

ISNA Education Forum 2006**Title:** Discipline with Dignity: Meeting the Needs of Students through Faith and Understanding**Author:** Omaira T. Alam**Track VI:** Teachers and Instructional Programs**Level:** Middle to High School**Acknowledgement:** The author would like to thank Arshia Alam for taking the time to edit this paper, and Christopher Moore for his ideas and editorial direction.**Abstract**

This paper is based on the premise that true discipline (i.e., guiding student behaviour) can only be accomplished if the basic needs of the student are met first and done so within the paradigm of dignified conduct. A comparison is drawn on the teaching methodology of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) in perfecting good character. The author of this paper argues that the Prophet's methodology was to guide the behaviour of people by meeting their needs and by maintaining their dignity as human beings. By following this needs-based approach within the paradigm of discipline with dignity, educators can bring students closer to the prophetic tradition of establishing good character.

Introduction

The aim of education is to cultivate the individual's capacities for mental growth and moral development; to help him [or her] acquire the intellectual and moral virtues requisite for a good human life.

[Mortimer J. Adler]¹

Educators should heed the warning of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society."² Civilization is not based on the principles of efficiency, but on the principles of humanity. To fully grasp the meaning of this humanity is to be prepared to teach children within a framework that dignifies them. Muslim schools are falling into the trap of efficiency and faltering in their ability to develop righteous, responsible, and respectful citizenry. Dr. Tariq Ramadan, a notable European scholar, and others acknowledge the benefits of Muslim schools:

In an Islamic school, children understand the essentials of their Muslim identity and the priorities of their upbringing through their relationships with their teachers and fellow-pupils and also acquire the tools that will help them succeed in the other disciplines. To judge from performance indicators, most Islamic schools produce excellent statistics and are often at the top of regional and national school tables.³

However, efficiency on standardized tests, albeit worthwhile, does nothing to improve the character of a child.⁴

The author of this paper is proposing a needs-based approach towards discipline that also maintains the human dignity of the disciplined child. In the process, the character of the child is inclined

¹ Haq, 2005

² Ibid.

³ Ramadan, 2004, p.131

⁴ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.165

towards traits that lead to good character. For Muslims, this needs-based paradigm is a step towards following the role model of the most perfect teacher (may God bless him and grant him peace).

Although, originally developed for at-risk students and students in special education settings, this paradigm can also be applied to students in various settings, whether public, private, religious, or secular. It is incumbent upon Muslim schools to develop a behaviour plan that disciplines with dignity, and strives to develop civically responsible global citizens.

Definitions of Discipline

*Control gained by enforcing obedience or order.
Orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behaviour. Strength and self-control.
A rule or system of rules governing conduct or activity. Punishment.*⁵

There are many definitions of discipline; however, for the purposes of this paper, the educational perspective will be used. The term ‘discipline’ is defined in the field of education as “methods in guiding behaviour”. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, discipline is “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character”.⁶ As such, this definition of discipline – the molding and perfecting of moral character – lends beautifully to the prophetic mission and paradigm as described by the Prophet, himself: “I was only sent to perfect good character.”⁷

The Basis for Human Dignity

*Aisha relates that the Prophet said, “Good neighborliness, maintaining blood ties, and good character are the basis of civility, and they enhance civilization.”*⁸

The enhancement of any civilization is due primarily to the dignity of the citizens and the humanity of their interactions. The Quran has raised the status human dignity as “an inherent right of the individual in an absolute and unqualified sense,” be they male or female, adult or child, rich or poor.⁹ According to Dr. Muhammad Kamali, Professor of Law at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, the implementation of human rights is, in fact, a manifestation of human dignity. He further asserts:

The Qur’an is ... expressive of the human dignity of man in its proclamations on man’s appointment as God’s vicegerent on earth, the subjugation of the created universe and its resources to man’s benefit and service, and the protective and punitive measures that are designed to safeguard human dignity. Social decorum and dignified encounter, just and upright character, safeguards against physical abuse, and protection against poverty and degradation are some areas where Islam provides substance to its perception of human dignity.¹⁰

⁵ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary; discipline.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shakir, 2006.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kamali, 2002, p. xv.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

It is through human dignity that God affirms his love for human beings, as mentioned in the Quran: “We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam ... and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation. (17:70).”¹¹

Many commentators further elaborate on the verse with the inclusion of: “everyone and all members of the human race, including the pious and the sinner are endowed with dignity, nobility and honour, which cannot be exclusively expounded or identified.” Similarly, other scholars have mentioned “that dignity is established for every human being as of the moment of birth” and “that dignity is the right of every individual.” His statement, “as of the moment of birth” highlights the dignity and the rights inherent to even a child or youth.¹²

Methodology of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace)

*Aisha, wife of the Prophet, mentioned that his character was an embodiment of the Qur'an. In other words, his character was godly, for the Qur'an is the eternal Speech of God.*¹³

According to Islamic teachings, the Prophet was sent to perfect good character. In this regard, not only was he the best teacher, but he was also the best disciplinarian. His method of disciplining was successful because he incorporated a central component: dignity. The Prophet preserved the dignity of the individual; whether adult, child, man or woman. He disciplined with dignity and dignified those whom he disciplined. He critiqued behaviour in general terms and focused on correcting or modifying behaviour without ever demeaning the individual in the process.

As stated by Kamali, and in agreement with other scholars across the centuries, “the Sunnah of the Prophet ... provides the authority for protecting the dignity of the dead in almost the same manner as that of the living.” It is narrated that as a funeral procession of a Jewish man passed by, the Prophet rose to his feet out of respect. He was questioned given the faith of the deceased. His reply, “Was he not a human being?” affirms his commitment to recognizing the inherent dignified status within every individual.¹⁴

The level of respect and honour that the Prophet bestowed on the living was unsurpassed. He addressed each individual based on what he understood to be as his or her cognitive abilities and spiritual nature.¹⁵ This insight into the human psyche formed the basis for the Prophet’s interactions. For example, when talking to someone the Prophet always faced the person with his full body. This simple action indicates his complete devotion in attending to the speaker.

It is because of the Prophet’s acknowledgement and recognition of the innate needs of people that permitted him to be a man of noble character and a role model for people of all faiths. As Habib Umar bin

¹¹ Ibid., p. xvi.

¹² Ibid., pp.1-2

¹³ Shakir, 2006.

¹⁴ Kamali, 2002, pp. xvi&2.

¹⁵ Adhami, 2005.

Hafiz, a notable Muslim scholar, has mentioned, the prophetic model that must be followed is one that provides,

...excellence in translating the beauty, majesty, and completeness of Islam through ... verbal conveyance and public interaction—all expressed in accordance with the sacred law, with both those near and far—and by spreading the carpets of the good and noble character that has been received from the magnificent Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Therefore, ... work hard to both manifest and self-actualize this level of noble prophetic character ... familial interactions, as well as in other human relations.¹⁶

According to the Prophet, the best thing that a parent can give his or her child is a good education.¹⁷ As mentioned before, a good education leads to good character. A good educator results in a good disciplinarian.

Discipline vs. Punishment

*Aisha, the blessed wife of the Prophet, may God be pleased with her, was asked to describe the character of the Prophet. She responded: "He was not foul in his actions, nor in his speech; he was not boisterous in the marketplace; he did not retaliate in kind to vile acts perpetrated against him; rather he pardoned and forgave."*¹⁸

The Prophet has stated, "He who is not kind to children is not one of us."¹⁹ The implications of this statement lend themselves to the method of instruction of the student not just in knowledge, but also in character. Ibn Khaldun, the great historian, highlights the results of severe punishment whether verbal or physical, that are no more different today than when they were presented centuries ago in *The Muqaddima*:

Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children, because it belongs among (the things that make for a) bad habit. Students ... who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking, because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth). Thus, they are taught deceit and trickery. This becomes their custom and character. They lose the quality that ... makes people human, namely, (the desire to) protect and defend themselves and their homes, and they become dependent on others. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities. Thus, they fall short of their potentialities and do not reach the limit of their humanity. As a result, they revert to the stage of "the lowest of the low."²⁰

It is for this reason that teachers, especially those who are in the Islamic schools, must practice disciplinary methods that maintain the dignity of the child. The effort to perfect good character as presented by the Prophet is the main premise to teaching and disciplining based in human dignity and upheld in the *Shariah*. As Kamali has mentioned:

¹⁶ Bin Hafiz, 2005.

¹⁷ Kamali, 2002, p.26.

¹⁸ Shakir, 2006.

¹⁹ Kamali, 2002, p.26.

²⁰ Ibn Khaldun.

It is not permissible to violate the personal dignity of anyone, regardless of whether the person is pious or of ill-repute, Muslim or non-Muslim, [adult or child]. Even a criminal is entitled to dignified treatment. For punishment is meant for retribution and reform, not indignity and humiliation.²¹

That level of harmful engagement has serious consequences not only in the *Shariah*, where child abuse is considered a major sin due to the injustice inflicted on those unable to defend themselves, but also in the long-term implications resulting in physical or emotional damage. If a child is “criticized, belittled, and shamed” then that child may develop a “lack of confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth”.²² Those least able to defend themselves are the children.²³ For this reason, a teacher is not permitted to be too severe to the student when trying to educate her or him, simply out of the possibility of transgressing these bounds.²⁴ Kamali further elaborates on the crux of a dignified interaction between teachers and students:

The dignity of man is identified as a strategic value of overall significance, and therefore all measures that are devised to protect and promote human dignity are *a priori* upheld and sanctified by the *Shariah*.²⁵

Most, if not all, teachers will say that they have never physically harmed a child. This may be true. However, for teachers, one key question needs to always be asked even with verbal attempts at guiding student behaviour: does this method of discipline attack or preserve dignity? Educators, Dr. Allen Mendler and Dr. Richard Curwin, stress that “while youngsters may cognitively process an experience differently than an adult would, their feelings toward it are much the same as the adult’s.”²⁶ As adults, one recognizes the humiliation that one experiences when treated in a less-than-dignified manner, yet, as teachers, one is quick to forget the long-term implications of treating students in a similar manner.

Mendler and Curwin further emphasize that teaching responsibility through a program of discipline based in human dignity is equally important for all students no matter how difficult they may be.²⁷ Bin Hafiz concurs and extends this concept to all of God’s creation: “One should ... display gracious interaction with all the children of Adam, as well as the animal kingdom, and even inanimate objects.”²⁸ Dr Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, an educator based in France, elaborates on the teaching of children within the paradigm of human dignity as akin to developing God-consciousness:

“The Islamic educational system never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul.” Islamic education ideally aims to provide a milieu for the total and balanced development of every student in every sphere of learning - spiritual, moral, imaginative, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, emotional and physical - directing all these aspects towards the attainment of a conscious relationship with God, the ultimate purpose of man's life on earth.²⁹

²¹ Kamali, 2002, p.2.

²² Helminski, 2004.

²³ Rabbani, 2006.

²⁴ Ibn Khaldun.

²⁵ Kamali, 2002, p.102.

²⁶ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

²⁸ Bin Hafiz, 2005.

²⁹ Henzell-Thomas, 2002.

Responding with Dignity as Teachers

In the Islamic tradition...the teacher is both a mu'allim (a transmitter of knowledge) and a murabbi (a nurturer of souls).³⁰

In order to properly teach the morals, ethics, and character of the Prophet, teachers must embody these traits within their own personalities. If they do not have these traits they must strive to develop them in order to facilitate the ethical learning process of their students. Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, an Islamic scholar based in California, traces this history of moral education from the time of the ancients:

Regarding education, the ancients understood that its primary purpose was not economical but ethical, and while they knew ethics could not be taught, they knew it could be induced through moral example and wise childrearing techniques that ultimately resulted in moral and intellectual excellence.³¹

For teachers, discipline with dignity, and moral education goes beyond the economic benefits inherent in most modern educational systems. When teachers respond with dignity, they inadvertently model the behavior that they expect of their students. Henzell-Thomas concurs with this approach to traditional education:

In authentic spiritual traditions, the teacher is not only responsible for the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge, but also with the education of the whole being. Such traditions never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul.³²

The concept of training the soul is highlighted in numerous prophetic traditions, and is the basis for the Islamic science of spirituality. When the Prophet carried the bags of the woman who was leaving Makkah in order to avoid meeting him, she cursed "this man, Muhammad" without knowing that it was he who was walking with her. Not once did he condemn her or return her abuses. In another tradition, the Prophet went and visited his neighbour who regularly threw filth and trash on him as he went into his home, when she had stopped doing so. His sole aim was to simply inquire about her. In both cases, the Prophet returned injustice with kindness, and in doing so he became the best disciplinarian. He followed the Quranic injunction:

Not equal are good and evil. Repel [evil] with what is best; you will unexpectedly see one with whom you had enmity become an intimate friend. [Quran 41:34]³³

The Prophet advised his companions to take the high road based on his example. In turn, teachers should also respond in a way that preserves his or her dignity when approached with offensive behaviour. This shows students that the teacher is competent enough to handle the problem. "Constantly sending the student to the office to let the principle handle it, or responding in such a way that diminishes the teacher's dignity indicates to students that the teacher is inadequate and ineffectual to be teaching."³⁴ Furthermore, as

³⁰ Ibid., 2004, p.8.

³¹ Hanson, 2003, p.79.

³² Henzell-Thomas, 2004, p.8.

³³ Shakir, 2006.

³⁴ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.81.

Mendler and Curwin have stated, every time an educator successfully defuses inappropriate student behaviour in a manner that preserves dignity, he or she also succeed in modelling effective techniques to students. In this era of impulsive, aggressive and “have-the-last-word” behaviour, teachers play a vital role in modelling the best response for students.³⁵ “Good teachers intuitively know that attacking students even in a momentary lapse of weakness takes something away from themselves” and negatively impacts their own dignified status.³⁶

Teaching within the framework of discipline and dignity results in a *mutually transformative experience*.³⁷ This is an interaction between the student and the educator where they engage in actions that result in the improvement of the individual parties and of the overall relationship leading to a substantial net benefit for all.

Strategies in Discipline within the Paradigm of Dignity

*Discipline is less about punishing and more about teaching responsibility.*³⁸

Given the prophetic paradigm of discipline with dignity, the next step requires practical methods in choosing a strategy that takes into account three important variables:

1. overall effectiveness,
2. the type of misbehaviour it is designed for, and
3. how it addresses the root cause or motivation for the misbehavior.³⁹

A strategy can only be used if the above criteria are fulfilled. In addition to these, Muslim educators in Islamic schools must also focus on whether or not this discipline strategy serves to bring the student closer to God-consciousness. As presented in a paper by Henzell-Thomas, Islamic education must embody an element of ta’dib or adab. In this work, Henzell-Thomas refers to Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas’ definition of adab which is deeper than the commonly understood meaning of “a context revolving around cultural refinement and social etiquette.” In essence, adab is “discipline of body, mind and soul” such that a person is able to recognize his or her place with family, community and God.⁴⁰

Once a discipline strategy is chosen five basic questions must be considered prior to its implementation:

1. Does using the method preserve dignity or cause humiliation?
2. Is the method primarily obedience-oriented or does it teach responsibility?
3. How does the method affect a student’s motivation to learn?
4. Does the method lead to a commitment to change?
5. Does the method work?⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p.71.

³⁷ Husain, 2005.

³⁸ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.13.

³⁹ Ibid., p.70.

⁴⁰ Henzell-Thomas, 2004.

⁴¹ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.70.

A strategy based on the prophetic paradigm of discipline cannot humiliate a student. The method of discipline must strive to preserve the dignity of the student which in turn preserves the dignity of the educator. In addition to this, a strategy must foster a sense of responsibility based on choice, and not obedience based on coercion. The use of rewards and punishment leads to coercion, but allowing for opportunities based on choices and consequences improves the decision-making skills of the student.⁴² In addition to this, effective discipline and the motivation to learn must work concurrently. If a strategy actually diminishes the student's desire to learn, then the technique should not be used. There must also be a commitment to change from within the student, in addition to the educator's desire to see that change. Without this the strategy is more than likely to fail. From an Islamic perspective, "education should engender in the human being with the realization of [their covenant with God and of His Lordship over them] so that by the time the child emerges into puberty, he is ready to take on ... the *amana* of responsibility and be able to fulfill that trust."⁴³ Finally, effective discipline should end the undesirable behaviour and lead to the improvement of decision-making skills.

Following these criteria, the discipline strategy can now be used to fulfill the needs of the students.

Needs-based Approach to the Development of Dignified Human Beings

*When told to sit down or else, the student said,
"I'll sit down, but in my mind, I'm still standing."*⁴⁴

Educators must realize that student behavior is not random. For students it is the best choice for themselves: an inappropriate attempt to meet appropriate needs. When educators understand why students misbehave and respond directly to their needs, they have a much better chance of helping students change than when educators simply respond to a student's behavior. The basic unfulfilled needs that lead to misbehavior are belonging, attention, competence / mastery, power / influence, empathy, fun / stimulation and relevance. Approximately five to ten percent of behavior is not associated with these needs and can be attributed to medical issues. For the remainder of students, discipline problems occur when students either come to school with unmet basic needs or when the school fails to address a basic need. Because all behavior is learned, it can be modified. However, teachers must begin to address the underlying motivation in order to establish long-term change.⁴⁵

Understanding the need also means determining how best to can accommodate it. If the chosen method does not work then attempts must be made to address another need. Teachers may establish their own guidelines, but usually two weeks of attempts or five attempts to meet a need is considered a general guideline.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hanson, 2001, p.26.

⁴⁴ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.53.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.54-55.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.56.

Belonging and Attention

They want to be noticed and feel connected; this is the need for belonging. Students will keep talking, singing, burping, making weird noises, and shouting out comments to other students while the teacher is trying to conduct a class. These students usually have perfect attendance to the point of walking to school in freezing weather, if necessary, but they may fall asleep in class or begin disruptive behaviour as soon as class starts. The expression of this need for attention is increasing in schools as the amount of attention received at home is decreasing.⁴⁷

Educators must actually develop classroom practices that make students feel a sense of welcome, importance and belonging.⁴⁸ Teachers must encourage positive attention-seeking behaviour and address negative behavior in such a way that it is not reinforced. A healthy amount of attention may result in an individual who is balanced in terms of their mental and emotional capacities.⁴⁹

In a study based in England, teachers were taught how and when to praise student behaviour. As teachers increased in the number of times they praised students (from 54% to 85%), the number of times that he or she had to admonish a student decreased (from 46% to 15%). It is obvious from this study that students flourish with appropriate praise. The percentage of students doing what the teacher requested increased to 94%.⁵⁰

Competence and Mastery

“This is stupid! This class sucks!” For students, the best way to hide feelings of inadequacy is to be thought of as a bad student, rather than as a stupid student. Students who worry about looking stupid will either withdraw –sleep or hide behind their desk – and become unmotivated, or act out when they should be working. They may direct their feelings of inadequacy on other students by calling them names, when they themselves cannot do the work; if they cannot do the work, no one else can.⁵¹

Generally these students are well-behaved except when they are required to show mastery or competency. The educator must instill in the student the belief that if they make an effort, they can and will succeed. Students need to feel appreciated for their efforts and for what they have already accomplished. They also need to know that their effort is at least as important as their achievement. The best practice is to continue to challenge the student when they are feeling successful.⁵²

Does not know any better

Many students simply do not know any better. A teacher cannot assume anything and especially, that students know what is expected of them. This highlights the need for clear expectations that are

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.57.

⁴⁹ Helminski, 2004.

⁵⁰ MacLeod, 2006.

⁵¹ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.57.

⁵² Ibid., p.58.

repeated whenever necessary. Teachers should always assume that appropriate standards of behavior need to be taught and modelled, not simply announced; knowing expectations improves student behaviour, as well as understanding the rules and the reasons behind the rules.⁵³

Educators should ensure that the rules and expectations set up in his or her classroom are clear and they promote student learning. There is no harm in revising the rules and including student input as the year progresses. Students will take greater ownership in their learning experience when given the opportunity to develop the guidelines. For students who constantly break rules, a teacher should have at least five separate sessions to practice appropriate behavior; failure for this method to work means it is more than just not knowing any better.⁵⁴

Ruled by Impulse

Some students want to behave better but cannot. Many have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and are ruled by their impulses. Sometimes students are unaware of their behavior. This can lead to difficult behaviour and hard-to-achieve success, which when reached is short-lived. These students respond well to positive reinforcement, structure, self-monitoring and self-control. Educators must clearly define the expectations to the student and guardians, and then monitor the progress in an organized way. This method fulfills the student's need for structure and direction.⁵⁵

Seek Fun and Stimulation

Students act out because they are bored and need more stimulation. These students are generally very likable and engaging. These students may improve if the teacher provides classroom entertainment opportunities like negotiated silly time. The goal is to reduce undesirable behaviour by controlling how much is permissible. When students act silly and play off one another, it may be time to vary the lesson. In addition to this, for the students who want to have fun, teachers set up times to give them a controlled opportunity to have fun.⁵⁶

Relevance

“Why do we have to learn this, anyways? When am I going to use this in life? I am only taking this class because I have to!” For many students, the connection between school and life is not all that apparent. For students who come to school motivated by strong familial messages on the value and importance of education, the relevance of education becomes a secondary issue. Group misbehavior in which students feed off one another is another way students question the relevance of what is being taught. As challenging as it may be, educators need to make efforts to describe and explain the purpose of the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.59.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.59-60.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.60-61.

content. Teachers must state the objectives clearly and with relevance to students. In doing so, teachers help students to make the connections.⁵⁷

Empathy

The largest increase in student misbehavior is due to a lack of empathy across all levels and forms of schooling; it is, in fact, reaching epidemic proportions in some schools in the United States. In most cases, the lack of empathy is due to a behavior that was not learned during their developmental years. However, when given the opportunity to do good, students will do good. Teachers must generate opportunities for students to do good deeds and praiseworthy acts within the school and outside, in the larger community. This form of civic action must be encouraged.⁵⁸

Power and Influence

Most students want to have some influence or power. This is from a home that is too permissive/unsupervised, or too controlling. An unpredictable home makes a child feel powerless. This translates into a child's inability to buy into decisions or rules. This also creates opportunities for responsibility and leadership as presented appropriately by the teacher. When students are given even the smallest task to do, they are less likely to misbehave.⁵⁹

This example is illustrated in a tradition of the Prophet. When raising one of the companions in his home, the Prophet requested him to go somewhere. The companion refused, and continued with what he was doing. The Prophet smiled and left, but upon his return he asked, "Did you go to where I asked?" The companion responded, "I'm going right away," and rushed to complete the task. In this simple instance, the Prophet acknowledged the need for this growing child to assert himself. For the Prophet it was not about relinquishing control, but about guiding behaviour so that the child learned responsibility. He allowed the child, as is in the nature of children, to be in control, and, without nagging or frequent prompts, he was able to get the task accomplished. As teachers, patience and allowing for that wait time, gives students the independence to grow into responsible individuals.

Anger

One of the most prevalent behaviors, in students who misbehave, is anger. When a student is angry they are feeling neglected, unloved, and unnoticed. In adolescent males, anger is a form of depression. When dealing with children who are angry, educators need to teach them to express themselves appropriately. At the same time, educators must acknowledge that the student's anger is legitimate. Students who first enter school are sometimes very angry. As the months progress, these same students

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.62-63.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.64.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.65-66.

begin to manage their behavior in more appropriate ways, and visibly try to control themselves. This is definitely based on the persistence of the adults who work with them.⁶⁰

Student misbehavior is an inappropriate way to address a very appropriate need. Educators must learn to diagnose the needs of their students in a way that facilitates the learning process and maintains each student's inherent right to dignified conduct. This was the methodology of the Prophet.

Outcomes of Discipline with Dignity

A child is a radiant being, whose innocence and grace illuminates a path to gardens of joy and delight.
Maghribi Poet

The outcome of discipline with dignity is two critical components of education: the “nurturing” role of education and the ability for it to “draw out the latent potential” of the student. This in Arabic is referred to as *tarbiyah*.⁶¹ Teachers who exemplify this approach to education and effectively apply the strategies presented in this paper, while consistently remembering the religious injunctions to do so as modeled by the Prophet, will be able to:

1. Develop a learning community and caring environment within their classroom.
2. Teach students self-control.
3. Promote concern and empathy for others.
4. Establish clearly defined limits.
5. Emphasize responsibility rather than obedience.
6. Teach conflict-resolution skills.
7. Cooperate and connect in meaningful ways with others.⁶²

Conclusion

*‘Amr bin ‘Abasa relates that he asked the Prophet,
“What is faith?” He replied, “Patience and a magnanimous spirit.”
‘Amr then asked, “What is the best form of faith?” He replied, “Good character.”*⁶³

As presented in this paper, discipline with dignity – using faith and understanding to meet the needs of students – is incumbent upon every educator. The premise for this method of discipline is found in the prophetic paradigm. The Prophet's example of mercy and compassion in all interactions allows one to see that inherent in every human being is his or her right to be treated with dignity. This concept permeated the honour-code by which the Prophet and his companions lived, and extended to every facet of their lives. This is beautifully illustrated in the following tradition:

During the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet's incisor was broken. His lower lip was ruptured, and he had a bleeding wound on his forehead. He was constantly drying up the blood to keep it from falling upon the ground, saying, “If any of this blood falls on the ground, Divine Punishment would descend upon them [the Quraysh].” The situation weighed on the Companions, and they implored, “Why do you not pray against them?” He replied, “I have not been sent to damn people. I have been sent as a caller and a mercy. O, God! Forgive my people for they know no better.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.66-67.

⁶¹ Henzell-Thomas, 2004.

⁶² Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.96.

⁶³ Shakir, 2006.

These are glimpses of the character of our noble Prophet. As he said, he was sent as a caller and a mercy. That call and mercy should be available to all people... The mercy that his mission embodied hinged on his uncompromising commitment to the ethical standard God established him on. Hence, his ethical standard made the gift of his mercy possible.⁶⁴

The background and rationale for the Niles Community Schools in Niles, Michigan are grounded in the concepts of *Discipline with Dignity*, a phrase coined by Mendler and Curwin:

The student is the reason for our being. We know that our students have diverse backgrounds and needs. Our charge and challenge is to accept these differences and meet each student's needs as we educate the adult citizens of tomorrow. ...The success of the students today and in tomorrow's global society is directly related to their perception of self-worth; their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills; and their ability to problem solve, predict consequences, and make appropriate choices.⁶⁵

Although not a Muslim school, Niles Community Schools put the needs of students first. This has resulted in a more compassionate learning community. Muslim schools may extend this approach further by using it to address the call to God and the Prophet. Muslim educators, in particular, can use this paradigm to increase the levels of spiritual and moral awareness among students such that it informs their public and civic actions in the United States.⁶⁶

When an educator responds to the basic needs of a student – belonging, attention, competence/master, power/influence, empathy, fun/stimulation, and relevance – he or she is moving beyond the manifested behaviour and addressing the underlying motivation. At this point, the educator begins to embody the prophetic tradition by treating the student with respect and dignity. This, in turn, will be reciprocated – perhaps not immediately – by the student, as he or she begins to feel acknowledgement and validation for his or her unmet needs. This mutually transformative experience establishes the dignity of both parties and exemplifies the character of the Prophet leading to an education grounded in developing good character.

I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.

A Teacher.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.170.

⁶⁶ Moore, 2006.

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