and most likely were born in, as well as gaining a spiritual sense of Islamic political philosophy.

The Orange Crescent School History-Social Studies Program (OCS HSS Program) offers a unique perspective and insight into teaching young Muslim-American students about the past. The Orange Crescent School is a private Muslim school located in the city of Garden Grove, California. It is affiliated with the Islamic Society of Orange County and sits on its sprawling 5.3-acre campus that includes the newly built Masjid al-Rahman complete with traditional Masjid architecture of minarets and a dome.

In this paper we will examine the strengths of this history program at the middle school level. In addition, we will discuss the teaching philosophies, instructional strategies and interactive assignments that create the foundation for the program. Furthermore, we will provide ideas and suggestions for teachers to take back with them and implement in their classrooms. The presenter will analyze the curriculum and how the program is developed through the traditional classrooms of the 5th grade (Early U.S. History), 6th Grade (Ancient Civilizations), 7th Grade (Medieval and Early Modern World) and 8th Grade (U.S. History). Lastly, the workshop will offer a comprehensive list of resources and references for enhancing a school’s middle school history-social studies program.

The OCS HSS Program is catered to developing young Muslim American minds that will be active participants and positive role models in the cultural landscape and society of this country.

The program is founded on five developmental strands: (1) Educational and Academic Development – meet and exceed the curriculum requirements set forth by the California Department of Education; (2) Spiritual and Religious Development – assist students as they grow in their faith understanding the concepts of personality and character; (3) Community Service Development – involve students in a hands-on-approach to community outreach; (4) Personal and Social Development – encourage students to grow as teenagers and adolescents and (5) Career Development – offer opportunities to see what professional positions in history, government and public life would be like.

Outline

In this paper, I will introduce the concept that the teaching of the history-social studies curriculum strengthens the Islamic Identity within our students. In addition, I will answer two fundamental questions related to this discussion; (1) How does the HSS curriculum contribute to the growth and development of the Islamic Identity? and (2) How can we link the teaching of HSS towards positive steps in building the Islamic Identity? Furthermore, I will outline different strategies methodologies designed to inculcate this identity at the middle school level including the grades of fifth through eighth.

The outline of this paper is listed below:

- ❑ **Historical Foundations**
 - What is history?
 - Why is history important to teach?
 - Perceptions of History
 - History Department – Goals and Objectives
- ❑ **History & Identity**
 - What is the Islamic Identity?
 - HSS Curriculum & Its Role in Islamic Identity
 - Linking History to Character & Personality
 - Key Issues for Integration
- ❑ **Teaching History in the Classroom**
 - Teaching Methodologies & Strategies
 - Student Projects and Assignments
- ❑ **References**
 - Bibliography
 - Organizational Resources
 - Educational Resources

Historical Foundations

What is history?

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), one of the largest social studies organizations in the country provides a comprehensive definition of history.

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

It is this very nature of history and its ability to touch almost every dimension in society that reaches at the heart of our discussion. History-Social Studies (HSS) educators and teachers must tap into this vast potential to create and design interdisciplinary connections for their students. The power to reach students on many different levels and in a variety of medium in this manner is extraordinary.

Moreover, in 1994 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) published the document titled *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards For Social Studies*. This document outlined curriculum standards as well as performance expectations across the school from the early grades to the middle grades and up the high school level. In the era of standards in this country, the curriculum standards for social studies help social studies educators develop and create more cohesive and integrated teaching units as well as challenging instructional practices. All HSS teachers and educators should capitalize on these standards as they teach and present in the classroom.

One of the essential components of the standards is the identification and inclusion of ten specific strands in social studies. These strands are designed to provide a central framework in which to teach history at all grade levels. Listed below are the ten strands and a brief explanation of them as described in the original document.

- Culture – culture helps us to understand ourselves as both individuals and members of various groups.
- Time, Continuity and Change – human beings seek to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time.
- People, Places and Environments – technological advances connect students at all levels to the world beyond their personal locations.
- Individual Development and Identity – personal identity is shaped by one’s culture, by groups and by institutional influences.
- Individuals, Groups and Institutions – institutions such as churches, families, government agencies and the courts all play an integral role in our lives.
- Power, Authority and Governance – understanding the historical development of structures of power, authority and governance and their evolving functions in

contemporary U.S. society, as well as in other parts of the world, is essential for developing civic competence.

- Production, Distribution and Consumption - social studies program should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.
- Science, Technology and Society – technology is as old as the first crude tool invented by prehistoric humans, but today’s technology forms the basis for some of our most difficult social choices.
- Global Connections – the realities of global interdependencies require understanding the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies.
- Civic Ideals and Practices – an understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship is critical to full participation in society and is a central purpose of the social studies.

Why is history important to teach?

A basic question some students ask the history teacher, is why we need to study history in the first place or what are we going to learn from it? One response might be that history is one of the core academic subjects, along with English/Language Arts, Mathematics and Science, that is taught at all schools - private or public and Muslim and non-Muslim. However, this may not fully address the student’s question and quench the thirst of the inquisitive mind. Another possible response could be to examine how history helps us to answer the question of who are we, where did we come from and where are we going? The proverbial w’s of history - who, what, where, when and why - do provide an attempt at capturing the essence of what history is all about.

In his reflective essay for the American Historical Association, Peter Stearns posits several reasons why history is important in the school curriculum. He provides six key points

- History helps us understand people and societies
- History helps us understand change and how society we live in came to be
- The importance of history in our own lives
- History contributes to moral understanding
- History provides identity
- Studying history is essential for good citizenship

Perceptions of History

While understanding the importance of history in the curriculum is essential, also realizing how students, parents, and others perceive it is quite critical. The traditional factors contributing to low achievement or satisfaction in history classes can be best summarized in the common sentiments regarding the subject: (1) History is about dead people; (2) History is filled with wars, battles and military strategies; (3) It is dry and boring; (4) It has no meaning for me today; and (5) I have to memorize too many names, places and events. In order to combat these potentially

negative attitudes among our diverse stakeholders, it is vital to outline goals and objectives for the HSS department.

History Department: Goals & Objectives

Goals and objectives will help drive student instruction and focus teachers on striving to engender this positive relationship between history content and identity development. Listed below are goals and objectives adopted for the middle school department at the Orange Crescent School. These can be adapted, modified and changed in any way, shape or form to meet the needs of your student population.

Objectives:

- Acquire a knowledge base on the growth and development of human society.
- Create an awareness of the world's different peoples, and their cultures, religions, languages and other distinctive and unique qualities.
- Instill the 'Islamic Identity' in the hearts and minds of young Muslims and to mold their character and personality to emulate the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).
- Train young Muslims to be active, vibrant and dynamic members of the American-Muslim community and to pursue the mantle of leadership in different sectors of society.
- Understand their role as world citizens in a global community including Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Visualize the opportunity to become 'Ambassadors of Islam' in both the professional and personal centers of life.

Goals:

- Meet and exceed the expectations set forth by the California Department of Education's Framework for History-Social Studies.
- Meet and exceed the academic content standards set forth by the California Department of Education.
- Develop the skills of 'critical thinking' within our students and provide opportunities for them to use these skills on a daily basis.
- Promote 'historical reflection' in our classroom and through our assignments.
- Build 'global awareness' among our students as they view the world.

History and Identity

What is Islamic Identity?

One of the first questions one can pose in our discussion is what is 'Islamic Identity'. While this is not a religious, theological or philosophical paper, I will allude to working definitions I have used as a premise for my framework and analysis.

Within the confines of my school's history department at the middle school level, I have identified the following elements as key components in this identity: (1) Islamic Personality and Character; (2) The Muslim Mind; (3) History and Geography; (4) Living Islam: Contemporary Issues and (5) Growing Up Muslim. Let me explain the critical areas within these components and the areas to concentrate on in linking the study of history-social studies to identity development.

Islamic Identity

Students will be instructed and master the fundamentals of their faith. The basic beliefs and the basic practices of the five pillars combined together comprise part of their identity.

- Focus on the principles concepts of Taqwa and Tawheed
- Possess knowledge of the basic beliefs
- Understand the basic practices of the five pillars
- Develop Islamic personality and Muslim character
- View mankind as Allah's vicegerent on the earth

Reading the Muslim Mind

Students will be given an opportunity to explore the meaning of their life and existence by examining the primary sources of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

- Comprehend the message of the Qur'an
- Explore the major themes of the Qur'an
- Profile the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
- Study the methodology and compilation of the hadith
- Examine the dearth of knowledge and wisdom from hadith

History & Geography

Students will be given an exposure to the over 1400 hundred years of Muslim history, culture and civilization. Classes and courses will highlight the monumental contributions Muslims made to world civilization.

- Master the foundation of the early history of Islam
- Trace the growth and development of the Khulafa-ar-Rashidun
- Outline the major periods of Muslim history
- Explore the dynamics of the Muslim World / Global Ummah
- Compare and contrast the past, present and future

Living Islam: Contemporary Issues

In the middle school, students will delve into tackling the major issues facing the global Ummah and the local community in the United States and Southern California.

- Outline the major issues facing the Muslim Ummah
Worldwide - United States - Southern California
- Explore the challenges facing Muslim Americans
- Examine the obstacles and hurdles to maintaining one's identity
- Identify achievements and accomplishments of contemporary Muslims
- Participate in programs, events and activities which tackle the problems facing our diverse communities

Growing Up Muslim

Graduating seniors will serve as 'Ambassadors' of OCS as they embark on their high school careers. Students will be articulate, confident and dynamic individuals.

- Navigate the ideological waters living in the 21st century
- Articulate the message of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition through action, word and deeds
- Prepare young Muslims for the rigors of high school life
- Understand 'gender relations' through the Qur'anic lens of haya (modesty)
- Provide professional opportunities for career exploration

One final note, HSS and Islamic Studies teachers and instructors should meet at the beginning of the academic school year to strategize for cross-curriculum projects, units and lessons. It is sound educational practice to have a continuous dialogue and discussion between these two departments to focus on identity development. Another practical angle is that they can discuss teaching methodologies, learning strategies, and reinforcement skills to build on the concepts taught in each class. In this way, ideas and concepts being in each class will be reinforced and strengthened through classroom discussion and other instructional designs.

HSS Curriculum & Its Role in Shaping the Islamic Identity

Another key question in our discussion is how can the HSS curriculum contribute to the growth and development of the 'Islamic Identity' within our students? While academic content is present and can be accessed by students, it is the role of the teacher to bring the subject matter alive for their students. In this process teachers should bring history down to a human level so students can understand, comprehend, and relate to it in their own experiences.

The concept of telling a story in learning about history is very relevant. The oral tradition is quite common and meaningful for our students at every grade level. Once they begin to internalize different aspects of history, the potential for growth in critical thinking and historical reflection are viable.

Linking History to Character & Personality

A third key question in our discussion is how can we link the teaching of history-social studies to the creation and crystallization of the Islamic Identity? History-social studies teachers and educators must allow the curriculum to become a vehicle for the process of self-discovery for their students. Teachers should design exercises that promote and enhance the acquisition of the skills of a historian. Classroom activities and assignments must reinforce the skills of critical thinking and historical reflection.

Key Points for Integration

The following points are recommended ones to keep in mind as integration and synthesis across curriculums occur.

- Focus on how history is a critical academic subject for all students at every level of schooling.
- Understand that history teaches us about the past, influences the decisions of the present and impacts the future.
- Recognize that history includes the history of the Muslim and non-Muslim peoples and their interactions.
- Stress that history includes a discussion of the contributions of Muslim scholars, scientists, philosophers and others who have made a difference in the lives of people.
-

Teaching History in the Classroom

In this section, I have listed ideas for teaching methodologies and strategies to employ in the classroom to assist in identity development. In addition, I have included sample ideas for student projects and assignments, again that are geared towards identity development.

Teaching Methodologies & Strategies

- Independent / Individual Student Learning
 - ☉ Journal – students can keep a daily or weekly journal that discusses a wide range of issues pertaining to their faith and how they practice it.
 - ☉ Book report – teacher can provide a reading list of books or list of topics and subject from which students can choose; reports can be given both orally and in written form.
 - ☉ Research report – specific research topics can be given on critical issues facing the Muslim family, community or Ummah.
- Group / Cooperative Student Learning
 - ☉ Design a newsletter
 - ☉ Produce a newscast
 - ☉ Performance of play
 - ☉ Roundtable discussion – the class can be divided into groups and several topics can be used for discussion regarding the issues facing the Muslim community in Southern California, around the country and globally.
 - ☉ Group projects – the class can be divided into groups and each group

- ☛ Role-play – creative teaching strategy where students
 - ☛ Case study – students are divided into groups and given a problem or dilemma to discuss; key feature is the discussion part within the groups and the possible solutions they come up with.
 - ☛ Watch video / documentary – excellent documentaries have been produced within the last decade on Islam, Muslims and religious and spiritual issues facing the world.
- Experiential Student Learning
 - ☛ Guest speakers
 - ☛ Field Trips

Student Projects and Assignments

- 5th Grade – Early American History
 - Keep a HSS Journal for use on weekly basis - the journal will allow teachers to pose prompts or questions related to what they are studying as well as community, national and international events.
 - Assign Book Reports -
- 6th Grade – Ancient Civilizations
 - HSS Journal
 - HSS Book Reports
 - Introduce the Current Events Assignment – pose a topic for students to do quick and easy research in the newspaper, magazine, television or any medium you select. This will enable students to see the relevance of today’s headlines to history and allow them to draw connections to the past.
- 7th Grade – Medieval & Early Modern World
 - HSS Journal
 - HSS Book Reports
 - Current Events Assignment
 - Read the following textbooks Reading the Muslim Mind and A Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern World
 - Visit local places of worships to inculcate respect
 - Participate in community outreach programs
- 8th Grade – U.S. American History
 - HSS Journal
 - HSS Book Reports
 - Current Events Assignment
 - Community Outreach Programs
 - Introduce the ‘National News Assignment’ – have student watch the national news of the one of the three major news channels of ABC, CBS or NBC;

- State of the Union Address – have students watch the President’s Annual message to the country and have critically examine the content on both the domestic and foreign policies and issues
- Visit the local city council meeting

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented an analysis and argument that the history-social studies curriculum offers a unique opportunity to develop the ‘Islamic Identity’ within the lives of our students. The tasks of shaping and molding the hearts and minds of young Muslim Americans is quite real and challenging. The HSS curriculum offers teachers, educators and schools the forum to build positive character and personality within our students.

The challenges within the ‘challenge’ are also demanding. Some students and parents have many common negative misconceptions about history and its study. Some teachers reinforce those feelings in their approach and teaching of the subject matter. Through this process we may be alienating our students from something far more than just the academic subject of history-social studies. It is my hope and intention that you will carefully examine and re-examine the objectives and goals of your history department across the school. This paper has dealt with middle school issues, however the specific recommendations and thoughts can be integrated across grade levels.

One vital component in this discussion is the inclusion of the national curriculum standards and the strands within these guidelines into the classroom. HSS instruction and learning will best be served when teachers rely on the principles detailed and outlined in the history standards document. The key, however, remains delivery, style and imagination. Once, teachers have done their homework and research to uncover the connections between history, identity development and identity maintenance, they should not feel their work is complete. They must delve into the rigors of the pages of history - with their shirtsleeves rolled up and ready to get a little dirty – engaging students along this process of self-discovery and self-realization. In that regard, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is an exceptional organization engaging and supporting social studies educators across the board

Lastly, in dealing specifically on academic content issues, the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) has designed and developed outstanding cross-curriculum materials to enhance your teaching. Their units are comprehensive, detail-oriented and ready to use in the classroom. Also, I have read several outstanding papers that deal with the topic of history, Islamic Studies and identity development. I have listed below the paper titles, the authors and the year they presented at the ISNA Education Forum.

- *Beyond the “Islamic” School: The Qur’anic Academy.* Presented by Matthew Moes at the 2005 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Integrated Islamic Curriculum.* Presented by Dr. Freda Shamma at the 2003 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Integrating Islam into Regular American School Curricula of Social Studies and Language Arts.* Presented by Amirah Desai and Rabia Sunday at the 2005 ISNA Education Forum.

- *Integrating Islamic Studies into the Standard Curriculum.* Presented by Fauzia Farooq and Hakeema Sarr at the 2004 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Modeling Methods for Integrated Curriculum – Three Teaching Units.* Presented by Susan Douglass, Ann El-Moslimany and Sommieh Uddin at the 2005 ISNA Education Forum.
- *A New Paradigm for Teaching History/Social Studies.* Presented by Susan Douglass at the 2004 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Presentation on Incorporating Islam in History Classes.* Presented by Dalila Benaneur at the 2003 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Teaching Islamic Studies to Young Children.* Presented by Huda Ata at the 2004 ISNA Education Forum.
- *Teaching Resource on Islam in World History/Cultures and Geography Course for Elementary, Middle and High School.* Presented by Susan Douglass at the 2005 ISNA Educational Forum.

References

▪ **Bibliography**

These articles, books or documents were cited and used in this paper.

'A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in Social Studies: Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy'. National Council for the Social Studies

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Washington DC: Developed by the National Council for the Social Studies, 1994.

Stearns, Peter. *Why Study History?* American History Association.

▪ **Resources**

These books are recommended for the teacher's professional library. They are quite helpful as reference and resource information.

Abiva, Huseyin and Noura Durkee. *A history of Muslim Civilization: Volume 1*. Skokie, Illinois: IQRA International Educational Foundation, 2003.

Ahsan, Muhammad. *Muslim Heritage and the 21st Century*. London, United Kingdom: TaHa Publishers Ltd. 2002.

Austin, Allan D. *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Barboza, Steven. *American Jihad: Islam After Malcolm X*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.

Diouf, Sylviane A. *Servants of Allah: African Muslim Enslaved in the Americas*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1982.

Hathout, Hassan. *Reading the Muslim Mind*. Burr Ridge, Illinois. American Trust Publications, 1995.

Khan, M.A. Muqtedar. *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom*. Beltsville, Maryland. Amana Publications, 2002.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*. Chicago: KAZI Publications, 1994

Nyang, Sulayman. *Islam in the United States of America*. Chicago, Illinois: ABC International Group, Inc.: 1999.

- **Educational Resources**

American Historical Association (AHA) – www.historians.org

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) – www.ascd.org

Council on Islamic Education (CIE) – www.cie.org

Middle East Studies Association (MESA) -

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) – www.socialstudies.org

National Middle School Association (NMSA) – www.nmsa.org