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# **The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-Based Education System in Canada's Multicultural Society: The Case of the British Columbia Muslim School**

By Faisal Ali, M Ed.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores how the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS) responds to the tension between preserving and promoting an Islamic worldview and values and the challenge to correspond to the norms and values of the dominant society in the context of Canada's multicultural society.

The dissertation further focuses on how the school teaches students the principles of Islam to strengthen their faith and identity while providing a safe environment in which to practice their faith and adopt an Islamic way of life. It also discusses the challenges faced by students and teachers of the BCMS in practicing Islam in public. In addition, the dissertation analyses perspectives on developing multicultural competence; how the BCMS deals with the issue of isolation, and the compatibility of an Islamic education with Canada's multicultural system.

This dissertation argues for the development of a more open and inclusive Islamic education curriculum for the BCMS as an alternative to the present exclusive curriculum that, as Ramadan (2004) observes, emphasises the differences between Islam and the mainstream society. If there is a hope of creating better integrated students, the Islamic education curriculum should find a balance between preserving students' beliefs and Islamic identity, and enhancing their multicultural competence. To this end, the Islamic education program should expand the concept of respect to include non-Muslims' beliefs and cultures, and define good Islamic practices to include good citizenship in the multicultural context.

In return, this dissertation argues, Canada's public schools, government agencies, and media outlets should develop policies aimed at challenging Islamophobia and present Islam from a perspective of peace and social justice, and not from the negative images which present Islam as a religion based on extremism (Zine, 2004). Finally, the dissertation offers some recommendations for finding a balance between preserving students' faith and identity, and enhancing their multicultural competence.

**The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-Based Education System in Canada's Multicultural Society: The Case of the British Columbia Muslim School**

By

Faisal Ali, Ms. Ed

University of Oregon

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, Durham University, UK, 2011

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## **Declaration**

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This section addresses the statement of the problem and background of this study. It also focuses on the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, and limitations of the thesis. This study explores how the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS) provides a meaningful Islamic education in the predominantly secular and multicultural Canadian context. It aims to further increase an understanding of how this school responds to the tension between the ambition to preserve and promote an Islamic worldview and values on the one hand, and the challenge to correspond to the norms and values of the dominant society on the other.

The purpose is to explore the meaning of Islamic education in Canada, while shedding light on this particular school's approach to Islamic education in terms of policy, pedagogy, and curriculum. The study gives special attention to the assumption that although Islamic schools benefit from the multicultural system in Canada, they also face unique challenges that stem from the tensions between two sometimes opposing worldviews, Islamic and liberal multicultural educational systems. Overall, the aim is to explore the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education in the context of Canadian multiculturalism, drawing on the case of the BCMS.

The theoretical framework for this thesis draws on both multicultural and Islamic educational studies. The data will be used to develop a deeper understanding of the research questions suggested in this research study. At this stage, it may be beneficial to briefly describe both Islamic education and Canadian multiculturalism. These areas will be explored in greater detail later in the thesis. According to Halstead (2004), Islamic education focuses mainly on individual and social developments. It aims to prepare children to lead a positive and good life as adults in the world around them, as well as to achieve positive rewards in the hereafter. Socially, an Islamic education aims at preserving the community's cultural heritage, and bringing social changes (Halstead, 2004). In contrast, as Ghosh (2004) discussed in her research studies, multiculturalism and multicultural education policy ideally promote equality, respect for human rights, and harmony and tolerance among diverse groups regardless of their languages, religions, cultures, or ethnicity. Grant (1997) believes that, like many other minority institutions, Muslim schools in Canada face challenges in

negotiating the tensions between the aspiration to preserve Islamic values and the expectation of integrating into the dominant cultural norms.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyse and increase an understanding of Islamic education in Canada critically, with an emphasis on its compatibility with Canadian multicultural policy and practice. The study examines the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education in Canada, drawing on the case of the BCMS. The thesis also contributes to the ongoing discussions about faith-based education systems in a secular, pluralistic context. The intended outcome is that this effort will not only provide insight for Islamic education practitioners in Canada, but it will also contribute to serious discussions about the future of Islamic education within the context of Canadian multiculturalism. It will also shed some light on how Canadian multicultural policy and practice could become more reflective of the Canadian multicultural society by genuinely accommodating the needs, values, and beliefs of diverse ideologically-motivated religious minorities who feel marginalized by their values and beliefs (Azmi, 2001). Finally, policy makers and researchers may find this study interesting since very few studies have looked at Islamic education in the Canadian context. According to Elmasry: “Canadian Muslims are still among the least-studied minorities in Canada and a change is long overdue” (2005: 8). Therefore, this study could launch future comprehensive studies, and contribute to meaningful policy formulation and sound decision making.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to define and explore what Islamic education is, and the philosophy that guides it. Furthermore, it is essential to explore how the British Columbia Muslim School contextualizes Islamic education, coping with internal elements that pull them toward isolation, and external elements that pressure them toward assimilation. It is important to note that the British Columbia Muslim School was established to preserve the Islamic heritage and values of its students and at the same time prepare them to function positively in the larger society. The school, like other Islamic schools in Canada, faces challenges in dealing with external pressures. The liberal multicultural discourse, for example, mainly addresses issues that have some connections to the public institutions and speaks to the needs of secular ethnic minority groups (Azmi, 2001). It hardly addresses the aspiration of ideologically-motivated, diverse religious minorities

who feel that the current liberal multicultural and educational policies and institutions marginalize their values and beliefs (Azmi, 2001). Arguably, this sense of marginalization among Canadian Muslims has weakened their trust in the dominant majority, and slowed their positive integration into Canadian society in general, even though the majority of them, with some exceptions, are willing to integrate into Canadian society (Elmasry, 2005:5). Moreover, Canadian Muslims are subject to discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping, because they are perceived to hold values that are different from the mainstream (Elmasry, 2005). According to Elmasry:

“The justification of prejudice and/or its denial usually relies on specious blame-the-victim arguments. Prejudice against Canadian Muslims today is compounded by media stereotyping that has built an image coloring them all terrorists, potential terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. They are marginalized as having values different from Canadian values” (2005: 6-7).

As Elmasry (2005:7) argues, the dominant English Canadian majority justifies prejudice against French Canadians or Jews, unlike Muslims, based on differences in language and culture, and anti-Semitism as a continuation of European attitudes. Both groups are perceived to be slightly different from the mainstream in race, language, culture, or religion (Elmasry, 2005: 2). One prime example of prejudice and discrimination against Canadian Muslims is highlighted in the following example (Elmasry, 2005): When Ontario Muslims asked the provincial government for the opportunity afforded to Christian and Jewish groups to have their faith-based arbitration system regulated by the courts, the government instead scrapped its recognition of all faith-based arbitrations.. The government of Ontario could argue that its action constitutes a shift in its multicultural policy on the grounds of equality of treatment. This move may be considered an example of prejudice against Canadian Muslims. The unanswered question is why the government of Ontario scrapped all faith-based arbitrations only when Muslims demanded equal arbitration rights with Christians and Jews (Elmasry, 2005). However, according to Adams (2007) regardless of this and other challenges that Muslims encounter in Canada, they enjoy more individual and group rights than Muslim communities in other western countries.

The research objectives framing this study are:

- To investigate the goals of the Islamic education program as viewed by students, teachers, parents and policy makers of the British Columbia Muslim School.

- To explore how the British Columbia Muslim School deals with the issue of isolation that faith-based schools in general, and Muslim schools in particular, are accused of.
- To critically explore the extent to which the Islamic education provided by the British Columbia Muslim School is compatible with Canadian multicultural educational practices.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities in implementing an Islamic-based education system in the Canada.

To address these objectives, the research takes a qualitative methodological approach involving interviews, documentary analysis, and grounded theory. Chapter 3 of this study provides an in-depth discussion of this approach.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

The literature review for this study focuses primarily on education for Muslims living in countries where they form the majority population. There are very few scholarly studies that examine Islamic education in the West in general (Halstead, 2004; Hewitt, 1997; Masood, 2007; Modood, 2007; Ramadan, 2004) and fewer still that look at Islamic education within the context of Canada's multicultural society (Elmasry, 2005; Khan, 2009). Nevertheless, new studies are increasing (Adams, 2007; Delic, 2006; Memon, 2009; Modood, 2007; Zine, 2007) as the Muslim presence in the West becomes more and more visible due to their increasing numbers, the opening of many Muslim schools across Europe and North America, and the aftermath of the tragic incidents of September 11, 2001 in the U.S., and the July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005 bombings in London, UK. On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC were attacked by Muslim terrorists who flew airplanes into them. As a result, nearly 3,000 innocent Americans were killed (retrieved on April 25, 2010 from: [www.wisegeek.com](http://www.wisegeek.com)). On July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, four Muslim suicide bombers struck in central London, killing 52, and injuring more than 770 (BBC- World News, Thursday, 7 July, 2005).

The multicultural policies literature referenced in this study was not initially intended to address the needs and aspirations of Muslim communities in Canada. It was originally intended to address the linguistic or heritage desires of communities that were closer to the dominant English culture, such as French- and Ukrainian-Canadians (Kymlicka, 2006). Multiculturalism in Canada is not static; it evolves and changes with the arrivals of new communities with different heritages and cultural backgrounds, including Muslims (Ad-

ams, 2007; Kymlicka, 2006). The debate on multiculturalism intensified when these communities demanded similar rights and accommodation for their cultural and heritage beliefs within Canada's multicultural mosaic (Kymlicka, 2006). It is a challenge to find literature that deals with the nature of Islamic education in a multicultural society directly, though this is improving as Muslims continue to increase their influence within Canada, and as Canadian society gains a better understanding of Islam (Bakht, 2008; Khan, 2009). This thesis will draw on the available literature.

## **1.5 Organization of the Study**

In order to address the research questions, this study evolved through several stages. The first stage was to develop a set of themes from the literature, and subsequently formulate questions to be explored in semi-structured interviews with participants. The second stage involved conducting interviews with participants that would uncover complex social phenomena. The third stage involved analysis of the data, although some analysis had begun during the second stage. And the fourth stage focused on a general analysis and discussion to bring all the findings together. Writing the thesis took place across all stages.

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study. It contains background about the study, and its purpose and significance. It also presents the research questions and addresses the limitations and organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents a brief survey of the relevant sources. It particularly draws upon two main areas of research, namely multicultural and Islamic educational studies. It provides historical background and theoretical perspectives of Islamic education and Canada's multicultural policy and practice. Chapter 3 focuses on a brief introduction to qualitative research. It particularly focuses on grounded theory as the specific research method for this study, using in-depth interviews and document analysis. Chapter 4 explores the nature of an Islamic education as found at the British Columbia Muslim School, within the context of Canada's multicultural society. This chapter draws on the perceptions of the teachers, principal, and chairman of the school board, parents, and students of the BCMS. Chapter 5 is an overarching analytical chapter that focuses on a general analysis and discussion of the findings. It tries to bring all the findings together to develop a better understanding of the multicultural competence among the students of the BCMS. It also presents implications, limitations, and conclusion of this study.

## Chapter 2: Background and Perspectives

### 2.1 Introduction

Canada has long been considered an immigrants' country, where new-comers arrive seeking a better life. According to Kymlicka (2006) the early waves of immigrants mainly consisted of Europeans, Africans, and then Asians. Muslims are amongst the latest immigrants to arrive. Zine (2007) believes that many new-comers from the Muslim world face some challenges in Canada due to differences in cultural social norms such as consuming alcohol, dating, and premarital relations. In addition, Merry (2005) indicates that many Muslim students in the public system face further cultural challenges including issues related to gender sensitivity, such as modest dress (e.g., the hijab), sanctioned food (halal), provisions for prayer, and character education. In such a context, as Zine (2007) discusses, Muslim communities in Canada seek to protect their children and youth from the negative outside influences of the dominant culture, while at the same time striving to integrate positively with the wider society. Islamic schools in Canada are established to provide a safe learning environment for students and to preserve their beliefs, identity, and cultural heritage. Islamic schools are also striving to protect students from cultural assimilation, to ensure cultural survival, and to provide students with an environment that is free from racism and discrimination (Hewitt, 1997; Zine, 2007). Yet, as some researchers (Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2007; Zine, 2007) argue, Muslim schools are constantly accused of isolating their students from the wider society, and as a result hindering these students' positive integration with the society at large. As some scholars (Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2005, 2007; Zine, 2007) explain, some oppose Islamic schools for fear of indoctrinating students with fundamentalism, divisiveness, and intolerance towards non-Muslims, as well as isolating students from the wider society. To put this discussion in perspective, the literature review provides a critical examination of the nature of Islamic education in a multicultural society such as Canada's.

This chapter focuses on the philosophical and conceptual framework of Islamic education. I will systematically explore the historical background and theoretical perspectives of Islamic education by scrutinizing the importance of knowledge in Islam and discussing

the historical development of Islamic institutions of learning such as the mosque during the early period of Islam, the madrasa during medieval and modern times and the rise of intellectual movements during the medieval. My intention is to formulate a definition of Islamic education in order to bring into perspective its aims. My challenges will centre on the nature of providing Islamic education in a multicultural society as it relates to the Canadian context. This includes a discussion of the role it plays in society, both for individuals and the community in general. Special attention will be given to the role Islamic education plays in maintaining the faith and identity of young Muslims, and preserving their cultural heritage in the West. Perspectives of some Muslim and non-Muslim scholars on faith-based schooling in general and on Islamic education in particular will be presented and analysed. In order to put Canada's multicultural system in perspective, and to develop a better understanding of the policies that guide the social and educational structures of the society in which Islamic education is provided, the chapter scrutinises the definitions, policies, and goals of multiculturalism and multicultural education as found in Canada. It will further present a general overview of the Canadian multicultural model and how it is viewed nationally and globally. Moreover, the literature review will engage in a detailed analysis of the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of two prominent liberal multicultural theories in Canada (Kymlicka 2006; and Taylor, 1994). I selected these two theories because they are the most influential liberal multicultural theories in Canada, and they have had a great impact on Canada's multicultural system and its implementation within different government departments and other public institutions, including education. By exploring the challenges and opportunities in providing Islamic education in a multicultural society in the Canadian context as provided at the BCMS, I will attempt to bridge some gaps and tensions that may arise from the study. I will also examine Ramadan's model (2004) for finding a balance between preserving Islamic identity and retaining national identity.

## **2.2 Historical Background of Islamic Education**

### **2.2.1 General overview of the importance of education in Islam**

According to Talbani (1996), formal education did not exist in the Arabian Peninsula until the introduction of Islam in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. However, as Anees & Athar (1989) indicate in their research, education became widespread throughout Arabia as a result of the teachings of Islam that encouraged its followers to seek knowledge. In Islam knowledge



and learning are a life-long process; knowledge is stressed and mentioned in the Qur'an 800 times (Anees & Athar, 1989). The Arabic word Qur'an is derived from the same root as the verb "to read" or "reading", where the first word revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was "Iqra" which means "read" (Said, 1981).

Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers (male and female) to seek knowledge: "seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim (male and female)" (Shaikh, 1996:70). Therefore, the Qur'an, and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad as the main guide, became the primary sources of knowledge, because at the time, the main curriculum was to teach the basic foundations of Islam (Anees & Athar, 1989). It is important to mention in this discussion that the Qur'an and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad are not only the prime sources of knowledge, but also the prime sources in all issues related to the lives of faithful Muslims (Halstead, 2004). Shaikh (1996) notes that Prophet Muhammad encouraged educated Muslims to teach the uneducated in order to spread the message of Islam as fast as possible. According to Yousif (1985) the immediate successors of Prophet Mohammed who ruled the Muslim world from 632-661 A.D continued to implement this same approach to education that they inherited from the Prophet Mohammad.

As Hoodbhoy (1991) notes in his research, despite this strong emphasis on knowledge and learning in Islam, the illiteracy rate in the Muslim world is very high, and as a result, according to Said (1981), the Muslim world in general lags behind non-Islamic countries, especially, in science and technology. Moreover, according to Hoodbhoy (1991) women in particular are at a disadvantage in Muslim societies, as many young girls in these societies are deprived of an education, which subsequently limits their opportunities as adults.

This section has briefly described the importance of knowledge in Islam. The following section will focus on the development and nature of Islamic education during the early period of Islam.

### **2.2.2 Development of Islamic education during the early period of Islam**

According to the research of Afsaruddin (2007) the mosque is considered by Muslims to be a comprehensive institution that serves as a centre of social, political, economic, and educational life. It particularly became a centre of learning for Muslims in the seventh century (Afsaruddin, 2007). The mosque continued to play a major role both in education and in worship until the ninth century. Scholars would offer instructions in religious as well as legal subjects to their students (Afsaruddin, 2007). Students normally sat in teaching circles (halaqa) either inside the mosque, or outside in its courtyard (Afsaruddin, 2007). As

Yousif (1985) states, the curriculum at the time of Prophet Muhammad and his four successors, Abu-Baker, Omar, Othman, and Ali, focused on religious teachings, though they encouraged some degree of balance between a religious education and more worldly knowledge. However, many Muslims in the past as well as in the present have gone to one extreme or another (Tibawi, 1954). As Islam spread throughout Arabia, the Prophet sent teachers to different Arab tribes to instruct them in the tenets of Islam. According to some scholars (Afsaruddin, 2007; Cook, 1999; Tibawi, 1954) as teaching sessions usually took place at the mosque, it could be concluded that during the early period of Islam, education mainly focused on basic religious teachings.

This section has briefly discussed the development of Islamic education during the early period of Islam. The following section will discuss the establishment and nature of the madrasa educational system.

### **2.2.3 Development of Islamic education after the establishment of the madrasa educational system**

According to Anzar (2000), in Arabic madrasa literally means a place of study. It emerged in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as a systematic traditional centre for religious education. The curriculum consisted of the knowledge of the Qur'an, traditions of Prophet Muhammad (ahadith), jurisprudence (fiqh) as well as Arabic language (Anzar, 2000). According to Afsaruddin (2007) the principal goal was to prepare religious leaders, though it was later expanded to prepare government officials as well. As Cook (1999) suggests, the curriculum of the madrasa could be categorized as unsatisfactory because its teaching methodology focused only on memorization and recitation of the Qur'an, while understanding, analysing, and discussing the meaning were given little attention.

The madrasa developed into a more modern centre for knowledge where colleges were established (Afsaruddin, 2007). The first systematically organized Islamic colleges were Nizamiya and al-Muntasiriya in Iraq, al-Azhar in Egypt, and at Cordoba in Spain (Tibawi, 1954). The period in which these colleges were established (between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) is considered to be the golden age of the Islamic empire in many aspects, especially with regard to modern knowledge (Cook, 1999). While the Western world was intellectually backward, the Muslim world was developing modern ideas about science, art, literature, mathematics, physics, and chemistry (Cook, 1999). Islamic scholars taught Greek knowledge that was not allowed in the Christian world at the time (Cook, 1999). Moreover, many Muslim thinkers believe that there was a strong connection and harmony

between scientific truths and religious truth (Cook, 1999). As Nakosten (1964) states, every mosque had a primary school where students learned the foundations of reading, writing, mathematical skills, some science, geography, and history. Ramadan (2004) observes that over time the openness to knowledge, rationality, and independent thinking (ijtihad) in the Muslim world during its golden age disappeared (Cook, 1999; Ramadan, 2004) and was replaced with a new method of blindly following (taqlid) the traditional scholars of what Cook (1999) calls “authoritative knowledge”. By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, religious scholars (ulama) had become authoritative translators of religious texts and transmitters of traditions (Cook, 1999). These ulama did not favour research or independent thinking or inquiry. Therefore, most of the research conducted after the 13<sup>th</sup> century lacked critical thinking or any new contributions to knowledge (Cook, 1999; Ramadan, 2004). According to Cook, “the lethal combination of taqlid and foreign invasion beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century served to dim Islam’s pre-eminence in both the artistic and scientific worlds” (1999:2). For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to mention that Islamic education promotes the concept of “ijtihad” or independent thinking in all areas except in issues related to the fundamental principles of Islam. These principles include the five pillars of Islam as well as the six pillars of faith.

Eventually, the remarkable intellectual superiority of the Muslim world during the early period disappeared (Cook, 1999). As a result, the Muslim world has not been able to compete with the Western world educationally or culturally since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Cook, 1999). Moreover, Cook (1999) and Anzar (2000) believe that European colonialism worsened the situation by ignoring the local cultural norms through domination. The European system focused on rationality at the expense of divine revelation, and the separation of religion and state, contrary to the Islamic viewpoint which integrates all aspects of life into a harmonious whole (Anzar, 2000, Cook, 1999). Consequently the two educational systems developed separately without any interaction (Cook, 1999). Therefore, it can be concluded that the lack of independent thought, the opposition of Muslim orthodoxy to scientific knowledge, and foreign intervention are all contributing factors in the decline of Islamic education (Cook, 1999).

Modern madrasas responded to changes differently (Anzar, 2000). The madrasas in the Indian sub-continent, for example, adopted an education system similar to the early periods of Islam (632-661AD) and eliminated any worldly or secular subjects from its curriculum when this region came under British rule (Anzar, 2000). The main reason for such an ex-

treme shift in the curriculum was the strongly-held perception that the European secular educational system, influenced by Christian missionaries, was a threat to Islamic culture, heritage, and identity (Anzar, 2000). However, the madrasa in the Arab world generally maintained the standards of education established in the early development of madrasa in Baghdad, and even to the present time accommodates secular subjects (Anzar, 2000:5). Unfortunately, as some scholars (Cook, 1999; Ramadan, 2004) note, until now, most of the Muslim world has been unable to compete with the West culturally, educationally, economically, and politically. Also, Cook (1999) argues, due to political instability, lack of independent and critical thinking, and foreign interventions, many Muslims face multiple challenges, including education. Both Cook (1999) and Ramadan (2004) believe that even though Islamic education in the West is slowly evolving, it still depends on the old teaching methodology as mentioned above. As a result, Ramadan (2004) argues, Muslim schools in the West are not able to find a balance between helping their students to preserve their Islamic identity and maintaining these students' national identity. Without doubt, it is the aspiration of Muslim communities in the West to preserve the values and identity of Islam for their children (Ramadan, 2004:126). The first generations of Muslim immigrants to the West were successful in passing on the values of Islam to their children regardless of their limited means and knowledge (Ramadan, 2004). These immigrants had strong faith since they grew up in societies where God was present in all aspects of life. According to Ramadan, the common concern of Muslims in the West has always been:

How can the flame of the faith, the light of the spiritual life, and faithfulness to the teachings of Islam be preserved in environments that no longer refer to God and in educational systems that have little to say about religion (2004:126).

Ramadan (2004:127) believes that the better-educated second generation of immigrants in the West, both in Europe and North America, built on the limited success of their successors in preserving the identity of the youth and strengthening their connection to God by establishing a more structured Islamic education system. At the time, Islamic education was often offered in mosques and Islamic centres during the weekends and evenings (Ramadan, 2004). The curriculum consisted of basic recitation and memorization of the Qur'an, the prophetic traditions (ahadith), the life of the prophet (Sira), and Islamic law and jurisprudence related to religious regulations (fiqh al- ibadat) (Ramadan, 2004). With time Islamic education developed to form private Islamic schools, which are currently widespread in Europe, America, and Canada to respond to the increasing needs of Muslims

in the west (Ramadan, 2004). It is important to mention in the discussion that two unique communities played major roles in the historical growth of Islamic education in North America. According to Memon (2009), these communities are represented by the African-American Muslim community of Imam Warith Deen Mohamed (1933-2008), and the immigrant community represented by the generation of Muslims who settled in North America in 1960s and 1970s. In the Western European context, Dassetto (2010) suggests that the establishment of Muslim schools came with the mass immigration of Muslims in the 1960s and 1970s after gaining independence from the European colonial powers.

While the public schools encourage students to think critically, express their views, question ideas and concepts, and engage in debates, Islamic education classes as found in some mosques and centres promote the opposite. Students in these classes are taught to be good listeners, respectful of what they are told without engaging in any critical thinking or democratic discussions. Such an approach encourages young Muslims to develop a double personality, where they are able to express themselves on every subject with non-Muslims, but become passive when it comes to speaking about Islam or interacting with their religious teachers (Ramadan, 2004). In addition, Cook (1999) believes the contemporary madrasa has not made major improvements in curriculum and teaching pedagogy. It still focuses on Qur'an memorization and recitation without proper understanding or discussing the meaning of the Qur'anic text (Cook, 1999). For example, both Cook and Ramadan (2004) argued that a close examination of the Islamic education curriculum in the West indicates that it focuses on teaching the basic principles of Islam, rules, obligations, and prohibitions in a negative manner. They believe that it also focuses on protecting students from the negative influence of the West by isolating them from non-Muslims. It is a program that is poorly organized and taught. As a result, many students may memorize long chapters of the Qur'an as well as many traditions of the Prophet (ahadith) that have no impact on their daily life and behaviour in the country where they live (Ramadan, 2004). Focusing on Qur'an memorization and recitation without understanding the Qur'an text has a great influence on how students approach learning (Cook, 1999). It has been noticed that many students who graduate from these schools, while possessing a great deal of memorization ability, often lack competence in critical analysis and independent thinking (Cook, 1999). The young Muslims are often taught that they are different from the "other", the Westerner, whom they should not resemble (Cook, 1999). This otherness, which is

taught in weekend classes in mosques and madrasas, changes during the everyday interactions, as Ramadan notes:

“Into an uneasiness and an inferiority complex almost impossible to live with: eventually, the religious and spiritual education that is provided and that should give the young and the not young the means to confront the challenges of their society pushes them along one of three avenues: to pretend, to use themselves in silence, or to reject everything and rebel” (2004:128).

Ramadan (2004) supports the above analysis, arguing that the curriculum of Islamic education in the West needs to be flexible and reflective of the reality of Western societies which are becoming more and more multicultural. Currently, this program promotes a dualistic approach that creates the notion of “us against them”. The content of the curriculum seems to be directed to students who reside in the Muslim world. While the curriculum of Islamic education in the West focuses on enhancing students’ belief system and identity, it needs to challenge students in balancing their faith and identity with their respective multicultural societies. Such balance requires openness and courage in handling different viewpoints and critically questioning and discussing such viewpoints. The implication for this study is that the current Islamic education program at BCMS needs to find a balance between preserving the basic fundamentals of Islam and providing for students the necessary knowledge and skills required to reconcile any tensions that may exist between their religious identity and national identity.

The following section will examine the concept of Islamic education based on the following key terms: ta’lim ( to learn), tarbiyah (to increase), and ta’dib (to be well mannered).

#### **2.2.4 Islamic education: concept, definitions and aims**

According to Delic (2006), Islamic educational philosophy aims at achieving serious goals and social responsibilities that include both religious and secular educations in a systematically integrated manner. Proponents of Islamic education (Abdullah, 1982; Ashraf & Hussain, 1979; Cook, 1999; Thomas, 2002) note that the curriculum provides a balanced and integrated faith-based education system that strives to educate the whole person. The system includes both religious and secular educations (Cook, 1999). Islamic education also nurtures a safe environment, and empowers students’ cultural/religious identity (Abdulah, 1982; Ashraf & Hussain, 1979; Cook, 1999; Merry, 2007; Thomas, 2002). According to Cook (1999) the following key terms, ta’lim, tarbiyah, and ta’dib, are used in Arabic to describe education. Cook notes that although each term has a specific meaning, all of them

enhance the different dimensions of the educational process in Islam. These terms are further interrelated in their concern for individuals, the community, and society as a whole, and represent the scope of education in Islam.

The first term, ta'lim, means to know, to learn, or to be aware. It is directly related to instruction that involves mental activities and results in knowledge that the student did not previously possess. It could be defined as the process of transmitting or imparting knowledge to a person that will help in training his or her mind, while developing reasoning power. Thus, ta'lim implies the process of instilling knowledge in somebody so that this knowledge provides meaning and value to human life and to all human activities (Bin Omar, 1993).

The second term is tarbiyah. This word comes from the root raba, and it means to increase, to grow or to nourish, to perform the gradual process of bringing or growing of something to the stage of completeness or maturity (Cook, 1999: 344-345). In contemporary Arabic usage, the word tarbiyah is a matter of putting affairs right and in a proper state, or order (Ibn Manzur, 2000, Vol. 1). The term further describes a state of spiritual and ethical nurturing that is in accordance with the will of the Ar-Rab (the Lord). Consequently, the task of Islamic education is "the vivid presentation of high values and continued exposure to the attraction of goodness, truth and honesty until they are woven into the fabric of personality" (Hajalton, 1982:59). Moreover, Thomas (2002:3) points out, in the world view of tawheed (divine unity), knowledge is one entity, and cannot be divided into secular and religious divisions. Therefore, Islamic education focuses both on training the mind and the passing of knowledge (ta'lim) to others, as well as educating the person as a whole (Thomas, 2002:3). The teacher is not only a teacher (mu'alem) but also a murrabi, or a trainer of souls and personalities. Both kinds of knowledge contribute to the strengthening of faith (iman) (Thomas, 2002: 3).

The third term is ta'dib. This word comes from the root of ad-daba, which means to be cultured, well mannered, refined, or disciplined. It describes good social behaviour. According to Ibn Omar: "It is a process by which are acquired the good qualities and attributes of the mind and soul in terms of proper behaviour or ethical conduct" (1993, 5-10). From this perspective, the function of Islamic education is to produce men and women who possess characteristics and manners resembling Prophet Muhammad as closely as possible (Cook, 1999). Muslims consider Prophet Muhammad to be the ideal role model in all aspects of life (Shaikh, 1996: 104). This means, as Delic says:

“In Islam, education can never be separated from adab in its most educational sense, because adab encompasses the spiritual level of human awareness. Because of this inner nature of Islamic education, it is impossible, theoretically speaking, to find an educated person, in the Islamic sense, who is an immoral person. The emphasis on adab, which includes action (a'mal) in education and the educational process, ensures that 'ilm (knowledge) is being put to good use in society” (2006).

After providing a general overview of the importance of education in Islam, the establishment of the madrassa and examining the concept of Islamic education based on the following key terms: ta'lim, tarbiyah and ta'dib, the following section will analyse the theoretical and philosophical perspective of Islamic education. It will specifically focus on the aims and nature of Islamic education.

### **2.2.5 Theoretical and philosophical perspectives of Islamic education**

According to some researchers (Abdullah, 1982; Cook, 1999; Hewitt, 1997; Tan, 2011), in Islam, the Qur'an, and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad are the core framework of belief and action on which Islamic thought and philosophy of education are built. Allah Almighty said “ And we have sent down unto thee the message (Qur'an) that you may explain clearly to men what is sent to them that they may give thought” (Qur'an, 16: 44) . As Maududi (1998) and Tan (2011) note, for Muslims, Islam represents their ideological world view, comprising a set of beliefs, practices and values. It includes both religious beliefs and cultural practices necessary for the formation of a cultural identity (Tan, 2011).

It is noteworthy that, according Abdullah (1982), the Islamic world view is that each of us consists of a soul and a body which require education and training as a whole. In this context, education means both the rational or intellectual sciences and revealed knowledge (Tan, 2011). The concept of separation between religious education and secular education is new for Muslims (Abdullah, 1982; Douglass & Shaikh, 2005 cited in Tan, 2011). The Islamic point of view takes a balanced approach that promotes integration of both religious and secular educations, which aims at producing a well-rounded person who is not only faithful to God, but also equipped with a modern education for success in everyday life (Abdullah, 1982). Islam further considers education as a process, which requires the involvement of the whole body with all its components. In this approach, all subjects must be taught from an Islamic viewpoint. “The dualism in the curriculum is not an inherent aspect of the Qur'anic outlook; where it exists, it is to be attributed to socio-political factors, both internal and external" (Abdullah, 1982:138). Underlying the Islamic theology is the notion that humans are created in a state of fitrah (by decree) with the ability to worship



(ibaadah), and obedience (ta'ah) to the commands of Allah (God) (Merry, 2007). Worshiping and obeying Allah means devoting all human activities in life (including education) to achieving Tawhid (Oneness of God), that is, to worship Allah alone to gain his blessings. Perhaps that is why the primary goal of Islamic education is to promote a complete submission to the will of Allah and to fulfil the responsibility of khalifah (vice-regent) in this world (Merry, 2007). Therefore, as Merry suggests, the curriculum in Islamic schools should be taught from an Islamic orientation.

Whether the Islamic approach is better than other approaches such as the secular educational system, is a widely debated issue, especially in the West (McKinney, 2006), as I will discuss briefly later in this chapter. In addition, according to some scholars (Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2005; Tan, 2011) there is no agreement among the Muslim communities as to whether the Islamic education system is overall better for Muslim children than the secular education system. Such disagreement is reflected in how Muslims see themselves in the West. Merry (2007) notes that while scholars such as Qutb, Navdi, and Maududi present a separatist model, Ismail al-Faruqi presents a model that views Muslims in the West as exiles with a main mission to spread the message of Islam. However, the majority of Muslims in the West do not fit either of these perspectives (Merry, 2007). Instead, they want to have a loose cultural connection with Islam, without going to the mosque and becoming practicing Muslims (Merry, 2007). It is noteworthy that, as Malak (2008) remarks, often it is either the voices of the most conservative practitioners, or those have neglected the faith completely who are presented within and outside Muslim communities, while the middle group is ignored. Considering the diversity of perspectives among Muslims in the West, a balanced perspective should be found to reflect this diversity (Malak, Ed. in Bakht, 2008).

Nevertheless, as Maududi (1988) explains, the Islamic philosophy of education is a product of Islamic culture, just as every educational system is a product of its culture. Many educational institutions promote certain ideologies and cultures. Culture is not an ethnic tradition or custom only; it also represents faith and ideology, and as such represents a specific world view. Furthermore, education is also closely interrelated with faith and ideology where it represents the social dimension of culture. Thus, there is a strong relationship between culture and moral values. Such a relationship influences the educational system as well as the process of teaching and learning. Therefore as Lemo (2003) and Merry (2007) believe, the aspiration of Muslims is to strengthen the Islamic culture and moral values that contribute to a well-rounded ummah (community of believers). More-

over, as Halstead (2004) notes, the philosophy of Islamic education principally focuses on two main domains: individual development and social development. In individual development, education strives to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in life as adults in this world, and to achieve positive rewards in the hereafter. In social development, education focuses on enhancing the community's collective identity and preserving its cultural heritage as an agent for social change.

According to Islam, the concept of community consists of the family and the wider global community of believers (ummah) under the umbrella of the Islamic law (shari'ah). The Islamic world view is that Islam is a way of life with universal values which are based on the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad that focus on creating a united ideological community (ummah). The Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUP) provide balanced guidelines that cover spirituality and ethics as well as other parts of life. Islamic law (shari'ah) is also a major source of identity for Muslims. Therefore, while Islam recognizes other identities, it definitely makes the Islamic identity a priority above other identities. Islam, in this context, provides harmony and unity, which enables its members to develop common centres and institutions such as mosques and schools (Halstead, 2004).

In Islam, social existence and individual existence have the same goal, which is "the realization on earth of divinely ordained moral imperatives. Indeed, the growth of an individual can only take place within the shari'ah" (Halstead, 2004: 523). The Islamic shari'ah (divine law) provides a guideline of God's commands for Muslims in their private life as well as in their social life, and Muslims follow such guidelines in all aspects of life (Halstead, 2004). Therefore, as Halstead maintains, the aspiration of Islamic education to preserve a community's cultural heritage is a challenge, as it may conflict with the nature and spirit of the multicultural policies in the West that are meant to accommodate different people from many cultural and religious backgrounds (Halstead, 2004). In order to make sense of Islamic education in the West, Ramadan (2004) proposes the following objectives, which form the basis of his analysis: Education of the heart, education of the mind, and education for personal growth.

The focus on the education of the heart is to strengthen students' belief system and their consciousness with God, and to make them aware of their responsibilities toward themselves, their relatives, their communities and their human family at large. The aim in educating the mind is to enhance students' understanding of the message of the revealed

sources, and to develop a better understanding of the nature of the society they live in so that they can find the way of faithfulness in everyday life. The final objective is to help students develop the necessary skills and knowledge that help them to become autonomous in their lives, and their choices. As Ramadan remarks:

The spiritual education that should lead individuals to a conscious awareness of the primal need of him: in the depths of their beings should at the same time impress in those same beings the need to be completely independent of people. Faith in God cannot justify any alienation: on the contrary, it calls, as we have seen, for an inalienable freedom and for the search for the complete liberation of heart and spirit (2004: 129).

Moreover, Ramadan (2004) believes that studies of the Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet (Ahadith), law, and jurisprudence, should take into consideration the environment and the context in which such learning takes place. Students must be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to independently propose solutions for their personal and collective concerns. To reach the goal of independent thinking the Islamic curriculum in the West must provide a body of teaching that encourages a sense of Islamic identity through prayer and observances such as fasting through Ramadan, as well as interacting with teachers and other students, and the wider society (Ramadan, 2004).

In an attempt to achieve the above goal, proponents of Islamic education explain that providing an Islamic perspective on education for Muslim students in the West is essential (Hewer, 2001; Tawhidi, 2003; Zine, 2007). In such a context, Lemo (2003) argues that providing an Islamic education in the West requires a total Islamic curriculum that promotes pure Islamic ideology taught by highly-qualified, practicing Muslim teachers. Therefore, according to Tan (2011) and Hewer (2001) a Muslim school, from this point of view, would not offer a distinct course called Islamic studies, or religious education, but rather the entire curriculum would be an integrated, Islam-based system. This means that when a science lesson, for example, is taught, the core concepts of such a lesson will not be compromised, but the lesson is taught from an Islamic perspective in which every aspect in life revolves around Allah (God). The implication for Islamic schooling in the West is a comprehensive curriculum based on Islamic education theory that also reflects diverse societies. As Safi, who advocates a total Islamization of knowledge, remarks:

If the Islamic school project is to succeed in achieving the goal of graduating well-rounded human beings, creative energy and financial resources must be challenged to produce an alternative school curriculum capable of bringing about integration of knowledge and consciousness (2007: 7).

According to some researchers (Lemo, 2003; Merry; 2007) Islamic schools in the West are the first choice of many parents for helping their children form an Islamic identity and maintain their faith and cultural heritage. According to Merry (2007), these parents want schools to be friendly and open to issues of gender-sensitivity, such as modest dress (e.g., the hijab), provide sanctioned (halal) food, provide provisions for prayer, and teach character. Merry (2005) states, that for these parents, Muslim schools ensure that their basic religious values are taught alongside the academic programs. Therefore, Hower (2001) argues that the Islamic education curriculum could be an agent of change that empowers students' Islamic identity within the framework of belonging to a specific community, culture, and civilization.

Yet, as briefly indicated above, some researchers believe (Ameli, Azam & Merali, 2005; Hower, 2001; Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2005; Zine, 2007) that the issue of faith-based schools in general and Islamic education in particular is a highly debated issue in the West.

According to Merry (2005) and Hewitt (1997), some Muslim parents oppose Muslim schools for several reasons, including the possible isolation from the larger community, the fear of indoctrinating students with fundamentalism, and the belief among many parents that these schools are divisive and intolerant towards non-Muslims. Furthermore, Merry (2007) notes in his study that many Muslim parents do not see much value associated with Muslim schools because Islam does not play a major role in their lives in the West. These Muslim parents prefer to associate themselves with ethnic/cultural norms and values, and they identify themselves with Islam only in a cultural sense. For them, while Islam is their heritage, being a practicing Muslim is not on their agenda. Their priority instead is to preserve their children's linguistic and ethnic dance, songs, and foods. Therefore, they oppose Islamic schools and consider them as agents of isolation and intolerance towards non-Muslims.

As Hewitt (1997) notes, by their nature, Muslim schools will isolate students from the mainstream student population, though all religious schools are equally subject to this criticism. Nevertheless, the current focus is more often on Muslim schools due to the irrational fear of Islam (Islamophobia) within some elements of Western society.

In contrast, defenders of public schools (government schools) (Banks, 2001; Gutmann, 1996; McKinney, 2006; Sweet, 1997, cited in Zine, 2007) consider religious education to be a rejection of liberal democratic values. They argue that religious education is intended to isolate students from the wider society and promote a separatist cultural heritage that

also limits these students' opportunity to engage in an open dialogue and critical thinking. For example, according to Banks:

The purpose of education is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decision, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his identity (Hewitt, 2001: 202).

Nevertheless, according to some researchers (Ameli, Azam & Merali, 2005; and Zine, 2007) this contrasts with the opinions of some proponents of independent schools who believe that such schools promote particular cultures and religions that aim at moving the experiences of their students to the core of educational discussion, rather than remaining marginalised. As Zine further suggests:

From an anti-racism viewpoint, the contributions of marginalized communities have long been absent from the curriculum in many mainstream Eurocentric schools. Reclaiming these historical contributions rather than undercutting mutual respect, this reinforces respect and neutralizes the superiority of the dominant culture" (2007:74).

In addition, Ameli, Azam & Merali, (2005) and Thessen (2001, cited in Zine, 2007) argue that faith-based schools will improve rather than hinder social harmony in a multicultural society, because they allow cultural and religious communities to maintain their specific religions and cultures, while public schools are committed to teaching liberal democratic values. In addition, according to McLaughlin (1992, cited in Zine, 2007), public schools may not meet cultural, religious, and other needs, therefore, there could be a social justice perspective that endorses separate schools within a liberal framework, as long as such schools encourage critical rationality and independence.

Moreover, according to Ameli, Azam & Merali, (2005), even though, religion is not publicly condemned in Western democratic societies, secular marginalisation is a cultural phenomenon in which religion is ignored. Therefore, while, there is a need for religious space within the mainstream education system in the West, a faith-based education system that minimizes the impact of alienation and isolation of students could be a choice for some parents (Ameli, Azam & Merali, 2005).

In the context of Islamic education in the West, Ramadan (2004) believes that, in theory, Islam advocates that students develop the necessary skills and knowledge for personal growth, autonomy and freedom. It also encourages young Muslims to express themselves, to become critical thinkers, question ideas and concepts, and engage in debate in a supportive environment. However, in practice, students in Islamic education classes in the West are often encouraged to be good listeners, and respectful of what they are told without any

critical thinking. Such an approach encourages young Muslims to develop a dual personality in which they can express themselves on every subject with non-Muslims, and become good listeners when it comes to Islam, or when interacting with their religious teachers (Ramadan, 2004). Merry (2007) notes that the philosophy of Islamic education is based on theology, as all aspects and actions in Islam have God (Allah) as their focal point. In such a context, the philosophy of Islamic education is developed for the Muslim ummah (community of believers) especially in the Muslim world; however, in practice, that presents a challenge for Muslim schools in the West. As Merry remarks:

The incongruence between an ideal type of philosophy of Islamic education and the heterogeneous body of Islamic schools in the West is admittedly an antinomy of sorts. In part, this tension exists because virtually all Islamic philosophy of education is derived from so called Muslim world. Indeed, this puts a pressure on Islamic schools' educators in the West to form a home grown philosophy of Islamic education that is rooted in the experiences of practitioners and addresses the needs of these schools in the context of Western society (2007: 46).

Yet, as Merry (2007) discusses, even though Islamic schools, like other faith-based schools, serve students from less diverse backgrounds, that should not be translated as promoting isolationism or intolerance. Since Islam presents its message as a universal message that is intended for all human beings irrespective of their backgrounds, there is a possibility in the future that Islamic schools might entertain the notion of a variety of students similar to modern Catholic and Protestant schools.

The following section will focus on the historical background and theoretical perspectives of Canada's multicultural system.

### **2.3 Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: Definitions, Policies and Goals**

This section will briefly focus on multiculturalism and multicultural education in general. As Banks (1994) indicates, ideally, multiculturalism is based on equality, and harmonious tolerance of diverse languages, religions, and cultural and ethnic groups in a pluralistic society. It is based on the idea that an individual can freely identify himself with two or more cultural identities. He can, for example, be both Ukrainian and Canadian at the same. According to Nye (2007:110), when defining the concept of multiculturalism it is essential to understand the complexity of different contexts in which it is often used. This is important because multiculturalism describes different issues that concern different levels of society. Multiculturalism does not describe a particular ideology, but rather a process

that occurs in different settings and times. In order to understand the concept of multiculturalism better and also manage it effectively, the context of particular relevant countries should be understood, where diversity is celebrated and challenges that come with it addressed both at the national and state levels (Nye, 2007:110).

As Hall (2000:209, cited in Nye, 2007: 110) indicates, the term multicultural “describes the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining some of their original identity”. He further states that the term describes “the strategies and policies adopted to govern and manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throw up” (Hall, 2000:209 cited in Nye, 2007: 110). In this context, multiculturalism should not be dealt with from a liberal political perspective. Rather, the state should manage it in a manner that fully accommodates diverse communities and groups in different societies (Nye, 2007:110). The process of multiculturalism requires both respect for differences in society as well as a sense of common ground (Nye, 2007: 110).

Multiculturalism is a method for managing diversity in society, especially in issues related to employment, housing opportunities, social justice and educational opportunities (p. 113). According to Nye (2007: 113), in order to create an effective dialogue in multicultural societies, systematic steps include recognizing differences, gaining knowledge of differences, and promoting tolerance and engagement across the differences. As Nye (2007: 113) argues, multicultural dialogue is critical in successfully managing multiculturalism in any society, but it is just the starting point and not the end itself. The second step involves gaining knowledge of differences, which requires observing differences. Since this process is a two way street, all parties have to take part in observing and gaining knowledge of each other. This may lead to negative outcomes, as we may discover that we are not happy with some elements of particular cultures (Nye, 2007). Regardless, this is essential. In addition, there is the need for multicultural engagement, which has both positive and negative implications. Beyond recognizing cultural differences, tolerance is required at both the state and individual levels. Accepting ideas, values and practices, which may not be in agreement with the majority culture presents some challenges such as accepting religious or social practices that fall outside of the norm of the majority religions or cultures. This works both ways, according to Nye (2007). Minorities must also respect and tolerate majority practices. For example, how is it possible to tolerate native British

values from an Islamic perspective (Nye, 2007: 113-114)? Successful multiculturalism and cultural engagement requires mutual tolerance (Nye, 2007: 14).

However, according to Nye (2007: 114) tolerance has its limitations and is not the end product of cultural engagement. But who decides such limitations? That is a challenge for multiculturalism. Beyond tolerance there is a need for engagement across cultural differences. Multiculturalism requires all parties to participate in learning about and tolerating each others' differences, then engaging across the differences. This must include showing mutual respect for diversity, and agreeing to a mutual goal that unites the different groups within any multicultural setting. As Nye (2007:114) explains further, a successful multicultural society will integrate all these concepts, and will take a proactive approach to ensuring that this process is consistently maintained. This means there must be gradual engagement among different groups and individuals across the cultures, religions, and values that separate them, and that engagement must be based on knowledge of each other, as well as tolerance and mutual respect for differences, along with acknowledgement of some common ground to which all belong.

In the context of education, according to Banks (1994: 44-47) multiculturalism attempts to equip ethnic and cultural groups with an understanding of, and respect for, the unique cultures of other ethnic groups. It further aims to reduce the discrimination that some minority groups face in schools and in the wider society (Banks, 1994). Banks believes that, ideally, multicultural education policy seeks to provide equal opportunities to all members of the society regardless of origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation. It also aims to eliminate cultural stereotypes and discrimination against minority groups (Banks, 1994). Therefore as Ghosh (2004) maintains, multicultural educational policies should focus on preparing students to participate in a just and fair society.

Moreover, the educational system must better engage students in human rights, and provide equal opportunities to all cultural groups in all aspects of life (Ghosh, 2004). Multicultural education has taken several different forms and goals in the last forty years. The following is one of the definitions:

Multicultural education is the policies, programs, and practices employed in schools to celebrate cultural diversity. It builds on the assumption that teaching and learning are invariably cultural processes. Since schools are composed of students and teachers from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, the best way for the educational process to be most effective for the greater number of students is for it to be multicultural (Gay, 1985:3).



Most scholars and researchers in multicultural education systems, including Banks (1994) and Sleeter & Grant (2006), agree that many changes are necessary. Some recommended changes should include institutional changes, changes in the curriculum, the teaching materials, teaching and learning styles, the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of teachers and administrators, and the goals, norms, and culture of the school. However, Banks (1994) argues that in many schools and universities practitioners have a limited concept of multicultural education, and they view it primarily as curriculum reform. For multicultural education to be better understood and implemented consistently, its different dimensions must be more clearly described, conceptualized, and researched. Multicultural education is much more than content integration (Banks 1994), and is not only for low-income students and students of colour (Grant & Sleeter, 2006; Parekh, 1986). Banks formulates the dimensions of multicultural education as content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture, and social structure (1994: 4). I will analyse some of the theoretical underpinnings of multicultural education as they relate to the Canadian context later in the discussion.

### **2.3.1 General overview of Canada's multicultural system**

This section will provide a general overview of the Canadian multicultural system. As some scholars discuss in their research studies (Canadian Heritage Department, 2006; Esses & Gardner, 2006; Leman, 1999), the most recent legislation for the enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada was passed in 1988. Esses & Gardner (2006) note that the objectives of Canada's multicultural system are, briefly, to promote understanding, equality, co-existence, harmony, and respect among all Canadians, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, and to eliminate any discriminatory barriers. In the education context, Ghosh (2004) believes that Canadian educators aim to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to realise the multicultural ideals.

Canada's federal government has made a firm commitment to multiculturalism, and to promote and encourage integration. In his 1971 speech on multiculturalism, then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau outlined practical steps that the federal government would take to support and promote this policy. The steps are as follows:

1. Resources permitting, the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow

and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance, the small and weak groups no less than the strong and highly organized.

2. The government will assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society.
3. The government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.
4. The government will continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society (Adams, 2007: 11-12).

According to Hyman, Meinhardt & Shields (2011: 5-6) the Canadian multicultural policy evolved over the years since it was first introduced in 1971. The main goal of the policy was to help different groups to preserve their cultures and identity. It also aimed to eliminate barriers to their positive integration into the wider Canadian society by, for example, helping new immigrants learn one of the official languages. During this stage, the majority of Canadian society was of Christian European stock. As the racial and religious fabric of immigration shifted from Europe to mostly non-Christian Asia, many newcomers faced social exclusion in many facets of life.

In 1982 the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was approved. The Charter guaranteed equal protection and benefit of the law, and freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender, religion and racial or ethnic background. Its provisions were to be interpreted in a manner consistent with the multicultural ideal.

In 1988 Canada's Multicultural Act was passed. This further strengthened multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society. It provided a legal avenue to guide the federal government's responsibilities and activities related to multiculturalism. In addition to guaranteeing equal opportunity for all Canadians regardless of origin, it focused on the rights of people of different ethnicities, races, and religions to preserve their unique cultural heritage. It also underlined the importance of eliminating any kind of systematic discrimination, and required all federal government institutions to implement their programs in a manner that reflects the new reality of the Canadian society. The Act also provided for funding to police departments, hospitals, and schools to implement multicultural policies (Hyman, Meinhardt and Shields, 2011: 6).

In summary, Canada's multicultural policy has evolved over the years to respond to the changing needs of the diverse Canadian society. In the 1970s, the main focus was to recog-

nize differences; in the 1980s to manage diversity; and in the 1990s to build constructive interaction and engagement. More recently, the 2009 policy objectives give priority to creating a society that is more integrative and socially cohesive. It also focuses on making institutions more reflective of the needs of Canada's diverse population (Hyman, Meinhardt and Shields, 2011: 6-7).

As Adams (2007) notes, proponents argue that Canada is committed to celebrating diversity and enriching its society with the best of the many cultures represented in the country. In general, Canadians take pride in promoting universal values such as peace, equality, harmony, freedom, and human rights:

Canadians generally, believe themselves to be peaceful and humane. And they like to think that if they are not as extroverted and friendly as their American cousins, then they are deep down nice in a quiet, unpretentious sort of way. Above all, Canadians believe they participate in a just society, one that is respectful of diversity and mindful of vulnerability. These values lie at the heart of our deep attachment to our public health care system, our passion about our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and our support for high rates of immigration and robust multiculturalism (Adams, 2007:4).

Because of the relatively effective harmonious relationship between diverse minority groups and Canadian society at large, Canadians have a lot to celebrate. Internationally, in terms of immigration and multiculturalism, Canada is viewed positively as among the most tolerant countries in the world by those who have participated in several global surveys (Adams, 2007:13). For example, a survey conducted by the United Nations Human Development Index concluded that Canada is among the top 10 most tolerant countries in the world (Canada Immigration Newsletter, July, 2007). The survey focused on issues such as literacy and education, living standards, and life expectancy. Another survey conducted in 23 countries with more than 32,000 respondents concluded that Canada is the most tolerant country in the Western world, and ranked at the top in welcoming Muslims (Canada Immigration Newsletter, February, 2007).

Malak (2008) illustrates the general spirit of solidarity of Jewish and Christian communities with Muslims with the following anecdote: After the tragic terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, Christian and Jewish leaders in Edmonton, Alberta reached out to their Muslim neighbours by attending Friday prayer at Al-Rasheed Mosque and offered their full support to the Muslim community. Malik notes that: "only a confident, caring culture can perform such an elegant proactive gesture. Only a genuinely generous community appreciates the generosity of other communities extending such a warm hand" (P. 74).

Similar stories could be told about many Canadian communities across the country. I recall that on Friday 14, September 2001, the Honourable Allen Rock then a Federal cabinet minister who was on a personal visit to Vancouver, decided to comfort the Muslims in Vancouver. Addressing a congregation of more than 1,000 people in the biggest mosque in the city, he focused on two issues: that the perpetrators did not represent Islam and Muslims, and that the Muslim community should not be held responsible for what happened and therefore should feel safe. Mr. Rock's conciliatory remarks were much needed comfort to worshippers, and minimized their fear of general retaliation from the wider society.

Finally, as Masood (2007) discusses, people in the West admire Canada's success in achieving harmony and peace among the diverse communities in the country. However, the emergence of al Qaeda in the developed countries, and the apparent support of a small number of Muslims for al Qaeda's violent vision is redefining citizenship and access to justice in the Western world in general (Masood, 2007). Regardless of the challenges, I believe that the above-cited surveys, discussions, and examples position Canada as among the leading countries to make multiculturalism work, as societies increasingly become more diverse than ever.

The following section will discuss the nature of Islamic education in Canada's multicultural society.

### **2.3.2 Islamic education in a multicultural society: The Canadian context**

This section will focus on the nature of providing Islamic education in Canada's multicultural society. It will particularly explore the possible root causes of frequent tensions between Islamic education and Canada's multicultural system.

As Masood (2007) argues, in order to challenge terrorism and ensure the freedom and safety of citizens, many European countries, are rapidly changing their immigration policies. Masood (2007) notes, that Canada has faced terrorist attacks in the past. For example, Canada faced numerous violent attacks from Québec separatists in 1969-1970, Armenian anti-Turkish operatives in the 1980s, and in 1985 from Sikh separatists who blew up an airplane bound from Montreal to London in mid-flight. However, the country did not face any specific threat from al Qaeda until June 2006, when about seventeen young Muslim men of different ethnic backgrounds were arrested in Toronto for offences related to terrorism (Masood, 2007). Since these arrests, Canadian policy makers have become concerned about possible support for al Qaeda within the Muslim community, which may result in following the European model of tightening immigration policy. So far, government policy

remains consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which is the basis for the modern Canadian state (Masood, 2007). In comparison to Europe, according to Adams (2007), Canadians are more accepting of multiculturalism, and acknowledge the reality that their country is becoming more and more diverse. They view immigration as part of the Canadian norm.

Nevertheless, according to Siddiqui (Bakht, 2008) Canada has experienced its share of Islamophobia since the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and the resulting politics of fear. The Maher Arar tragedy, in which a Syrian-born Canadian was handed over to Syrian officials by the CIA with the full cooperation of Canadian security agencies, is one example. Mr. Arar, who was suspected of having links to al Qaeda, suffered, severe torture while in a Syrian prison, before a public outcry led to the federal government's intervention, resulting in the release of Mr. Arar (Bakht, 2008). The Canadian government has since established a commission to study post-9/11 injustice, especially in the case of Arar. The commission concluded that there was Canadian complicity in his imprisonment and torture, and has subsequently offered an official apology and financial compensation. Another example of compromising individual rights in the name of securing national security is the arrest of 23 Muslim men in Toronto in 2003. Though the 23 were suspected of terrorism, there has not been a single related charge brought against them. While the threat of terrorism from al Qaeda is real, such threats should be dealt with within the rule of law (Siddiqui, 2008).

As Modood (2007) suggests, religious and ethnic differences in the West are on the rise as debate on the issue of multiculturalism intensifies. Issues such as immigration, visible minorities and fears of post-September 11 terrorist attacks increase concerns related to safety in many Western societies. Also, Modood (2007) remarks on the noticeable increasing presence of Muslims within Western societies, and ongoing debates over national identities that have further increased criticism of multiculturalism. Muslims especially are under pressure to find a balance between national identity and religious identity in the West. Such a balance becomes more significant as many Western nations are engaged in conflict with some Muslim countries (Modood, 2007). Furthermore, according to Kymlicka (2006), while the Canadian experience with multiculturalism has been relatively positive, there have been some challenges and tensions.

Kymlicka (2006) argues that as immigrants, including Muslims, from unfamiliar territories and cultures continue to arrive, prejudices and discriminations will arise from time to time at all levels of society. As Taylor (1994) suggests, critics of multiculturalism argue

that the policy, which claims to be neutral, is flawed and uneven. For example, Halstead (2004) argues that from a liberal perspective, the ideal is an open, pluralistic and democratic society, whereas, the Islamic ideal sees the best society as a society that is guided by the commands of God (Allah) as detailed in the Islamic law (shari'ah). Banks (2001) further believes that a liberal education would train students to critically examine issues around them without restrictions. In this context, according to McKinney, the aims of faith-based education are contrary to the aims of the secular educational system. There is a perception that a religious education suppresses such autonomy, and leads to indoctrination at the expense of education (McKinney, 2006, cited in Zine, 2007). From an Islamic perspective, as Halstead (2004) discusses, independence of thought and personal autonomy do not enter into Muslim thinking about education, which is more concerned with the progressive initiation. However, while the Islamic perspective on education restricts students' critical thinking on issues related to the fundamentals of Islam such as the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of Iman (faith), it gives a great flexibility for critical, independent thinking in issues related to philosophy, politics, technology and science. The implication for a more integrative approach of Islamic education in non-Muslim societies such as Canada is that there should be a balance between promoting an Islamic perspective and complying with the Canadian Charter of Rights. Perhaps Elmasri's (2005) model for smart integration would meet the challenge:

Unlike the assimilation or isolation models, the smart integration model promotes the preservation of one's identity in matters of religion, culture, language and heritage, while simultaneously encouraging full participation in the country's political square, and promoting both individual and collective contributions in all fields to its well-being. This positive hybrid model follows the ancient wisdom which recognizes that as minorities adapt, countries should adopt. In the case of Canadian Muslims, smartly integrated individuals and communities are far better able to look after new immigrants from within and without their groups. And it goes without saying that the contributions of those following the smart integration model will have greater positive impact on the well-being of their country than if they work through either the assimilation or isolation models. Smartly integrated individuals would not try to hide their ethnicity or religion, nor would they feel inferior as compared to their fellow citizens. In sum, they would not feel restricted or handicapped by their identity (p. 4).

Moreover, researchers such as Franklin & Brummelen indicate that, while liberal theory is credited with establishing tolerance, democracy, freedom, and justice in the West, ideologically it is not tolerant. They further argue that public policy has limited the role of religion in public life (Franklin and Brummelen, 2006). Moreover, multiculturalism in the

Canadian context is founded on liberal theory, and that presents a challenge to some communities that do not entertain the philosophical foundation of such a theory (Franklin & Brummelen, 2006) According to Kymlicka (2006) the main reason for such scepticism is because multiculturalism in Canada was originally established for well-integrated European ethnic groups that had only minor differences in terms of culture and language with the dominant group. For example, Ukrainians, Italians, and other European immigrants led the multiculturalism discussions and debates in the 1960s and 1970s. Kymlicka (2006) further believes that multiculturalism in Canada was not initially intended to accommodate Canadian Muslims, or to enhance their positive integration into the wider Canadian society. It can be argued that when multiculturalism was introduced it was a reasonable response to already established communities of immigrants, though it lacked flexibility in accommodating the needs of new immigrants, and did not eliminate the challenges faced by Muslims and similar minorities in their struggle to survive (Kymlicka, 2006).

In addition, there is an ingrained and acknowledged privileging of the majority's history, values, and language (Kymlicka, 2006; Zine, 2007). According to Kymlicka: "it is the majority language that is used in public institutions, the majority holidays that are recognized in the public calendar, and the majority history that is taught in schools" (2001: 43). In such a context, the minorities' request for group-specific rights is long overdue to resolve such unfair practices and treatments. The above-mentioned arrangements are integration plans developed by Government that minorities have to accept, otherwise their chances of positively integrating with the dominant group, and benefiting from its institutions will decrease. These government plans lead to marginalizing all minority groups, especially Muslims, where they are placed at a real disadvantage (Azmi (2001). According to Kymlicka (1998) and Zine (2007) the liberal multicultural discussion mainly focuses on issues that are related to public institutions, and addresses the needs of secular ethnic minority groups, especially from Europe. It often does not accommodate the aspirations and needs of ideologically-motivated, diverse religious minorities that feel that the current liberal multicultural and educational policies and institutions marginalize their values and beliefs.

Moreover, Muslims and their institutions face challenges in dealing with external pressures (Azmi, 2001; Zine, 2007). Like many other minority institutions, Muslim schools in Canada face challenges in balancing the tensions between the effort to preserve Islamic values, and the requirement to integrate into the dominant cultural norms. This is in part

because, as Grant suggests: “Muslim schools live within societies with norms already determined by the majority culture” (1997:24). These institutions promote some elements of culture and lifestyle that are, in some cases, different from the faith and values of their students and their parents (Azmi, 2001). The pressure on the Islamic schools and Islamic education has increased since the tragic incidents of September 11, 2001. Muslim communities and their institutions around the world came under strict scrutiny from both the media and law enforcement agencies. The global war on terror, in many cases, put Muslim communities under psychological incarceration (Azmi, 2001). The often-misguided presentation of Islam and Islamic institutions in the media both accentuate and perpetuate the general anxiety about the outward expression or practice of the Muslim religion and way of life (Azmi, 2001). For example, Canada’s mainstream media commonly focuses negatively on Muslims, presenting the actions of a few as symptomatic of an entire community, ignoring the overwhelming majority of law-abiding Muslims (Siddiqui, 2008:3). This is guilt by association. Though some terrorists commit some unacceptable crimes somewhere in the world, they do not represent all Muslims (Siddiqui, 2008). On the other hand, Canadian Muslims have the responsibility to disassociate themselves from terrorist acts committed in the name of their religion, and to condemn such acts in the strongest terms (Siddiqui, 2008). As the *Globe and Mail* newspaper (April 17, 2007) indicates, the Québec example in which young Muslim girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were turned away from a Tae Kwon Do competition because they wore Islamic headscarves shows the increasing challenge that the Canadian society faces in dealing with diversity. According to Azmi (2001) the seeming unwillingness of some Muslims to accept liberal multiculturalism does not mean that Muslims are against multiculturalism, for the Muslim community itself is very diverse and multicultural. However, as Azmi suggests:

Some Muslims have significant problems with liberal multiculturalism that directs them to marginalize religious values and beliefs in favour of secular inclusiveness. A multiculturalism that includes the outlook of faithful Muslims would need to allow the explicit retention of religious values and beliefs even when these run contrary to prevailing public norms (2001:271).

Moreover, Elmasry (2005) argues that feelings of marginalization among Canadian Muslims have weakened their trust in the dominant majority and slowed their positive integration with Canadian society in general, even though the majority of Muslims are willing to integrate with the Canadian society. Canadian Muslims are subjected to dis-



crimination and stereotyping, because they are believed to hold different values from that of the Canadian mainstream. As Elmasry remarks:

The justification of prejudice and/ or its denial usually relies on specious blame-the-victim arguments. Prejudice against Canadian Muslims today is compounded by media stereotyping that has built an image coloring them all terrorists, potential terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. They are marginalized as having values different from Canadian values (2005:6-7).

In contrast, as Elmasry (2005) believes, the dominant English Canadian majority justifies prejudice against French Canadians based on differences of language and culture, and prejudice against Jews as a continuation of European anti-Semitism. Both groups, unlike Muslims, are perceived to be only slightly different from the mainstream in their characteristics of race, language, culture, or religion (Elmasry, 2005). Elmasry, along with Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley (retrieved in July 10, 2010), notes that one example of prejudice and discrimination against Canadian Muslims is highlighted by the following example: When Ontario Muslims asked the provincial government to have their faith-based arbitrations system regulated by the courts, an opportunity enjoyed by other religious groups, the government responded by scrapping its recognition of all faith-based arbitrations (Elmasry, 2005; Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley, retrieved in July 10, 2010). According to Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley (2010) religion represents a challenge in Canada because it is often avoided and not dealt with directly. These researchers believe that while the Canadian Multiculturalism Act mandates that the multiculturalism program address religion among other issues, in reality little attention is given to religion and religious communities in Canada, especially Islam. According to Ibrahim & Jahevich (2004) “while other religious minorities have been addressed under the categories of race or ethnicity, due to the heterogeneous Muslims population, ethnic, race or linguistic categories are not adequate to address the religious needs of Muslims” (cited in Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley, retrieved on July 10, 2010:12). As a result, there are often tensions between preserving Muslims’ religious identity and the government’s multicultural policy regarding addressing minority concerns (Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley, retrieved in July 10, 2010).

The most noticeable act of anti-Muslim bigotry in Canada happened in Hérouxville a small town in Quebec, about 130 miles north of Montreal. The town has a population of 1,300 people, with only one immigrant family, and little hope of attracting any further immigrants, due to this controversy (Siddiqui, 2008:2). In 2007 Hérouxville adopted a code of conduct for immigrants, stating that: “Thou shall not stone women to death or circum-

cise them, nor wear the hijab or carry the kirpan in public, nor expect employers to provide a place or time off for prayers” (Siddiqui, 2008:2). According to Siddiqui, following a public outrage over this bigotry against immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular, in 2008, the government of Québec appointed prominent academics Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard to find a reasonable accommodation for immigrants. When the hearing began, the deep negative feelings against immigrants became apparent. Many participants aired anti-Semitic and anti-Islam views. Participants complained that some public swimming pools were reserving private times for Muslim women, some public facilities were providing prayer spaces for Muslims, junior hockey star Benjamin Rubin of Gatineau Olympique was allowed to take Saturday off for the Sabbath, and Montréal’s Jewish General Hospital staff had rejected an ambulance driver from its cafeteria for eating a ham sandwich (Siddiqui, 2008:6). These bigoted views are in conflict with Canada’s Charter of Rights, which ensures the survival of different cultures in the country. At the end of the hearings, Taylor and Bouchard concluded that, “the right to freedom of religion includes the right to show it”. They argue that showing religious symbols in public places promotes the common good, and helps citizens to experience diversity. Therefore, the hijab, kippa, turban, and kirpan should all be accepted in schools and in other public facilities. Also, the hijab should be accepted in sports competitions as long as it does not compromise the safety of individuals. In addition, they recommended that all public facilities such as universities and hospitals should also offer a space for prayers (Siddiqui, 2008).

### **2.3.3 Theoretical and philosophical perspectives of liberal-multicultural system: Canadian perspectives**

Debates about cultural practices have recently intensified in many Western countries. In theory, it is accepted that cultural groups are granted protection of their rights and entitled to some forms of public recognition. I will analyse two prominent theories of liberal multiculturalism. The first, promulgated by Charles Taylor (1994), focuses on the cultures themselves and raises the issue of the value of cultures in relation to the public discourse (Taylor, 1994). The second theory presents the liberal multiculturalists’ analysis of Kymlicka who takes the norm of individual equality as a starting point. Kymlicka promotes group rights as long as they do not interfere with individual rights and freedom. His liberal perspective requires the protection of both freedom within groups and equal rights between groups (Kymlicka, 1995).

The first theory is the 'politics of equal recognition' developed by Charles Taylor (1994). Taylor's theory emphasises the equal dignity, rights, and entitlements of all citizens regardless of their backgrounds. The liberalism of equal dignity ostensibly assumes that there are some universal principles. In Canada the debate on Québec as a distinct society almost led to the separation of Québec from the rest of Canada (Taylor, 1994:51-52). It began with the adoption of the Charter of Rights in 1982, which proposed a schedule of rights that would form a basis for judicial review of legislation at all levels of government (Taylor, 1994:52).

The Charter of Rights defines individual rights, guarantees equal treatment of citizens in all aspects of life, and protects such citizens against any form of discrimination. The Charter further recognizes language and aboriginal rights (Taylor, 1994:53-54). Empowered with the legal rights guaranteed by the Charter, the Québec government introduced a series of language laws, mandating French language schools for all Francophone and immigrant children, requiring that enterprises with more than fifty employees conduct their business in French only, and banning all non-French commercial signs. These restrictions were aimed at ensuring the survival of French culture, though they would be perceived as violations of the Charter in other parts of Canada. Opponents do not accept collective goals that restrict the rights of individuals. They believe that individual rights should take priority over collective goals (Taylor, 1994: 55).

Québécois distance themselves from the liberal model of rights. They prefer instead another model that is organized around preserving a collective goal, in this case, preserving a unique culture while respecting diversity and basic rights (Taylor, 1994:59). This model of a liberal society provides a better balance between maintaining certain forms of uniform treatment and preserving cultural survival, especially in modern multicultural societies (Taylor, 1994:61). According to Taylor (1994) any variations in cultural accommodations must be balanced. Cultural variations, for example, will be accommodated in applying a schedule of rights, excluding murder, or disrupting the peace, as in the case of author Salman Rushdie in the United Kingdom (Taylor, 1994: 61-62).

As societies become more multicultural, it is important to show equal respect to all cultures. The real challenge lies in how to deal with the sense of marginalization without compromising basic liberal-political principles (Taylor, 1994:63). Taylor suggests that cultural survival should be acknowledged as an acceptable and collective goal, and should be allowed as a legitimate consideration in a judicial review, or other major social policy

(Taylor, 1994:63-64). Taylor further demands all cultures should be valued as equal, and their worth acknowledged, helping them survive (Taylor, 1994:64).

Taylor's model has some shortcomings. He advocates gaining extensive knowledge of other cultures and evaluating them: "...all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings" (Taylor, 1994:66). However, cultural evaluation implies passing judgment on a culture's value. Taylor advocates keeping an open mind while studying other cultures, and avoiding imposing our ethnocentric standards on others. His solution instead is to balance between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards (Taylor, 1994: 72).

According to Schuster (2006), Taylor's model has some limitations, as there are various unanswered questions. For example, how far and how extensively should other cultures be studied? What is the aim in studying such cultures? What criteria and benchmarks should be employed to assess and evaluate the values of cultures if we must disregard our own cultural standards? Even though having a clear objective in deciding the level of worthiness of cultures, the issue becomes more challenging when we realize that there many different cultures to evaluate (Schuster, 2006). In practice, it is difficult to assess the real value of cultures through such an open-ended process (Schuster, 2006). Another challenge is the relationship between the process of evaluating and the objectives behind such a process. Taylor's model appears to lead towards cultural equality, however, that may not be the case, because no culture is all good or all bad (Schuster, 2006). In such a context, each culture consists of some aspects that could be viewed by others as negative values (Schuster, 2006). It is important to recognize that Taylor's model gives a high priority to achieving equality, though he does not come up with clear strategies to achieving such an outcome. Regardless of its shortcomings, Taylor's model is not only open to recognizing the value of different cultures as found in Canadian society, it also recognizes their worth as cultures that deserve acknowledgement. Taylor remarks that:

It is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings of diverse characters and temperaments over a long period of time — that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable — are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps one could put it another way: it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility a priori (1994:66).

Taylor's model may contribute to promoting the positive integration of minority groups with the wider Canadian society. It may also help in reducing marginalization, prejudice and discrimination against the cultures and faiths of minorities in the context of Canada's multicultural society.

Will Kymlicka (1995), a leading political philosopher and theorist, presents a different approach in dealing with diversity in a multicultural society— the politics of differences. According to Gingrich (1998), Kymlicka recognizes the increasing diversity of western countries due to advances in communication. Such diversity requires improved interaction among the different cultures. In Canada, Québécois and aboriginal peoples have demanded increased autonomy and rights (Gingrich, 1998). The relationship of Québec with the rest of Canada became the most debated issue in the country, where individual and group rights are addressed at different levels. To respond to these demands and to address demographic and social changes, government policy has had to be modified. The multicultural policy of Canada is a prime example of such an evolution. Policies dealing with immigration, land claims, self-government, language, and customs have all changed in recent years.

Kymlicka undertakes his analysis clearly from the tradition of liberalism which gives a higher priority to individual freedom (Gingrich, 1998). This point of view considers the individual as autonomous, and tolerance and respect for the rights of others are part of this dynamic. He argues that groups' rights are important characteristics of a liberal society which values freedom and equality. Kymlicka divides minority groups in Canada into two groups — those present at the founding of the nation, that is, Québécois Francophones, and the aboriginal peoples of Canada, whom he calls national minorities in multination states, and the rest of the minority groups whom he calls "ethnic groups in poly-ethnic states". Kymlicka advocates that, as founding peoples, French Canadians and First Nations peoples deserve special rights that may not be accorded to other ethnic groups in poly-ethnic states. They should be allowed to preserve their cultures, govern themselves, and be recognized as distinct societies. Because other immigrants arrived voluntarily, sometime after Canada had been established, they should be expected to integrate into the wider society. Kymlicka believes that the government should help both groups to maintain their cultures by introducing policies that eliminate racism and discrimination. He also advocates equality in education, including some forms of affirmative action.

As Kymlicka suggests, Canada's liberal multicultural policies provide "a convenient and already established discourse and institutional infrastructure to negotiate these chal-

lenges” (2006: 3). Through this infrastructure, minorities promote their rights and create institutions that promote their distinct needs. The discussion provides a means towards helping minority groups maintain and promote their distinct identities without pressure to assimilate or risk of being marginalized (Kymlicka, 2006). As a liberal theorist, Kymlicka is committed to the principle of individual autonomy and choice, regardless of whether these choices run against the community’s values (1998, 2001). While Kymlicka’s theory of minority rights acknowledges state-imposed privileging of the dominant European cultures, especially English- and French-speaking communities, he proposes group-specific rights for minority cultures to compensate for some of the inequalities and to support their demands for fairer terms of integration and recognition. In Kymlicka’s approach, for national minorities a dialogue is the most suitable approach, except when dealing with ethnic groups that maintain some illiberal cultural practices where some rights should be limited.

The implication of Kymlicka’s theory for different cultures is that it does not recognize and acknowledge the value and worth of such cultures. He gives a priority to protecting individual freedoms and rights over preserving minority cultures. Therefore, Kymlicka’s position may present a challenge for the survival of minority groups’ cultures, and as a result hinder the positive integration of these groups into the wider society. It may also present a challenge for those in the minority cultural groups who may desire to preserve their religious and cultural practices and obligations in public. In addition, this model may also have a negative effect on the formulation of public education policies, and affect the way the media present minority groups and their cultures in Canada in general.

#### **2.3.4 A perspective on bringing religion to the heart of the discussion on multiculturalism in line with ethnicity and race**

Though Kymlicka (1995) and Taylor (1994) promote accommodating ethnic minorities within Canada’s multicultural system, though from different perspectives, their analyses are based on Western liberal/secular principles. These analyses suggest accommodating minority groups as long as they are in agreement with Western political principles. For example, according to Gingrich (1998), Kymlicka, (1995) undertakes his analysis clearly from the tradition of liberalism which gives a higher priority to individual freedom. He argues groups’ rights are important characteristics of liberal society which values freedom and equality. Taylor (1994) argues that it is important to value all cultures as equal, and acknowledge their worth, helping them survive without compromising basic liberal-

political principles. Therefore, religion is not directly an essential consideration in their discussions regarding Canada's multicultural system. Any accommodation for minorities, especially, religious groups, according to both Kymlicka and Taylor, has to be within the acceptable level of the secular liberal political principles. That makes Tariq Modood's (2005) perspective on accommodating religious groups in line with ethnic and racial groups relevant to this discussion.

As Modood (2005: 131) argues, new immigration situations have presented new challenges for multicultural societies in the West. Religious groups and their role in these societies have been the focus of debates. According to Modood, many multiculturalists in the West firmly separate politics from religion, and this position poses a challenge, especially, in regard to the relationship between ethnicity and citizenship. Modood suggests that complete separation of politics from religion hinders the development of a balanced multicultural system, because it negates the important role of religious groups in any society. Modood believes that the multicultural system should not privilege any particular group, but rather should recognize diversity in the racial, ethnic or religious identities of minority groups (Modood, 2007 cited in Meer and Modood, 2009: 490).

As Modood (2005:141) suggests, a multicultural state should not be a radically secular state; instead, it should give religious communities the opportunity to play a central role in the political life of their respective societies. Moreover, Modood (2005:141) argues that, the plural state provides a good model for a balanced multicultural state that does not exclude religious communities from participating in the political life of the state. Therefore, Modood (1996b: 178-179, cited in Modood, 2005: 141) recommends carefully examining issues related to multiculturalism and including religious groups in the political debates.

In addition, according to Modood (2005: 161-165), to ensure neutrality of the multicultural system, there should be religious equality within the political system. Also, as Modood (2005:163) argues, religious convictions should be treated with the same respect that is accorded other categories such as gender and race. The legal system should not practice discrimination in any form, "for example, a person who is trying to dress in accordance with their religion or who projects a religious identity (such as a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, a hijab (2005:162). In short, Muslims should be accepted as a genuine group with a common belief system (as distinct from their ethnic identities as, for example, Asians), whose presence has to be recognized and reflected in all parts of the society (Modood, 2005: 165).

As Meer and Modood (2009: 479) analyse the experience of Britain's Muslims with that country's multicultural system, they indicate that while ethnic and racial minorities in Britain have been recognized and are granted government support to overcome social barriers and legal protection from any form of discriminations, Muslims in Britain (Meer and Modood, 483) were denied similar political and legal rights for a long time. According to Meer and Modood (2009:483), opponents claimed that Muslims include people of many nations and colours, who speak different languages and whose only common denominator is religion and religious culture. Nevertheless, there are some other minority groups similar to Muslims who are included in the race relations legislations. For example, even though the Jewish minorities in Britain come from different backgrounds and countries, they are granted full social and political protections in accordance with the race relations legislations. This example illustrates the biased nature of Britain's multicultural system as it relates to its Muslim population.

In addition, those who oppose including Muslims in Britain's race relations legislation have argued that Muslims' request for equality is culturally unreasonable or theologically unattainable (Modood, 2006:34). This viewpoint toward Muslims can be understood when we realize that the multicultural system in Britain is dominated by a secular bias that favours ethnicity and presents religion as problematic. The main purpose was to isolate many religionists, especially Muslims, from discussions related to multiculturalism (Modood, 2007c cited in Meer and Modood, 2009: 490).

While the above analyses are directly related to Britain's multicultural system they are also relevant to other Western multicultural societies, including Canada. In the Canadian context, according to Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley (2010) religion represents a challenge because it is often avoided and not dealt with directly. These researchers believe that while the Canadian Multiculturalism Act mandates that the multiculturalism programs address religion among other issues, in reality little attention is given to religion and religious communities in Canada, especially Islam. According to Ibrahim & Jahevich (2004) "while other religious minorities have been addressed under the categories of race or ethnicity, due to the heterogeneous Muslim population, ethnic, race or linguistic categories are not adequate to address the religious needs of Muslims" (cited in Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley, and 2010:12). As a result, there are often tensions between preserving Muslims' religious identity and government policy regarding minority concerns (Biles, Ibrahim & Tolley, 2010). According to Taylor (1994), critics of Canada's multicultural policy argue that the policy,



which claims to be neutral, is flawed and uneven. Furthermore, Franklin & Brummelen (2006) argue that the multicultural system in Canada is based on secular/liberal theory that often does not accommodate the needs of religious minorities. This policy often subjects Muslim institutions in particular to scrutiny and challenges (Azmi, 2001; Zine, 2007).

According to Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thompson (2009) race, rather than religion, has been the main factor in shaping Canada's multicultural system since 1970. The initial early immigration to Canada was dominated by people from Europe, but then, non-European immigrants started arriving. These immigrants faced racial discrimination, and in response, the government created the term "visible minorities" (1984). Though discrimination based on religion is prohibited by Canada's human rights framework, this prejudice was not raised as a special concern during this early period. There were few studies available that examined social discrimination based on religion. Canada's black population have historically faced the greatest problems of discrimination in education and employment, though most African Canadians are Christians. As such, among minority groups today, blacks are the focus for most public discussion of social problems such as low school completion rates and high rates of youth crime (James, 1998). By contrast, although non-Christian visible minorities such as South Asian and Chinese also show disadvantages and indications of social distress, it is significantly less. Although all visible minorities report experiences of discrimination, including employment, the proportion is higher among blacks than among any other visible minority groups (Reitz, 2007, Reitz, Breton, Dion, & Dion, 2009, cited in Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thompson, 2009).

As in many other Western countries, Canadian society has been debating the significance of minority religion as a threat to social cohesion (Baramadat & Seljak, 2005, Seljak, 2007 cited in Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thompson, 2009). Internationally, terrorism and al Qaeda's attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 intensified the nature of this debate, as it related to Muslims. Although Canadians feel that they are less likely to face terrorism, there has been a significant and growing Canadian debate about whether certain religious minority values, beliefs or practices can integrate with Canadian attitudes towards gender equality or secularism in public institutions (Abu-laban, 1995; Modood, 2003; Ramadan 2007; Soysal 1997 cited in Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thopson, 2009). Model & Lin (2002) compared population and employment outcomes among non-Christian minorities in Canada and Britain, using census and survey data. They conclude that although minorities in Canada have higher socio-economic status (based on immigration selection),

there are inconsistent cross-national differences. In both countries, Muslims and Sikhs experience greater disadvantages compared to Hindus and Buddhists (see also Peach 2006 cited in Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thopson, 2009).

To move forward, Modood (2007c in Meer & Modood, 2009) proposes considering multiculturalism as a civic idea that can be integrated into an inclusive national identity. He suggests promoting strong citizenship identity that fosters commonality and strengthens national identities, while preserving differences in various aspects: "...it does not make sense to encourage strong multicultural or minority identities and weak common or national identities; strong multicultural identities are a good thing -- they are not intrinsically divisive, reactionary or subversive-- but they need the complement of a framework of vibrant, dynamic, national narratives and the ceremonies and rituals which give expression to a national identity" ( Modood, 2007c in Meer & Modood, 2009:489).

Modood's perspective in bringing religion to the multicultural discussion side by side with ethnicity and race, and considering multiculturalism as a civic idea that can be integrated into an inclusive national identity, may help Western societies become more reflective of the needs of different groups including religious groups. It may also contribute to influencing decisions that relate to employment and government services, equality, and preserving religious identity. Modood's perspective on developing a common national citizenship may create a strong sense of national identity that respects differences in religion in line with ethnicity and race.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter examines Islamic education in a multicultural society, focusing on the challenges and opportunities in the Canadian context. The following areas emerged as major factors: An Islamic education aims at integrating religious and secular educational systems, preparing students to lead a positive and good life as adults in the world around them, as well as achieving rewards in the hereafter, and preserving their Muslim heritage. The study further establishes that the spread of education in Arabia was due to the spread of Islam, whose followers were encouraged to seek knowledge. The Qur'an and the tradition of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) are the core frameworks on which the Islamic thought and philosophy of education are built. The concept of Islamic education is based on ta'lim, which means to know or to learn, tarbiyah, which comes from the root word Raba, meaning to increase, to grow, or to nourish, and ta'dib, which comes from the root of ad-daba, which means to be cultured, well mannered, or disciplined. The concept of separation be-

tween religious and secular education is new in the philosophy of education in Islam. The Islamic philosophy promotes integration, which aims at producing a well-rounded person who is not only faithful to God, but also equipped with a modern education for success in everyday life.

The chapter also establishes that some scholars argue that religious education is not a real education at all, but an indoctrination which does not give students the opportunity to think critically or to challenge opposing views and ideas independently. The view of many liberal educators is that most faith-based schools are indoctrinatory (McKinney, 2006 cited in Zine, 2007). They argue that faith-based teaching does not support critical thinking and ignores the growth in rational autonomy among children. Therefore, the aims of faith-based education are contrary to the aims of a secular educational system (McKinney, 2006 cited in Zine, 2007).

Canadian multicultural policies and education aim at providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary to promote human rights, social justice, equality, harmony, and tolerance. Because of the relatively harmonious relationship between diverse minority groups and the Canadian society at large, Canada is viewed positively by many citizens of the world (Adams, 2007:13). Canada's experience with multiculturalism has been relatively positive compared to other Western countries. However, Canada faces challenges in implementing multiculturalism. As new immigrant groups, including Muslims, continue to arrive, prejudices and discriminations arise from time to time in all levels of the society. The literature review suggests that although, Islamic educational institutions benefit from the multicultural system in Canada, they also face unique challenges that stem from the tensions between the sometimes-opposing Islamic and liberal multicultural educational systems. The research questions which emerged from the literature review are outlined in Chapter 4.

In essence, the literature review suggests the need for a greater investigation into the nature of providing Islamic education in the context of Canada's multicultural system. My intention is to explore this topic through a case study of the BCMS. In the next chapter, I will set out the methodological approach that I adopted to try and accomplish that task. This approach will be a qualitative methodological approach involving interviews, documentary analysis and grounded theory.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the characteristics of qualitative research methodology. It will focus on grounded theory, the rationale and philosophical background of the grounded theory approach and why it is appropriate for this study. This chapter also focuses on strategies for validation and reliability of data using the grounded theory research method. It also addresses the issue of population and sampling, the site of the study, data collection procedures, anticipated ethical considerations, data analysis, and the role of the researcher, including assumptions and value freedom questions.

## 3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

The study will take a qualitative approach that will involve interviews and documentary analysis using a grounded theory method. It may be useful to begin with the definition of qualitative research methodology. According to Denzin & Lincoln:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005:3).

Qualitative research involves the use of data such as documents, interviews, and participant observations to understand and explain a social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative researchers come from a broad range of disciplines and fields, and use a variety of approaches and techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Qualitative research methods are designed in such a way as to support researchers in understanding meanings by capturing and analyzing people's feelings and values within the social cultural context in which they live (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Qualitative research is conducted when it becomes necessary to explore a problem or an issue related to a group or population instead of relying on existing conceptual research findings from other studies (Creswell, 2007:40). It is also used when an issue requires a

complex and detailed understanding, and the only way to develop a better understanding of a complex issue is through direct conversations with people in different settings, including homes, workplaces, and schools, and giving them the opportunity to tell their stories (Creswell, 2007:40). This methodology is used when we want to understand the settings or contexts where participants in a specific study talk about an issue or a problem (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative research method fits well with the purpose of this study, because I intend to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of Islamic education in a multicultural society as found at the British Columbia Muslim School in Richmond, B.C. The following section will discuss the theoretical background of grounded theory.

### **3.2.1 Theoretical background of grounded theory**

This research study will use an approach that draws on key principles associated with grounded theorising that is inductively based on the data collected from the participants. Grounded theory (GT) is a research method widely used by social science researchers (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). It helps to formulate a theory that explains a specific subject or topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Traditional qualitative research methods depend on a literature review that leads to the development of a hypothesis (Allen, 2003). This hypothesis is then tested in real life situations. However, GT analyses the data and investigates the specific topic under study based on that analysis without a defined hypothesis (Allen, 2003). While the analysis of data collected through interviews leads to an interpretive approach in qualitative research, in GT it leads to the formation of a theory to explain the phenomenon under study (Allen, 2003). Strauss & Corbin define grounded theory as:

One that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection, and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (1990:23).

According to this definition, grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures in developing an inductively-derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:24). The research findings in this process form a theoretical formulation of the topic that is studied, instead of a set of numbers or a group of loosely related themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:24). The concepts and relationships between such concepts are not only formulated, but also provisionally tested (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990:24). In light of the above discussion, it could be argued that the purpose of the grounded theory is to go beyond describing the process or the phenomenon under investigation, and instead aims to generate and develop a new theory that explains the process or phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Some researchers suggest that grounded theory should focus on induction (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Induction gives researchers the opportunity to generalize from several cases and observations, whereas deduction means that empirical research can be used only to test theories (Borgatti, 2008; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The inductive approach also means starting the research study with extensive observations of the topic then moving on to abstract generalizations and ideas (Neuman, 1994:41). At the beginning of a research study the researcher may have only a specific topic and some general concepts, however, as the study develops further, he may be able to narrow the scope of the concepts, develop empirical generalizations and specify preliminary relationships, and finally formulate the theory from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Neuman, 1994). The following section will discuss some weaknesses and strengths of GT.

### **3.2.2 Weaknesses and strengths of GT**

Grounded theory comes with both limitations and advantages. As for the limitations, the researcher is required to begin his research study with an open mind, putting aside any pre-existing theoretical frameworks related to the topic until the final stages of the study to allow the analytic and substantive theory to emerge (Creswell, 2008:68). Many social researchers recognize that it is not easy to ignore conceptual studies because theory-neutral observation is rarely accepted today. These researchers prefer to build upon the studies of other scholars when conducting their own studies (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009: 256-257). It is important to mention that it is not realistic to expect researchers to completely put aside pre-existing literature and the research of other scholars while using GT, and wait for a theory to emerge entirely from the data (Allan, 2003). In fact, the original position of Glaser & Strauss (1967) was to encourage researchers to use pre-existing materials and writings with an open mind while undertaking their own GT-based research studies (Allan, 2003). Also, Glaser (2002) considered the literature review as data that play a major role in generating GT (Shannak & Aldmour 2009:26). Furthermore, Straus & Corbin (1990) view “the use of literature as a basis of professional knowledge and refer to it as literature sensitivity” (Allen, 2003). In such a context, researchers should start their investigation with an initial literature review before beginning the fieldwork (Shannak & Aldmour, 2009). Then

they should begin conducting interviews with a general direction, but not a specific idea. As they complete each stage, researchers should go back to the literature review (Shannak & Aldmour, 2009). However, any literature review at the initial stage should not lead to any hypotheses of sufficient interest (Allen, 2003).

Another challenge with GT is the complexity of deciding when categories are saturated, and it can be concluded that there are enough data to help the theory to emerge (Creswell, 2007). Glaser (1978) for example, considers saturation as a key indicator to stop analysis, but it is not easy for researchers to recognize when it is time to stop analysing and develop their theory (Allen, 2003). One approach is to use a discrimination sampling, where extra information is collected from participants similar to those initially interviewed to test if the theory stands true for these new samples (Creswell, 2007). GT also presents a challenge for researchers in that it relies mainly on interviews as a data collection method. Transcribing recorded interviews is time consuming. This makes it difficult for researchers, especially those with tight deadlines, to undertake a comprehensive grounded theory analysis with its constant interplay of data collection and conceptualization (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009: 256-257).

Despite these challenges, GT is today probably the most influential method for undertaking qualitative analysis (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009: 256-257). The main processes of grounded theory — coding, memos and the development of theoretical ideas from the data— have been very influential (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). Software programs have been developed with grounded theory in mind, thus improving the process (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). Another advantage of GT is that it presents a single, unified and systematic method of data analysis such as open coding, selective coding, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). Such a method provides tools for analysis, which makes it easier for researchers to follow specific steps in developing concepts, categories, and hypotheses, and allowing a theory to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, analysis starts as soon as data collection begins in the first interview, especially if the researcher identifies concepts that require further follow-up (Glaser, 2002). It is important to understand, however, that it is not sufficient simply to review data and label relevant points (Allen, 2003). Instead, the data have to be analysed systematically and carefully to discover the concepts leading to the categories, as this is an interactive process requiring time, patience and analytic skills (Allen, 2003). The following section will focus on the justifications for using GT in this research study.

### **3.2.3 Why the grounded theory (GT) methodology is appropriate for this research study**

When I started my initial investigation for this research study, I found few scholarly research studies about Islamic education in the context of multicultural societies in general, and fewer were related to the Canadian context. This lack of a theoretical foundation (literature) for understanding the challenges and opportunities in providing Islamic education in a multicultural society such as that found at the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS) led me to apply an approach which draws strongly on key principles associated with GT to my research since it is a field that has not been clearly defined and studied.

The nature of providing Islamic education in a multicultural society as found at the BCMS is a topic about which little is known, yet which deserves further study and formulation of a theory that explains the phenomenon. As Elmasry states, “Canadian Muslims are still among the least-studied minorities in Canada and a change is long overdue” (2005: 8).

My hope is that the theory that will emerge at the end of this research will explain how participants experience Islamic education at the BCMS in the context of the Canadian multicultural policy and practice. It will also enable me to determine the viewpoints of participants with regard to the research literature review as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. For example, is Islamic education compatible with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice? In the case of the BCMS, what are the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education in Canada? How is this school balancing the provision of a religion-based educational system while complying with the requirements of Canadian multicultural policy? Grounded theory in this context provides the flexibility to develop a theory that explains the phenomenon in a rigorous manner (Grotty, 1996:4).

Grounded theory is suitable when there is either no theory available to explain a process, or where models are available in the literature, but were developed for different samples and populations and are therefore not applicable to the researcher’s area of interest (Creswell, 2007:66). Therefore a theory is needed to explain how people experience a phenomenon. The theory developed from the collected data will provide a general framework for a research study (Creswell, 2007:66).

GT presents a systematic process of data analysis such as open coding, selective coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). This process presents tools for data analysis that make it easier for researchers to follow specific steps to develop concepts, categories, hypotheses, and theory (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, the GT approach gives a



great deal of flexibility in the process of sampling selection and data analysis for exploring new topics and ideas that influence the topic under study (Shannak & Aldmour, 2009:26). I followed the above sample selection process and data analysis method using GT, including systematic procedures for selecting the sample, continued data analysis, and comparison process which has helped me make constant modifications as the process of interviewing and re-interviewing continued during the course of conducting this study.

In addition, I started my investigation without any representative samples and without developing any specific hypotheses. I also avoided using structured or semi-structured interviews at the beginning of this study because there were no possible specific themes, so I could not ask or design questions, or formulate hypotheses. For example, in the first stage, I began my interviews with general questions as I had only general concepts. However, after the first stage of my research and as interviewees gave detailed explanations of the topic under study, I was able to narrow the scope of my questions and design semi-structured interviews. This method allowed me to follow up on ideas, ask for explanations, steer the conversation to focus on the topic, and fill any information gaps. I also encouraged interviewees to give their opinions freely and openly regarding how they perceived Islamic education at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural system. Following this stage, categories and hypotheses emerged from the data that were collected from interviews conducted and documents analysed.

GT helps the researcher to theorize his research study because it offers a process for developing theoretical propositions from the data, which increase the researcher's confidence and ability in the area of theorizing (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather than studying topics that have already been studied, this process allows researchers to generate data for relevant topics (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT also allows researchers to start the research study without any specific concepts to be examined, especially when there is a lack of adequate literature related to the topic of interest (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, another reason why grounded theory proved best for this study is that in conducting in-depth interviews, semi-structured questions generate the detailed responses that are important for the clarification and deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2007). Intensive interviewing fits well with grounded theory as it allows for verification and clarification of data, ideas, and views (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). In the context of the BCMS, besides in-depth interviews, analysing documents such as curricular guidelines,

textbooks, and policies helped me to compare, contrast, and check and re-check data that might contradict each other. This process optimized the validity and reliability of this particular research study. The process of getting as close as possible to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the school board through intensive, individual interviews, helped me generate a theory that explains the nature of providing Islamic education in British Columbia in the context of Canada's multicultural policy and practice.

### **3.2.4 Importance of reliability and validity in conducting a research study using grounded theory**

Reliability and validity are very important in any research study. Reliability addresses the accuracy of the research methods used for any particular topic in generating data (Canon, 2010). Utilizing triangulation where researchers use different methods and sources on any specific issue increases reliability of the interpretation of data (Canon, 2010). In conducting interviews for example, the researcher should address this question: "How certain are you that any person using the same interview script will not sway the answers of the interviewees?" (Canon, 2010: 4). That means that if another researcher uses the same interview transcript for analysis, he or she may reach the same conclusions as the researcher who collected and analysed the interview script. Validity, on the other hand, addresses whether the research explains or measures what it indicates will be measured or explained. It focuses on the appropriateness of a method to the findings arising from the application of the method (Canon, 2010). It addresses "How well matched is the logic of the method to the kinds of research questions you are intending to develop?" (Mason, 1996:14, cited in Canon, 2010: 5). To validate the researcher's analysis of the data, I should trace the methods followed to arrive at any specific interpretation (Canon, 2010). This includes constant justification of your interpretation and internal evaluation of your reasons for interpretation in a particular way (Canon, 2010). According to Canon (2010), another way of increasing the validity of the research findings arising from application of a method is respondent validation, where transcripts are shared with the interviewees to check for the researcher's accuracy in reporting their perspective. Using a grounded theory approach may minimize any threats to validity and reliability because the researcher will have several opportunities to compare and contrast the collected data (Hutchinson, 1988:125). As Bell, Bryan & Teevan remark:

Constant comparison is a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualization, so that the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators is not lost. More specifically, attention to the procedure

of constant comparison enjoins the researcher to continually compare phenomena being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can emerge (2009:253)

Hutchinson (1988) points out that constantly comparing and contrasting data provides a check on validity, and allows the discovery of distortions or inaccurate representation of the data. In addition, conducting in-depth interviews and document analysis allows the researcher to verify and clarify the information collected, and to make any corrections or changes necessary to represent the data as perceived by the interviewees, to develop a good understanding of the phenomenon under study, and to consider the lived experience of participants (Hutchinson, 1988:125). In this study I accomplished this through the process of triangulation, using multiple sources and methods to provide corroborating evidence to shed some light on a perspective (Creswell, 2007:208). Another method that I used to optimize validity was to clarify my value-freedom questions which limit researcher biases from the outset (Creswell, 2007). The term value-freedom is defined in Appendix D, Glossary. More details will be given when I discuss the role of the researcher later in this chapter. This clarification process alerts the reader to the researcher's value-freedom questions and prejudices that will affect the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2007:208). I also used reflexive reading of the study as indicated by Mason (2002). Doing so located me as part of the data which I had generated, and helped me to explore my role and perspective in the process of generating and interpreting data. I would therefore seek a reading of data which captures those relationships (Mason, 2002:149). In short, the data collected from the interviewees were read and re-read, and compared and contrasted several times to enhance the validity and reliability of this research study. As Borgatti remarks, "The basic idea of grounded theory approach is to read (and re-read) a textual database (such as corpus of field notes) and discover categories, concepts and properties and their interrelationship" (2008:2).

Conducting in-depth interviews as well as analysing documents maximised the amount of information available to me, which, as a result, may have minimised the potential risk of researcher freedom-value for this specific study. The concept of reflexivity and its relevance to this study will be discussed later

### **3.2.5 Population and sampling of the study**

The population of this study are teachers, an administrator, and a member of the governing body, students and parents for a total of 12 individual participants. The specific number

was selected to represent the views and experiences of participants in relation to the challenges and opportunities in providing the Islamic education as found at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural society. Since theoretical sampling focuses only on conceptual and theoretical development and is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generality of the results of any specific study (Charmaz, 2006) I felt that the number of interviewees was adequate to give insight into different viewpoints in relation to the topic, and at the end to lead to the formation of a theory that explains the nature of providing Islamic education such as that provided by the BCMS in a multicultural society. I interviewed some of the interviewees more than once, for a total of 22 interviews. The participants interviewed more than once consisted of the principal, two Islamic education teachers, three parents and three students. Students were interviewed at a later time after leaving BCMS (in the presence of their parents) when they were in Grade 8 in the public school. The main purpose for these follow-up interviews was to explore students' experiences in the public school regarding integration and isolation compared to when they were attending at BCMS, especially preserving religious identity such as wearing hijab (headscarf) for girls, performing prayer at public schools (for both sexes), consuming halal food and male-female relationships.

For the purpose of collecting data for this research study, relevant participants were contacted and their agreement to participate in the study obtained. My criterion for students was that they have attended the BCMS for at least three years. I believed that both parents and students selected for this study would be able to give perspectives on the nature of Islamic education at the BCMS. I sent requests for interviews to parents and students through the principal, and then selected the specific interviewees randomly from the qualified potential subjects. Then I submitted an approval application to the Durham University ethics approval committee. The application included the topic of the study, its purpose, a brief summary, and the participants' consent form. The consent form included the freedom to participate in the study or to decline such participation. The application further stated that identities of the participants and any information they provide will be confidential.

Developing sound sampling decisions play a major role in the success of any research study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:72). In the grounded theory method, sampling cannot be decided during the early stages of the research study (Dey, 1993:4-5). Rather, it is informed by the data collection process, as sampling decisions must be theoretically informed, and therefore await the formation of guided theory (Dey, 1993:4-5). After some theoretical

ideas emerge, the researcher will be able to decide what further data may be collected, and to elaborate on such ideas (Dey, 1993:4-5).

In terms of a study using grounded theory a researcher chooses participants who possess insight, experiences, and information related to the phenomena under study (Strauss & Corbin). Such participants can contribute to the development of the theory (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). That is why the most knowledgeable participants are targeted for theoretical sampling, a process that can increase the quality of the data collected in interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling directs the researcher to follow proper leads to obtain data that will allow him to explicate categories that reflect on qualities of respondents' experiences and provide a useful analytic handle for understanding them (Charmaz, 2006: 100). Theoretical sampling should be flexible and adaptive to the development of a theory (Dey, 1993). The data collection process should also be adaptable to new ideas that may emerge from the research at a later time (Dey, 1993). It is important to mention that theoretical sampling focuses only on conceptual and theoretical development and is not about representing a population, or increasing the statistical generality of the results of any specific study (Charmaz, 2006:101). Participants should be in a position to contribute to building the opening and axial coding of developing the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, I based my sampling selection for this study on participants' insight, knowledge, and experiences of the topic under study. I also selected the BCMS as a site of this study as will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

The issue now is to define a sound sample size for a study using grounded theory methodology. Some studies used different sample sizes that served the aim of their specific research. For example, Charmaz (1997) used several grounded-theory steps in her study with a sample of 20 chronically sick men. Gehrke (1981) studied patterns of teacher interaction with the potential reference groups in the school. He interviewed 11 beginning high school teachers over a period of five years (Hutchinson, 1988). The process of collecting sufficient information to fully develop the model of grounded theory research may involve 20 to 60 interviews (Creswell, 2006:66-67). In fact, as Strauss & Corbin suggest, "Sampling continues until all categories are well developed in terms of properties and dimensions" (1990: 215). This is what researchers call "theoretical saturation," that is, reaching a stage where there is no point in reviewing old data or collecting new data to check how it fits with concepts or categories; new data is no longer needed (Bell, Bryman & Teevan, 2009:252). However, saturation is not easy to determine (Allen, 2003).

### **3.2.6 British Columbia Muslim School: site of this study, historical background, funding and aims**

I selected the BCMS for the reason specified below. The British Columbia Muslim Association founded the school in 1983 (School Parents' Handbook, 2005). Originally established as a private co-educational Muslim elementary school, it has grown to be one of the most highly-regarded Muslim schools in North America (School Parents' Handbook, 2005). It is an independent school, serving about 300 students from Kindergarten through Grade 7 in the school year 2007-2008. As the oldest and the best-regarded Muslim school in British Columbia it is ideal in allowing me to explore the insights and viewpoints of participants regarding the opportunities and challenges in implementing Islamic education in a multicultural society in British Columbia.

The British Columbia Muslim Association founded the school in 1983 in Richmond, British Columbia to fulfil the educational, religious, and cultural needs of the Muslim children in British Columbia (School Parents' Handbook, 2005: 4). Originally established as a private co-educational Muslim elementary school, it has grown to be one of the most highly-regarded Muslim schools in North America (School Parents' Handbook, 2005). It is an independent school serving 300 students from Kindergarten through Grade 7 (from 6 years old to 13 years old). In the school year 2007-2008, there were 15 academic teachers (teaching the government curriculum) and four religious teachers. The work of the British Columbia Muslim Association in establishing the BCMS is essential because it illustrates how committed this organization is to Islamic education, establishing the first Muslim school in Western Canada, becoming a major catalyst for other schools in British Columbia. The BCMS plays an important role in providing students with the opportunity to fill the gap between a Muslim lifestyle and the secular world of the public schools in providing an environment that is free of racial and religious discrimination. According to the Parents' Handbook (2005:4) the mission statement and objectives of the school can be summarized as follows:

- To provide the basics of Islam for students.
- To prepare students to adopt Islam as a way of life.
- To help students become contributing members of the Muslim community in particular and Canadian society in general.
- To help students develop good Islamic qualities and manners.

- To provide students with a solid Islamic education program that helps them to develop balanced and progressive minds.

In addition, the BCMS encourages and helps students prepare for post-secondary education, fosters good etiquette based on Islamic principles, strives for the complete integration of the curriculum, and provides a solid Islamic studies program that nurtures balanced and progressive mind (Parents' Handbook, 2005:4).

Students at BCMS are all Muslims; however, they come from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, representing approximately twenty different nationalities and at least thirty linguistic groups.

Through formal classroom instruction, regular homework, meaningful assignments, complemented by a solid Islamic Studies program, the BC Muslim School offers a unique environment. It is the school's aim to produce Muslims of character who are able to excel academically, physically, and spiritually. The BC Muslim school fulfils all the requirements of the BC Ministry of Education. Daily school life at the BCMS includes Islamic Studies, Arabic as a second language and salaah (prayer) at the masjid (mosque), not to mention participation in various Islamic competitions and other extra-curricular activities. Approximately 85% of the instructional time is devoted to the government's curriculum, where the other 15% is devoted to a locally developed Islamic Studies and Qur'an program. For example, students get 40 minutes of instruction per day for Arabic. They also get 40 minutes of instruction per day for Qur'an lessons and Islamic studies. The Arabic language is taught in the school as a second language recognized by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia, instead of French which is the second official language in Canada's English speaking provinces. In addition, they get the opportunity to perform the noon prayer at the Richmond masjid (mosque) which is the oldest and biggest mosque in British Columbia. Moreover, the school offers the regular academic program prescribed for schools in British Columbia by the Ministry of Education in BC.

The school is accredited and partially funded by the Government of British Columbia as an independent school. In addition, the school relies for financial support on tuition fees, fundraisings, and donations. Independent schools in British Columbia are regulated by the Independent Schools Act (ISA) (Ministry of Education, 2011). The ISA balances an independent school's autonomy with provincial academic standards. Provincial requirements establish a framework within which independent schools have freedom to operate (Ministry of Education, 2011).

In terms of funding the school depends on tuition fees collected from parents. It also depends on fund-raising and public donations from well wishers within the wider Muslim community in British Columbia. In addition, independent schools like BCMS receive 50% of the funds granted to public (government) schools. To qualify for grants, these schools must employ B.C.-certified teachers, have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of the B.C. curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, maintain adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Provincial requirements establish a framework within which independent schools have freedom to operate. For example, independent schools have freedom to address the curriculum from their own religious, cultural, philosophical, or pedagogical perspectives, but all independent schools are bound by section 1 of the Schedule of the ISA, subsection 1(a) which reads:

“Before issuing or renewing a certificate to an authority the inspector must be satisfied that

(a) no program is in existence or proposed at the independent school that would, in theory or in practice, promote or foster doctrines of:

- (i) racial or ethnic superiority or persecution
- (ii) religious intolerance or persecution
- (iii) social change through violent action, or
- (iv) sedition” (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The Islamic education program as found in British Columbia Muslim School is not integrated with the wider academic curriculum as recommended by the theory of Islamic education discussed in the literature review chapter of this study. Rather, it has a separate curriculum that focuses on a range of religious issues related to the belief and practical aspects of Islam, and many topics related to Islamic manners. This presents a challenge for the school as it affects teaching of the government-required academic curriculum in the school. That is because it creates a tension in some cases involving sensitive topics such as evolution in science, sex education, family structure, as well as how Islam is presented in the social studies curriculum. In such cases, the school attempts to find a balance between covering the required curriculum and preserving the Islamic perspective. Islamic Studies teachers and academic teachers coordinate with one another in finding such a balance. It



is a challenge that the BCMS, like many other Muslim schools, has been facing in integrating Islam with academic subjects in the absence of a practical guide to integrating the theory of Islamic education with secular education.

### **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

In-depth interviews and documentary analysis were used to conduct this research study. These interviews offered a deep understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Policy document reviews and analysis of Islamic education curriculum, textbooks and school policy handbooks giving a detailed understanding of the Islamic education program at the BCMS provide a clear picture of the program for the readers of this research study.

#### **3.3.1 Interviews**

Before conducting any interviews I sent an official letter outlining the purpose of the research and my intention to interview selected participants to the chairman of the school's governing body. After obtaining written permission to conduct interviews, I then contacted the principal of the school to facilitate the process. The principal sent consent forms to parents of Grades 6 and 7 students. After parents returned the signed consent forms I requested that the principal make arrangements for the interviews. Each interview took between thirty minutes and an hour. I interviewed teachers, students, the administrator and the member of the governing body in the school. Parents were interviewed at locations of their choice. I interviewed four students in Grades 6 and 7. Each of the students had been attending the BCMS for at least three years. These four students consisted of two students from Grade 6 (one male and one female) as well as two students from Grade 7 (one male and one female). Students in Grades 6 and 7 were considered to be more mature, and therefore able to offer insight during the in-depth interview process. Two boys and two girls were selected to collect the viewpoints of both genders. Three male parents who had been involved with the schools for at least three years were interviewed for this study, because it was easier for the researcher to make arrangements with these fathers. The interviews included two Islamic and one non-Muslim educators, the most senior teachers at the school. A member of the administration was selected to give his viewpoints from the administrative perspectives. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form consistent with the rules and regulations of the Graduate School of Durham University for conducting empirical research and interviewing participants.

In this study the data collected through in-depth interviews helped capture participants' viewpoints as they perceived Islamic education's compatibility within the context of Canadian multicultural policy and practice. For example, what are the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education in Canada? How are Islamic schools balancing conformity to Canadian multiculturalism while preserving the identities and values of Muslim children? All interviews were conducted in English, and tape-recorded.

In order to increase the validity and reliability of the study, school documents, policies and curricular guidelines for the Islamic program were reviewed and analysed. In-depth interviews of this nature should be considered a form of conversation with a specific goal to help uncover the participant's views, and respects how the participant frames and structures the answers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:108).

In conducting GT studies, data collection is usually, but not exclusively, by interviews (Allen 2003). Interviews reflect on the information given to a researcher about issues relevant to his specific research study (Perakyla, 2005: 869). Qualitative research methods often use interviews which may reveal some aspects about the topic of study that would be otherwise unknown, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes (Bell, Bryman & Teevan, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Perakyla, 2005). Furthermore, interviewing is a very convenient method of data collection as it helps the researcher to overcome challenges such as distance and time, where past experiences and events can be studied through interviews with people who witnessed or experienced events (Perakyla, 2005:869).

The conversational nature of interviews helps in explaining a specific topic in depth (Charmaz, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Participants share their own interpretation of their experiences with the interviewer (Charmaz, 2006). That is the case especially when the participants have in-depth experiences about which the interviewer is interested in the details (Charmaz, 2006). The interviewer can ask questions about experiences that are not often shared in normal day-to-day situations (Charmaz, 2006). In such interviews, the interviewer's role is to be a good listener, to encourage the participants to respond to, and reflect on, their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). The interview method fits grounded theory research because it helps the researcher to prepare a few broad, open-ended questions that encourage intensive discussion and help uncover unexpected statements and stories (Charmaz, 2006). The combination of effective questions and interview technique determines how well the researcher balances open-ended questions and answers with focused, significant statements (Charmaz, 2006: 28). Furthermore, the interview method allows the

researcher to follow up on ideas, ask for explanations, steer the conversation to focus on the topic, and investigate motives and feelings (Robin & Robin, 1995). It also enables the researcher to clarify any confusion, fill information gaps, and encourage hesitant participants to offer more information (Robin & Robin, 1995).

The process of conducting an interview reflects on what both the interviewer and the interviewee bring to the conversation, including impressions and perceptions during the interview and the relationship formed through it (Charmaz, 2006: 28). It is helpful to be aware of the participant's perceptions towards the researcher, and how the past identities of participants and researchers may influence the character and content of the interaction. Both the past, and the present experiences inform participants' implicit questions, negotiations, and discussion throughout the process. Research participants evaluate the interviewer, assess the situation, and reflect on their present assessments and prior knowledge. Interviewers learn how deep to go and when to seek further explanations as they become sensitive to their participants' concerns (Charmaz, 2006).

Naturally, there will be differences between the researcher and participants in some aspects such as race, gender, age and ideologies, and such differences may have some impact on the interview. Therefore, the researcher should be flexible (Charmaz, 2006:28).

The researcher begins his study with an observation of a topic and as he starts analyzing data, goes back to the participants with more focused questions (Charmaz, 2006). Intensive interviews fit grounded theory methods very well because as Charmaz (2006) remarks, "both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches" (p.28).

The interview method provides researchers with the opportunity to generate data and to analyse them (Charmaz, 2006:28). It further helps researchers to follow leads and to enable participants to give their viewpoints freely and openly (Charmaz, 2006). For GT, data collected through the means of interviews can create greater reliability than data collected by other methods (Allen, 2003) because in a face-to-face situation an interviewer can tell whether the respondent is the appropriate person to answer specific questions (Allen, 2003). Also, the analysis of data collected through interviews leads to an interpretive approach in qualitative research, while in GT it leads to the formation of a theory to explain the phenomenon under study (Allen, 2003).

### 3.3.2 Document collections and analysis

In this method, I collected and analysed various kinds of documents, including policy documents, curricular guidelines, textbooks, brochures, reports, and information from the school's website. In the context of my study, I tried to ensure the authenticity of the documents by conducting a comprehensive comparison of the three Islamic studies' textbooks used at the BCMS, the mission statement, and the relevant policy documents. Also, my in-depth knowledge and experience of the subject under study enabled me to appropriately interpret views, ideas, assumptions, and local meanings hidden in such documents as will be outlined in the following section of the role of the researcher. Following the suggestions of Aranson (1994) and Braun and Clarke (2006) on document analysis, I identified the main themes of the documents such as mission statement, policy, curricular materials, and textbooks. As suggested by Aranson (1994), during the process of thematic analysis for this study, I collected the data and the necessary information from all Islamic studies textbooks used at BCMS. In this stage, I read and re-read all units and lessons covered in the Islamic Studies textbooks, and then I identified relevant patterns. The intent was to understand the main focus of such units. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:21), at the end of this stage, the researcher should have a fairly clear direction of emerging themes and how such themes fit together, and the general story they present about the data. Then as suggested by Aranson (1994) I identified all data that relate to the patterns I had classified previously, and expounded on the identified patterns. All topics and lessons that fit under the specific pattern were identified and included into the corresponding pattern. According to Braun and Clarke, "It is important that by the end of this phase you can clearly define what your themes are, and what they are not. One test for this is to see whether you can describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentence. If you cannot do this, further refinement of that theme may be needed" (2006: 22).

For example, topics discussed about respecting parents, teachers, elders, non-Muslims, neighbours, truthfulness, honesty, helpfulness, avoiding inappropriate behaviours such as stealing, lying, disrespecting parents, teachers and elders were placed under the category of Islamic manners. Also, all topics discussing the five daily prayers, paying zaka (helping the needy), fasting in the month of Ramadan and performing the Hajj (pilgrimage) were placed under the category of practical aspects of Islam. In addition, all topics discussing the pillars of Iman (faith) were placed under the category of the belief system in Islam. As Braun and Clarke (2006:23) explained, my next step was to build a valid argument for choosing

the developed themes and formulating theme statements to develop a story line that stands with merit.

In general, themes are defined as “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folks sayings and proverbs” (Leininger, 1985:60 cited in Aronson, 1994: 1). According to Aronson (1994: 2), themes that emerge from the data collected are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience, “the coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together” (Leininger, 1985:60, cited in Aronson, 1994).

This concept document analysis aims to study and interpret various written documents, as recommended by Tepperman, Russell & Northey:

It examines and interprets original written records as data about activities and beliefs of a person or group not otherwise available to the researcher. Such documents may include speeches, books, and essays by eminent figures, parliamentary debates, pamphlets, magazines, folk tales and art (2002: 92)

While using policy documents, both artefacts and archival data could be collected and analysed (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The artefacts and data include current information about a setting or an organization such as curricular materials and communication methods within a school system, and archival data include newspapers, minutes of school boards, records of teachers’ union contract negotiations, as well as textbooks (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In addition to traditional printed documents, radio, television, video and Internet documents have improved the means of communications in modern life. In this context, documents help researchers to understand and interpret relevant topics of study. Document analysis becomes particularly important when conducting a research study involving schools where the goal is to understand the nature of curricular guidelines, textbooks, and policy documents.

While it is important to recognize the importance of documents in enhancing and supporting qualitative research in social sciences, its strengths and weaknesses should also be recognized. One of the advantages of document analysis is that it is an unobtrusive method that helps to explain the values and beliefs of participants in a setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). It is also stable and available for multiple, inexpensive revisions. Such flexibility allows researchers to review documents without depending on the cooperation of their interviewees, whose observations and responses require considerable time to transcribe (Creswell, 2003; Tepperman, Russell & Northey, 2002). Moreover, the fact that

documents are in their original language provides contextually important information related to specific topics of study. Documents may provide insight into the language and vocabulary of participants (Creswell, 2003). The researcher should ensure authenticity and completion of the documents analysed (Creswell, 2003). Documents can also be helpful in discovering information that was previously hidden, or earlier events. They can also provide an efficient summary of time, settings, and events (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

However, documents are silent, and unlike interviews, do not allow for interaction or reaction in which meaning can be reviewed and checked immediately (Hodder, 1998). Documents cannot be checked for accuracy, or analytic interpretations, and are not often open to negation (Hodder, 1998). Although documents can be reviewed, reorganized, and analysed, an examination of their original meaning and intent is a challenge “because they have been disconnected from their creation” (Hodder, 1998).

Researchers often find documents that contain insights and clues to the phenomenon under study worth the effort to locate and analyse (Creswell, 2003). To correctly analyse documents, it is necessary to possess an understanding of the subject and the references to contemporary events, persons, and writings relating to the subject (Tepperman, Russell & Norhtey; 2002:92). Without this understanding, the researcher will face a real challenge in properly analysing the content for references, nuances, unstated assumptions and local meanings that may be hidden in the document (Tepperman, Russell & Norhtey; 2002:92). Another approach to ensuring accuracy and authenticity of a document is for the researcher to examine past interpretations of such documents by other researchers, and the reasons behind their interpretations (Tepperman, Russell & Norhtey; 2002). Searching for supporting documents, including materials by the same person or group that reference the same time and place can provide assurances that the document is authentic (Tepperman, Russell & Norhtey; 2002:92). The point is that the researcher should support his interpretation with other contemporary materials affirming the same thesis, or at least expressing similar concerns (Tepperman, Russell & Norhtey, and 2002:93).

### **3.3.3 Ethical considerations**

When a research study is conducted, ethical issues emerge (Creswell, 2003). For example, the researcher should make very clear how he plans to ensure the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the research study. As Creswell remarks, “In qualitative research inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places to protect identities” (2003:60). Another important issue is to ensure that the data collected are stored in a

secure place, and kept for a reasonable period of time after the completion of the research study (Creswell, 2003). Seiber (1998), for example, recommended keeping the data in a safe and secure place for five to 10 years for further revisions if needed (cited in Creswell, 2003:60). After that period, the data should be destroyed to make sure that it will not fall into the hands of other researchers who may use these data for other reasons or projects (Creswell, 2003). Moreover, the researcher must obtain permission to conduct the research study from the relevant institution, as well as to enter the setting and participate in or observe any activities that will occur during the study, and explain in detail how the results will be used and reported (Creswell, 2003).

As the researcher for this study, I made genuine attempts to reduce any potential ethical risks associated with the interviews conducted and the documents analysed. The participants are competent individuals who willingly volunteered to be interviewed. They were given the option to drop out any time they felt uncomfortable. Each participant signed a consent form. All interviews were tape recorded, and data were transcribed to a computer by the researcher. The transcripts are protected by passwords. Audiotapes are protected and locked in a very secure place until the research study is completed. The transcripts from the interviews and the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the five year period recommended by Seiber (1988) as cited in Creswell, 2006, to ensure confidentiality of information collected from the interviewees and their identities. To further ensure confidentiality the actual names of the interviewees were concealed by assigning each of them a relevant role corresponding to their specific individual names. Details that would identify members of the BCMS's governing body and administration were also concealed to ensure their anonymity.

In reality, the analyst and research participants come with their own biases, perceptions and viewpoints to their research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I made every effort to minimize any risk of potential bias in my research. As a long time teacher of Islamic studies at the BCMS (1992-2007) and currently as a principal of another Muslim school, I have my own perspectives and views. Therefore, these biases may have shaped the way I viewed, understood, and interpreted the data I collected. I commenced this study with the perspective that it is a challenge to implement Islamic education in a multicultural society.

In addition, like any other researcher studying his own organization, I faced potential challenges such as jeopardizing my job if participants revealed unfavourable data, or disclosed private information that could have a negative influence on the organization

(Creswell, 2007:122). I followed Creswell's advice to clarify my biases from the outset of the study, giving the participant a clear understanding of my position and any perceptions that may affect the research study (Creswell, 2007:208).

I tried to listen carefully to what each participant said, especially to students as they are minors, and made every effort to summarize, repeat, and paraphrase it back to the participant during the face-to-face interviews to ensure that participants did not mean something different from what I understood.

### **3.3.4 Data analysis**

After the data were collected, the second step of analysing the data began. When I conducted the first round of interviews regarding the goals of Islamic education at the BCMS, I broke down the information of each transcript into pieces, and discovered lots of concepts which I then compared and classified. This helped me to group concepts in a new way, reading and re-reading the information to examine similarities and differences to arrive at categories. As I now had many concepts, I then identified relationships and made connections across the categories (an example of coded transcript is provided in Appendix E). The following categories emerged from the data: good manners, belief in the five pillars of Islam (practical aspects of Islam), belief in the six pillars of faith (Islamic belief system), what it means to be a Muslim, worshiping Allah (God), pleasing Allah (God), going to paradise in the hereafter, learning Islam strengthens Islamic faith and identity, importance of respecting others, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and multicultural competence.

After the open coding stage, where I discovered and developed the above categories, I assembled the data by making connections between categories and identifying relationships across such categories. At this stage, I re-grouped categories according to similarities and relationships. For example, categories have been reduced to the importance of displaying Islamic manners, preserving Islamic identity, strengthening Islamic practice and beliefs, and respecting others to enhance multicultural competence. Moreover, with each interview, I examined themes and categories. Through constant comparison I developed categories and identified two main themes. The first theme focuses on how Islamic education is perceived at the British Columbia Muslim School; how the school teaches the principles and practices of Islam while providing a safe environment in which students practice their faith, and strengthen their identity and cultural heritage as Muslims. This theme also explores the challenges and opportunities that Canadian multiculturalism affords. The second theme focuses on the compatibility of an Islamic education at this school



within the Canadian multicultural system. It specifically analyses the British Columbia Muslim School's perspectives on developing multicultural competence in the Canadian context — how the BCMS deals with the issue of isolation for its students, and the compatibility of an Islamic education with the policies and practices of Canada's multicultural society.

As well, transcripts were prepared and analysed and the data were re-read several times to ensure the validity and reliability of the viewpoints and perspectives of the study's participants. I conducted multiple interviews with some participants to gather further information. As Creswell (2007) notes, using a constant comparative approach will help the researcher to saturate the categories and to continue looking for information until the new information fails to provide insight into the category. The purpose of re-reading the data several times is to ensure that what the participants have said is consistent. In order to validate what participants said during the interviews, a detailed portion of the data is presented so that the reader can easily follow the logic of the analysis. At the end of the data collection stage the responses of the participants were compared to determine if there were major differences in their viewpoints. The purpose of this multiple data analysis, as mentioned earlier, was to establish the perception of the participants in regard to the compatibility of Islamic education with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice, and to explore the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education in Canada.

Qualitative data analysis provides a general process that helps in gathering general statements about categories and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The process reduces the collected data to a manageable size, and often helps the researcher to interpret the insights, words, and experiences of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In most cases, the research questions focus on how the individuals experience the process, and identify the steps in the process, while the researcher initially explores the issues that are being addressed (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The researcher then returns to the participants and asks more detailed questions that help to shape the research findings and gather enough information to fully develop the model (Robin & Robin, 1995). During this stage, the data collected for this research study were arranged and analysed according to the themes and narratives. Grounded theory methods such as identification of related thoughts or events applying initial coding were used, so those concepts were developed and grouped into categories.

It is important to elaborate on what is involved in the process of coding data and analysing them. I adopted Strauss & Corbin's (1990) specific analytic procedures in grounded theory research in which the qualitative data analysis falls into three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Coding represents the operations in which the collected data are separated and broken down, conceptualized, and rearranged, enabling the researcher to pull out a few themes and develop a descriptive theoretical framework of loosely interwoven concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 58). It also builds, rather than only tests, theory; provides the rigor necessary to make the theory good science, and provides the grounding, builds the density, and develops the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly-woven explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:58).

Open coding is the part of analysis that is specifically related to the naming and categorizing of phenomena by closely examining the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this stage of coding, data are broken down into separate parts, examined closely, and similarities and differences are compared and a series of questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through this process, the researcher's assumptions as well as the assumptions of others are questioned or explored, leading to new discoveries. Constant comparison and questioning are very important in developing grounded theory. Perhaps, that is why grounded theory is referred to by some researchers as the continued comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 62-63).

Axial coding is a set of procedures used to pull and connect the data in new ways, systematically following the open coding stage. The focus in the axial coding stage is to connect categories and to establish relationships among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:96). This is done by using a coding model involving conditions, context, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. Moreover, in this stage, the focus is to identify a specific category (phenomenon) in relation to the conditions that caused it, the context in which it happened, the action or strategies used to handle it, and the consequences that result from such strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:97). During the process of conducting a research study analysing data to formulate grounded theory, the researcher alternates between open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:98).

During the selective coding stage the focus is to integrate all categories in order to formulate a grounded theory. Such an integration task is challenging, and even experienced researchers find it difficult (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:116). The researcher at this stage may

write a storyline that connects the categories. Alternatively, positions or hypotheses may be specified that state a predicted relationship (Creswell, 2007:67). In this stage, it is important to select the core category, and then relate all major categories both to it and to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:142). This theory can be presented as a narrative statement, a visual picture, or a serious hypothesis (Creswell, 2007:65).

The types of coding do not have to follow any systematic order (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher may move back and forth among them, especially between the stages of open coding and axial coding. Normally, open coding and axial coding take place at the early stages of the research, but in some cases, they may also take place at the end. During the selective coding for instance, the researcher may find some concepts that require further development and he will have to go back to the open and axial coding stages. The process of returning to the first stages improves the selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data collection and data analysis are closely interrelated and take place alternately because the analysis directs the samplings of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:57-59). This is what Creswell (2007: 64) called “zigzag” in describing his image for data collection in grounded theory study, where the researcher is constantly out in the field to gather information, then into the office to analyse the data, and back to the field to gather more information, and so on.

To sum up, in this study, I started my investigation with the general research questions specified in Chapter 1, after which I sampled expert participants, and then collected the relevant data such as interviews and document analysis. I then moved to the stage of coding data, which may have helped to generate concepts at the level of open coding. There was a constant movement backwards and forwards (or ‘zigzag’) between these steps to collect more information, resulting in the need to sample the data. The process of constant comparison among indicators and concepts that fit one another helped me to generate the categories. After generating categories, I then moved to explore the relationships among specific categories. The final step was to collect further data through theoretical sampling, which had been guided by the theoretical saturation principle that eventually led to the formation of a theory that explained the phenomenon of challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education at the BCMS in a multicultural society.

### **3.4 The Role of the Researcher**

As Hughes (1996) recommends, I kept a research diary and notes while conducting this study. I used a notebook to record my research. These notes include my involvement in the

study, where I recorded the research process, notes about interviews and follow-up interviews, planning sessions, and reflections on re-reading the diary plans for any area of the research that required further attention. I also took notes of books or papers that I read, discussions and useful conversations, good ideas or questions that I wanted to follow up. This process helped me to reflect on this information and decide what to consider as useful and what to disregard. It also helped me to question my position and role and consider what I could have done differently with specific events and situations.

For example, when I analysed the interview transcripts of the teachers, I noticed inconsistency in how these teachers perceived the issue of isolation regarding the Islamic education program at the BCMS. In such a context, I felt it was important to conduct further interviews to fill any gaps. Also, when I analysed the interview transcripts of the chairman of the school board, the principal, teachers, parents and students regarding the goals of providing an Islamic education at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural system, I noticed that their views focused on issues related to Islamic belief system, Islamic practical aspects, Islamic manners and identity, and did not mention issues related to multicultural competence. Therefore, I decided to analyse the Islamic education curriculum guidelines and textbooks and compare them with the views of interviewees. Moreover, as I was analysing transcripts of the interviews, I noticed there were some contradictions between the views of interviewees and some perspectives discussed in the literature review chapter regarding the compatibility of Islamic education with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice. While the interviewees viewed Canada's multicultural system positively, some studies presented in the literature review raised some concerns and grounds for tensions (Azmi, 2001; Elmasri, 2005; Franklin & Brummelen, 2006; Kymlicka, 2006; McKinney, 2006). This informed me of the need for further reading which led me to the useful research of Adams (2007) that helped me to fill some gaps in the area of compatibility of Islamic education program as found at the BCMS with Canada's multicultural system.

Moreover, as I conducted the first round of interviews regarding teaching multicultural competence within the Islamic education curriculum, I noticed that the majority of the interviewees did not see teaching multicultural competence as a priority. These interviewees perceived that the diversity of the Muslim community and the nature of Islam that promotes multiculturalism should be sufficient to instil in students multicultural competence skills and knowledge. In order to examine how practical such claims were, I analysed the

content and textbooks of the Islamic education curriculum as well as the school mission statement and policy documents. Finally, discussions with colleagues and their feedback led me to relevant books that I had not read before and I subsequently incorporated some valuable ideas in the literature review (Bakht, 2008; Merry; 2007, Zine; 2007).

Since qualitative research depends on interpretations, the researcher is normally involved in in-depth interactions and experiences with the relevant participants (Creswell, 2003). Because any researcher who conducts a qualitative research becomes part of the lives of those he interviews, and such a strong connection invites different strategic, ethical, and personal issues that do not attend quantitative approaches, this relationship has to be addressed appropriately (Marshall & Rossman, 1999: 79). To do so, the researcher should clearly identify his value-free questions, values, and personal interests about his research topic. That means including information about the researcher's past experiences that provides background data which will help the readers to better understand the subject investigated, the setting, and the research site (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative methodology researcher plays two roles (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The first role is as a data collector and analyst; the second role is that of a learner who is expected to listen (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In the first role, the researcher makes every effort to listen carefully, to learn, and to remain as open-minded as humanly possible (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher also makes a maximum effort to stay neutral during the analysis stage, and keep his views from influencing the outcome of the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

In reality, the analyst and research participants come with their own biases, perceptions and viewpoints to their research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I made every effort to minimize any risk of potential bias in my research. As a long time teacher of Islamic studies at the BCMS (1992-2007) and currently as a principal of another Muslim school, I have my own perspectives and views. Therefore, these biases may have shaped the way I viewed, understood, and interpreted the data I collected. I commenced this study with the perspective that it is a challenge to implement Islamic education in a multicultural society. Any researcher is automatically located as part of the data he generates, and will, as Mason (2002) suggests, seek to explore his role and perspective in the process of generating and interpreting data. In addition, reflexivity is defined by Nightingale & Cromby (1990) as follows:

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting re-

search. Reflexivity then, urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research (P.228).

According to this definition, the researcher is aware of his role, presence, and personality within the research that he is undertaking (Ryan, 2005). It is a matter of questioning how the process of any specific research study and analysis affect the final outcome (May, 1998:22 cited in Ryan, 2005). Reflexivity in this sense makes the researcher as subject to scrutiny and critical analysis as the topic under study itself (Carolan, 2003:6 cited in Ryan, 2005). The reason for such scrutiny is to address the validity of knowledge claimed, and to increase the researcher's credibility (Antonacopoulou, 2002).

The researcher needs to be reflexive, and to develop a body of data that demonstrates the necessary degree of reflexivity (Ryan, 2005:3). In doing so, the researcher recognizes the integral part of the social world being studied (Ryan, 2005). The researcher's reflexivity is very important even when all participants share the same background. For example, when participants are in the school system, subject to similar experiences and with a common framework of understanding, concern for the researcher's reflexivity should be magnified. Since it is the inner understanding that needs to surface, it is only then that complete understanding may be possible (Ryan, 2005: 4).

Like any other researcher studying his own organization, I faced potential challenges such as jeopardizing my job if participants revealed unfavourable data, or disclosed private information that could have a negative influence on the organization (Creswell, 2007:122). I followed Creswell's advice to clarify my biases from the outset of the study, giving the participant a clear understanding of my position and any perceptions that may affect the research study (Creswell, 2007:208).

I tried to listen carefully to what each participant said, and made every effort to summarize, repeat, and paraphrase it back to the participant during the face-to-face interviews to ensure that participants did not mean something different from what I understood.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter addresses the research methodology used to conduct this study. It establishes that qualitative research methodology using grounded research strategy is the most appropriate methodology for this study. It outlines the rationale and philosophical background of the grounded theory approach. This chapter also presents some strategies for validating and ensuring the reliability of the data findings using a grounded theory research

method. It further addresses the role of the researcher, including assumptions and biases, population and sampling, site of the study, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and anticipated ethical issues. The following chapter will focus on data analysis and presentation. It will also analyse the mission statement, policy document, curriculum guide and textbooks of the Islamic education as found at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural system.

# Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Presentation

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the nature of an Islamic education as found at the British Columbia Muslim School, within the context of Canada's multicultural society. It draws on the perceptions of the school teachers, principal, and chairman of the school board, parents, and students<sup>1</sup>. Data analysis and presentation in this chapter is guided by the following general research questions.

1. What are the goals of the Islamic education program as viewed by students, teachers, parents and policy makers of the British Columbia Muslim School?
2. How does the British Columbia Muslim School deal with the issue of isolation that faith-based schools in general, and Muslim schools in particular, are accused of?
3. Is the Islamic education provided by the British Columbia Muslim School compatible with Canadian multicultural educational practices?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing an Islamic-based education system in the Canadian context?

This chapter has two main themes, both generated by the data analysis. The first theme focuses on how Islamic education is perceived at the British Columbia Muslim School. It presents and analyses the perceptions of teachers, administrators, parents and students. I will examine the ways in which the school teaches students the principles of Islam to strengthen their faith while providing a safe environment in which to practice Islam, and helps them to adopt an Islamic way of life, strengthening their identity and cultural heritage as Muslims. I will also discuss the challenges in implementing Islam in public, as experienced by students and teachers of the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS).

The second theme focuses on perspectives of compatibility of an Islamic education at this school with the Canadian multicultural system. It specifically analyses the BCMS perspectives on developing multicultural competence in the Canadian context— how the BCMS deals with the issue of isolation for its students, and the compatibility of an Islamic education with the policies and practices of Canada's multicultural society.

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<sup>1</sup> While aiming to provide an in-depth analysis, the study consisted of selected participants from a single school located in British Columbia, and should not therefore be considered to be representative of other Muslim schools in Canada, North America or in general.



## **4.2 The BCMS Perspective on Islamic Education**

All interviewees indicated that they wanted the Islamic education program at the BCMS to focus on teaching students the basic principles of Islam, providing a friendly environment in which students can practice their faith, as well as the necessary skills and knowledge to strengthen their Islamic identity, and acquire the ability to resist external, non-Islamic influences. They also wanted the program to model excellence in Islamic manners and personal growth.

### **4.2.1 Teaching students the basic principles of Islam and providing a safe environment in which to practice Islam**

Interviewees agree that the Islamic education program at the BCMS should focus on teaching students the basic principles of Islam to strengthen their faith while providing a safe environment in which to practice Islam. One teacher describes the program:

We teach students the principles of how to worship Allah, and who is God? Who is his Prophet, and how you practice what you learn about your religion on a daily basis. We try to infuse what we learn in our actions. We also teach them about the Creator, and why they were created on this earth, and how to practice the religion and how to worship God.

A parent adds that the BCMS curriculum teaches students du'as (supplications) to be recited for different religious events, such as before and after eating, and after performing the five daily prayers, as well as the five pillars of Islam<sup>2</sup>. It also provides a safe environment in which students can develop the habit of practicing Islam:

The Islamic studies education is organized to teach students the basics of Islam. It starts teaching from the basic supplications (du'as) to the five pillars of Islam, and when they do them in congregation with other Muslim students, they feel that they are not alone. And this is part of who they are. And they get training and exercise and gaining the habits of, I could say, a Muslim way of life.

According to the chairman of the BCMS school board, the Islamic education seeks:

To instil in children the values of Islam and give them an understanding of such values that will help them be at peace with their identity as Muslims, especially in the West, and give them the tools to apply their religion in their life.

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<sup>2</sup> The pillars of Islam are as follows: to believe in one God (Allah), to perform the five daily prayers, to pay zakah (that is, paying 2.5% of your annual saving for a good cause), to fast during Ramadan (the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar), and to go for Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca once in a lifetime for those who have the physical and financial abilities to do so. Believing and acting upon the above pillars of Islam is obligatory upon adult Muslims.

One student reinforced the above viewpoints, noting that the Islamic education at the BCMS helps students to distinguish right from wrong, and to resist external non-Islamic influences. She added that the program teaches about the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and about Islamic manners:

Because I am only in elementary school, I think it's good to learn Islamic studies now so that when I am older I can use it in life. Let us say I had not studied Islamic studies and had non-Muslim friends and they do something haram (forbidden) I would go along with it. In Islamic studies classes we learn about the Prophet (Prophet Mohammed), and the Qur'an, how Allah gave the Qu'ran, and about Islamic manners and how should we behave.

Finally, one parent indicated that one of the goals of the Islamic education at the BCMS is to produce students with a strong knowledge of Islam, and who possess a strong belief system:

I send my children to the BCMS because the school provides a very good basic knowledge and information about Islam. It produces graduates who are Muslims who understand their religion, who are comfortable with their identity as Muslims.

All interviewees agreed that they wanted the Islamic education program to teach students exclusively internal religious issues such as the basic principles of Islam, and Islamic practice, to give students a sense of belonging and the social and religious tools to resist external immoral influences, and to prepare them to practice Islam in real life situations. In other words, the interviewees wanted the Islamic education program to prepare students with a strong belief system that shapes their personalities and enhances their confidence in adopting Islam as a way of life. All interviewees' view-points are consistent with the BCMS Islamic education curricular guidelines.

Comprehensive analysis of the textbooks of Islamic education at the BCMS confirmed that they focus on a series of topics that aim at strengthening students' Islamic belief system and character (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). For example, the topics presented in these textbooks include the importance of worshipping God from an Islamic perspective in this world and in the hereafter. They also include many social issues that are considered inappropriate from an Islamic perspective that Muslims should avoid in their day-to-day interaction with other individuals and groups. The textbooks also present comprehensive discussions of acts of worship that Muslims should carry out on a regular basis including the five pillars of Islam, which are obligations of adult Muslims. The books also present lessons related to the six pillars of faith (as distinct from the above pillars of

Islam) which are: to believe in Allah (God), to believe in the angels, to believe in all the revealed books of Allah, to believe in the Prophet of Allah, to believe in the day of judgement, and to believe in destiny. They also contain topics that deal with the family system, lawful and unlawful issues such as eating halal food and preserving the female dress code (hijab). All of the above mentioned acts of worship are required practices for adult Muslims. The ultimate goal of these instructions is to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to adopt Islam as a way of life.

The views of the interviewees confirm the findings of this study's literature review, namely that the Islamic worldview applies Islamic principles to all aspects of life in order to strengthen faith, shape personality, and gain the pleasure of Allah in this world and in the hereafter (Halstead, 2004, Maududi, 1988). Islamic education focuses on establishing an ideological community (ummah) with principles based on the teaching of the Qur'an and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (Halstead, 2004). These sources establish not only the spiritual and ethical guidelines, but also make Islam a primary source of identity for its followers. The ideals of Islam are to provide cohesion and solidarity, which enable its members to establish common institutions such as mosques and schools (Halstead, 2004).

Moreover, Islamic education aims at achieving a state of spiritual and ethical nurturing that is in accordance with the will of the Ar-Rab (The Lord) (Ibn Manzur, 2001, Vol. 1). Consequently, the task of Islamic education is "The vivid presentation of high values and continued exposure to the attraction of goodness, truth and honesty until they are woven into the fabric of personality" (Hajalton, 1982:59).

The interviewees perceived Islamic education at the BCMS as an agent of change that aims at teaching students the basic principles of Islam and providing the necessary skills and knowledge to adopt Islam as a way of life. The hope is to endow students with the confidence to implement Islamic principles in their day-to-day situations internally as well as externally. However, the interviewees' statements seem to be exclusive and narrow, and may have negative implications in a multicultural society. This may contribute to creating patterns of isolation that may slow or hinder the students' full participation in the wider society. Furthermore, these interviewees seem to be fearful of the majority culture's negative influence on the Islamic identity of students. Therefore, they feel the Islamic education is the strongest defence in preserving their Islamic belief and resisting non-Islamic influences. I will further develop and discuss this issue when I focus on the compatibility of Islamic education as found at the BCMS with Canadian multiculturalism.

It is important to mention that the interviewees did not differentiate cultural identity from religious identity while talking about the BCMS. They indicated that both identities are interrelated, helping students to adopt Islam as a way of life. This could be because the notion of secularism that separates religion from other aspects of life is not accepted in Islam (as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study). As other researchers have pointed out, in the world view of Tawheed (divine unity) in Islam, knowledge is one entity, and there is no division of knowledge between the secular and the religious. Islamic education focuses both on training the mind, and passing knowledge to others as well as educating the person as a whole (Ashraf, 1979; Thomas, 2002). Both kinds of knowledge contribute to the strengthening of faith (Iman). The following section will focus on Islamic education as an agent for preserving the identity and culture of students of the BCMS.

#### **4.2.2 Strengthening Islamic identity and cultural heritage of students at the British Columbia Muslim School**

The strengthening of Islamic identity and cultural heritage of students at the BCMS is an important component of the school's Islamic education program, as indicated by interviewees. According to interviewees, the school should help students to enhance their Islamic identity and cultural background. It should also enhance students' self esteem in practicing Islam, and help them to maintain their Islamic identity, and, at the same time, contribute to the wider Canadian society.

The chairman of the BCMS school board believes that the Islamic education will raise students' confidence in retaining their Islamic identity in Western society:

The Islamic education curriculum, which was also referred to as the core program, is the core upon which the rest of the curriculum is based. The objective is to instil in children the values of Islam, to give them an understanding of Islam, an understanding that will help them to be at peace with their identity as Muslims, especially in the West, to educate the Muslim children with the focus being to produce graduates who are Muslims who are comfortable with their identity as Muslims, and to give them the tools to apply their religion in their life, and to be able to succeed as Muslims in Western societies.

It is clear from the chairman's statement that preserving the Islamic values and identity of students living in the West is a high priority. The fear of losing this Islamic identity was shared by students. As one student says:

Because I am only in elementary school, I think it's good to learn Islamic studies now so that when I am older I can use it in life. Let us say I had not studied Islamic studies and had non-Muslim friends and they do something haram (forbidden) I would go along with it. In Islamic studies classes we also learn about the

Prophet (Prophet Mohammed), and the Qur'an, how Allah gave the Qur'an, and about Islamic manners and how should we behave.

According to the principal, the aims of Islamic education at British Columbia Muslim School include: "promoting Islamic teachings and values, maintaining Islamic identity and heritage and fostering Islamic worldview and understanding"

However, a balanced approach between maintaining Islamic values and identity and a positive interaction with Canadian society could be more beneficial for the BCMS students as well as for the wider, non-Muslim society, as suggested by one parent:

The Canadian system encourages people of different backgrounds to still adhere to their culture and identity and at the same time to work toward the common benefit of the general Canadian society. That is why the Islamic education at the BCMS seeks to help students to preserve their culture, identity and enhance their confidence level.

Perhaps Elmasri's (2005) model for smart integration would meet the challenge:

Unlike the assimilation or isolation models, the smart integration model promotes the preservation of one's identity in matters of religion, culture, language and heritage, while simultaneously encouraging full participation in the country's political square, and promoting both individual and collective contributions in all fields to its well-being. This positive hybrid model follows the ancient wisdom which recognizes that as minorities adapt, countries should adopt. In the case of Canadian Muslims, smartly integrated individuals and communities are far better able to look after new immigrants from within and without their groups. And it goes without saying that the contributions of those following the smart integration model will have greater positive impact on the well-being of their country than if they work through either the assimilation or isolation models. Smartly integrated individuals would not try to hide their ethnicity or religion, nor would they feel inferior as compared to their fellow citizens. In sum, they would not feel restricted or handicapped by their identity (P. 4).

In addition, the principal of BCMS remarked that:

The school strives to provide Islamic education. It makes an effort to illuminate or reduce anything that goes against the basic tenets of Islamic. The school also aims to meet all government requirements including the multicultural policy. For this purpose, the school utilizes the government mandated curriculum as a tool that promotes the multicultural reality of the Canadian society.

One Islamic studies teacher also noted that the Islamic education curriculum emphasizes developing the students' Islamic manners, and acting upon them in real life situations. Some of the topics in the curriculum include respecting others, helping those in need, and the importance of avoiding inappropriate behaviour such as cheating, lying, and disrespect-

ing others in general. The program further strives to connect students to their cultural heritage and seeks to develop in students the qualities necessary to possess Taqwa (righteousness):

The children are learning that you have to start with self purification by making yourself a good person, to follow the Islamic principles which I think are the same everywhere: to be a good person, you do not lie, you do not cheat, and you know that God is watching over you, and this is the most important thing. And you have to be good to other people. And you respect everyone around you, the older and the younger, respect property, be kind to animals, and to everyone around you. We also teach students about their culture and background.

The program provides students with the basic foundations of Islam at an early age in a friendly and safe environment. As one parent observes, this strengthens the students' connection to their heritage:

The environment itself, in the beginning of childhood, is if we give them a good foundation and knowledge as to who they are, they will always remember Insha-Allah (God willing), and I quote from Imam Siraj Wahaj (a well-known African American Imam and a community leader) a convert himself. He used the example of salmon, which are born in the Fraser River in British Columbia. They spawn and go to the Pacific Ocean, but at the end of their life cycle they go back to the Fraser River to die. The death ratio on going back or being caught by a fisherman is 98%, so only two fishes out of a 100 actually make it back to the spawning ground to die or lay eggs for the future generations. So the Imam used the example that if you give your children a foundation, no matter where they go, they will remember what their roots are and what their foundation is and they will return to it.

Other interviewees echoed similar thoughts regarding the importance of the Islamic identity and cultural heritage of the students. One student comments:

If Muslims from other countries come and they go to public school they might lose what they learned before and their Islamic culture. But when we have a Muslim school like the BCMS, they will learn more and be more confident about their culture. So, we can be prouder, not feeling as though we have to hide anything.

Furthermore, one teacher notes that receiving an Islamic education at the BCMS gives students the opportunity to practice Islam at the school, and helps them to gain confidence in practicing their religion in public, even when facing some challenges, especially in regard to the female dress code (hijab):

It's an opportunity for us to practice our religion at the BCMS, and when we pray in the parks with the kids, they know they can pray everywhere and society is accepting that. These days they are more open and they are more open to us too. But really, the big challenge is the hijab and the relationship between boys and girls, women and men, any relationship before marriage is not accepted.

Another parent agreed that learning Islamic principles at the BCMS may increase students' confidence in practicing Islam in public:

There are good things about Canada. They are sensitive with different identities. So, when students learn their Islamic principles at the school and they learn to present them, say we go outside for a picnic or any event in a public place, and the time for prayer comes or for example during the fasting month or anything that is solely associated with Muslim character.

The parent also observed that the BCMS may also help students preserve their Islamic identity while interacting with the wider society:

We have not developed the skills to present ourselves because we are from a homogeneous Muslim environment. But students at the BCMS are growing up in a non-Islamic environment and they get trained at the school about how to preserve their identity and how to present it well. So they have got a better chance than us to present their Islamic identity to the rest of the community.

These findings are echoed in other studies. The literature review confirms that Islamic schools help their students maintain the identity and heritage of their community (ummah) (Halstead, 2004; Lemo, 1999), which is why many Muslim parents send their children to schools such as the BCMS (Merry, 2005). These parents want schools to be friendly and open to issues of gender sensitivity, such as modest dress (e.g., the hijab), provide sanctioned food (halal), provide provisions for prayer, and teach character. For these parents, Muslim schools ensure their religious values are taught alongside the academic programs (Merry, 2005). Scholars of Islamic education suggest that it is essential to establish schools that provide an Islamic perspective on education for Muslim students in the West (Hewer, 2001, Tawhidi, 2003), and some advocate for a total Islamization of school curricula (Lemo, 2003). For these scholars a true Islamic school is an exclusive institution that promotes pure Islamic ideology taught by highly qualified, practicing Muslim teachers. A Muslim school, from this point of view, should not offer a distinct course called Islamic studies or religious education, but rather the entire curriculum should be an integrated, Islam-based system (Hewer, 2001).

All interviewees for this study agreed with the BCMS mission statement, which states:

The school provides the foundation based on Islam for life-long learning and prepares students to assume their responsibilities as adults. The school is committed to developing in students the attitude, skills and knowledge that are necessary for leading positive, satisfying lives, and becoming contributing members of the community and Canadian society at large (Parents' Handbook, 2005: 4).

In addition, the BCMS encourages and helps students prepare for post secondary education, fosters good etiquette based on Islamic principles, strives for the complete integration of the curriculum, and provides a solid Islamic studies program that nurtures balanced and progressive minds (Parents' Handbook, 2005: 4).

The mission statement and objectives can be summarized as follows:

- To provide the basics of Islam for students.
- To prepare students to adopt Islam as a way of life.
- To help students develop the sense of social responsibility as adults.
- To help students become contributing members of the Muslim community in particular and Canadian society in general.
- To help students lead a successful life in adulthood.
- To help students develop good Islamic qualities and manners.
- To provide students with a solid Islamic education program that helps them to develop balanced and progressive minds.

While these goals are achieved internally, there are still some challenges in realizing such goals externally, due to pressures from the wider Canadian society, as will be discussed in the following section. The dress code for female students and teachers presents a real challenge in public places because many non-Muslims consider the hijab to be a symbol of oppression for Muslim women (Adams, 2007). However, the Islamic education at the BCMS seeks to strengthen its students' confidence in practicing Islam regardless of external pressure.

The following section will present and analyse interviewees' viewpoints, and the experiences of students and teachers in practicing Islam at the BCMS, as well as analyse the challenges of practicing Islam in the wider public context of Canada's multicultural society.

#### **4.2.3 Challenges in implementing Islam in public as experienced by students and teachers of the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS)**

All interviewees suggested that practicing Islam in public presents challenges that are partially due to external pressures from the majority culture, and partially due to negative perceptions fostered by the media. As one student remarked:

At British Columbia Muslim school, performing prayer and wearing the hijab is very simple because everyone is doing it. During prayer time for example, everyone is doing the same thing. But it's harder for me now because I go to public school. It's difficult in public places to pray because there are not many Muslims in



my school, but it is still doable. Some young people may be concerned about losing friends, or being pressured sometimes, that is why they do not practice Islam sometimes. Some people are not going to be too nice to you, I know that for sure. Going to school at the BCMS, I know that I am going to be able to do prayer, I am going to be able to wear the hijab like anyone else and nobody is going to make inappropriate comments to me, so it's much easier.

Another student echoed these remarks, and added that the Islamic education program at the BCMS provides the necessary skills and knowledge to practice Islam at the school and in public. However, the student noted, some may neglect practicing Islam in public, due to discrimination and peer-pressure:

It's very easy to practice Islam at British Columbia Muslim School, because everyone is a Muslim. It's easy to perform prayer as the mosque is beside us and everyone is doing the same thing. The teachers taught us the basic principles of Islam in Islamic education classes. But at public school where I attend now, I think if I had not been at the BCMS where we had Islamic education, I would not be that confident of being a Muslim, because most of the Muslims I see at the public school that were not at the BCMS, like most of my friends, are not in the right way. My friends who attended the BCMS have more confidence in practicing Islam in public and they will overcome the pressure unlike other friends who want to fit in the society. Non-Muslim friends may call you names sometimes when they see you practicing, or know you are a Muslim, for example, terrorist. Many friends may feel uncomfortable in praying in public or showing what religion you are. But for me, Islamic education classes prepared me to practice Islam with confidence and explain to people that I am a Muslim and Islam is not what the media talks about.

Examples of some challenges are illustrated in performing the five daily prayers and observing the mandatory Islamic dress code (hijab) for women in public<sup>3</sup>. The Islamic education program at the BCMS seeks to prepare students to adopt Islam as a way of life in general. These students are often caught in the middle, between fitting into mainstream society along with different cultures, and preserving their Islamic culture and identity. As one student noted:

Applying what we learn in the BCMS in practice in public could be a challenge, such as wearing the head scarf. At the BCMS I really do not feel pressured, because everybody does the same thing, like performing prayer. If I go to another school it won't be as easy. So there is really not much pressure (at the BCMS). Like wearing the hijab — because everybody wears it, everybody knows it you have to wear it, and nobody asks you questions. If I go to a public school, because they do not have prayer time and you have to squeeze it in, maybe on your lunch time and you have to explain to your non-Muslim friends that it's your religion and you have to do it. And also the hijab — not many people in the public schools are going to wear it

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Islamic Shariah (divine law), Muslim adult females should cover their entire body except the face and hands while in public places or with strangers (Qur'an, 59:33).

and may also pressure me to take it off, but I have to stay strong and explain to them that it is part of my religion. All of that make me uncomfortable, because they really do not understand what I am talking about, and that I have to always explain what I am doing.

A senior Islamic education teacher observes that it's easier to practice Islam at British Columbia Muslim School, because you do not have to explain yourself all the time to others.

Prayer time for example, you are in Islamic environment. Also, you do not have to explain at the British Columbia Muslim School why you wear the hijab, perform prayer, and fast in the month of Ramadan. There are some challenges with practicing Islam in public, especially, the dress code for women, due to ignorance from the part of some people in the public.

When Muslim ladies go out they face some challenges, especially with the hijab. Some people reject it, and tell us to go back home if you want to cover your head/body. The society is harsh on us sometimes in different ways. It's a challenge to build confidence in girls at the British Columbia Muslim School to accept the hijab as a part of our religion.

The challenges in practicing Islam in public that this study's interviewees reported are confirmed in other studies. For example, one study found that 36% of Canadians support banning the hijab in public places including schools (Adams, 2007). According to this study, there are two reasons for this negativity surrounding the Islamic female dress code (Adams, 2007). The first is a perception that the hijab is a symbol of gender inequality and the subordination of women to men according to traditional religious laws (Adams, 2007). The second reason is that the head scarf promotes loyalty to Islam, and encourages isolation from secular life in Canada (Adams, 2007). While similar arguments could be made about the outward symbols of other faiths, there is currently a particular focus on Muslims and the Islamic faith (Adams, 2007). Such perceptions about Islam are not justifiable, and contradict the values promoted by Canada's Charter of Rights (1984) which ensures equality for all, irrespective of their religious, cultural, linguistic and racial backgrounds. However, in practice, according to Taylor (1994) critics argue that the policy, which claims to be neutral, is flawed and uneven. Furthermore, Franklin & Brummelen (2006) argue that the multicultural system in Canada is based on secular / liberal theory that often does not accommodate the needs of religious minorities. This policy often subjects Muslims to scrutiny and challenges (Azmi, 2001; Zine, 2007).

In addition, the media express selective outrage about the plight of Muslim women (Siddiqui, 2008:3). As Pankaj Mirshra, Indian novelist writes: "Almost every day newspa-

per columnists berate Islam, often couching their prejudice in the highly moral language of women's life" (cited in Siddiqui, 2008: 3). According to Khan (2009) some polls indicate that 37% of Canadians hold a negative view of Islam, and 21% of them mention the treatment of women as the basis for their views. Adams (2007); Khan (2009); and Bakht, (2008) suggest that this is because those polled perceive that Islam oppresses women, and the hijab (headscarf) is a sign of such oppression.

According to Khan (2008) the California chapter of the National Organization of Women asked her to speak on the issue of women's rights in Islam under the heading, "What Muslim Women want American Feminists to Know". In preparation for the lecture Khan searched the Internet for some common perceptions, and found "genital mutilation, the stoning of women for adultery, the ban on women driving, honour killings, the headscarf as a symbol of oppression, banning of the hijab-wearing soccer players, the niqab, the recent debate on the identity requirement for the Canadian election". (2008: 66-67). Moreover, according to Khan (2009), while some Muslims blame the media's poor coverage of women's rights in Islam, the reality remains that gender equality often falls far short of the Qur'anic imperatives. Muslim women are not given full rights in many aspects of life. Khan (2009) further points out that such mistreatments are in direct conflict with the teachings of Islam.

Nonetheless, Khan (2009) argues that a balanced approach by the media would help to form a positive view of women's rights in Islam. Khan's (2008) recent analysis of the content of Muslim Girl's Magazine: Representing Ourselves (published in Toronto, Canada) is a step in the right direction. Her analysis presents the practical daily experiences of some Muslim women in North America. For example, she notes that the featured role models in the first issue of the magazine were successful Muslim women, including BBC anchor Mishal Hussain, Afghan presidential candidate Dr. Massouda Jalal, Islamic Society of North America president Dr. Ingrid Mattson (from Ontario), as well as several athletes. According to Khan, the main message of the magazine is that: "Muslim women are not foreign, other, or alien, and Muslim Americans are able to reconcile the different sometimes contradictory aspects of their identities" (Khan, 2008). As Khan (2009) notes, reporting more positive news and experiences of Muslim women in North America can promote mutual understanding and tolerance in Canadian society.

Further studies referred to in the literature review confirm the challenges faced by Muslims and their institutions in dealing with external pressures (Grant, 1997). Like many

other minority-owned institutions, Muslim schools in Canada face challenges in balancing the tensions between the willingness and goal to preserve Islamic values and the requirement to integrate into the dominant cultural norms (Grant, 1997). According to Grant, “Muslim schools live within societies with norms already determined by the majority culture” (1997:24). Public institutions in Canada promote some elements of culture and lifestyle that are, in some cases, different from the faith and values of their students and their parents (Azmi, 2001).

The challenges faced by Muslim students in practicing Islam in public places and maintaining their Islamic identity are shared by Muslim youth attending public schools in the United States and Canada. According to Khan (2009) in the context of post 9/11, stereotypes and discrimination about Muslims based on their religious or national identities have become very common in North America and elsewhere.

Muslim youth must deal with the reality that their identities will be contributing factors to the challenges they face in school and society. One of the common stereotypes about Muslims that got worse after September 11 is that Muslims’ values were not compatible with Western values (Khan, 2009: 27). Emerging research on the Muslim experience in North America confirms these challenges. These studies show that stereotyping, systematic discrimination, and school cultures that contradict Muslim values and beliefs lead many Muslim students to experience alienation, marginalization, and a sense of otherness (Khan, 2009: 27). For example, some Muslim students face challenges based on the stereotypes others associate with their Muslim identity. In many cases their teachers’ and peers’ perceptions of their ethnic and religious identities reinforce negative stereotypes. Also, some students face challenges associated with observing visible religious duties such as wearing the hijab (female headscarf) in schools and other public places (Khan, 2009:30). These students feel that their identities as Americans are often overlooked (Khan, 2009: 30).

Madeeha, a female student who wore the hijab to her school in Raleigh, North Carolina explained, “People ask you ‘in other cultures, (do) they do this?’ and he (the teacher) will be like ‘Right’. I will be like, ‘I was born here all my life.. I don’t know’ ” (Khan, 2009: 30). It’s important to mention that the challenges and conflict faced by Muslim American youth is due to the experience of belonging to a religious minority group in the United States and in School. The extent to which the students practiced Islam had an effect on, but was not always indicative of, the ways in which they experienced themselves as Muslims.

In other words, while being a Muslim typically held some religious connotation, it also took on social and political undertones as well (Khan, 2009: 30).

According to Khan (2009: 31) the above analysis is similar to Zine's (2006) study on Muslim females in Canada who wore a hijab to their respective high schools. She found that they faced challenges, marginalization, stereotyping and discrimination. However, she found that despite not always wanting to represent their community of Muslims, the young women recognized that their behaviour could confound others' stereotyping of Muslims and in turn proactively assert a new and positive image of Islam ( Zine, 2006, cited in Khan, 2009: 31). The positive position of these girls is supported by one of the most documented methods used by Muslim students in the U.S., Canada and Great Britain to respond to their challenges including the use of the hijab, which is a well recognized marker of Muslim identity (Khan, 2009:32).

In summary, while students at the BCMS receive an Islamic education and practice their faith in a safe and friendly environment, they face external challenges in practicing Islam in public. Attaining a good foundation in Islamic education and practicing Islam at the BCMS enhance students' belief systems and strengthen their Islamic identity so that they can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to resist external pressure, and adopt Islam as a way of life in public life in general. The following section will discuss the negative influence of media and world events on implementing Islamic education in the BCMS in Canada.

### **4.3 Perspectives on Islamic Education and Cultural Diversity**

Several interviewees noted that the media and world events such as the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington, DC had a negative impact on Islamic education at the BCMS. As one parent said, "Global issues and pressure from the media all affect the school as it is part of the community."

The fact that the BCMS was temporarily closed following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 demonstrates how some global events negatively affect the process of providing an Islamic education at the BCMS. A parent recalls,

On September 11, 2001, the British Columbia Muslim School was closed we got phone calls out of nowhere saying come and pick up your children. Why was our school getting shut down? Are we going to be alright, are my children going to be alright? Will they be safe outside if they are not even safe at their own school? So it's a challenge to teach and learn Islamic education in this context, because being a Muslim school, you are already under the microscope from the media.

This parent suggested that more interaction with the wider society may help to reduce the negative influence of media and global events in providing an Islamic education at the BCMS:

Invite them (non-Muslims) to play sports with you, and they will realize that you have a playground and a soccer field, not bomb-making labs. Make them feel safe around you. We are not planning for violence.

The chairman of the school board advocates that teachers teach their students the principles of Islam and how to practice Islam, regardless of negative media and non-Islamic cultural influences:

Teachers of Islamic education at the British Columbia Muslim School face some difficulties in delivering the program in the context of the media influences and the society in general. The main goal of the Islamic education at the BCMS is to develop the Islamic character of students. So you have a student who is not only developed academically, intellectually, but also in the Islamic values, being taught to act as a Muslim and to live his or her life as a Muslim. In that context, the student is being influenced by a bombardment of the media, by the prevailing culture in which he or she lives. The teachers do face a challenge as they try to instil those values in students.

The chairman added that the media often presents negative information about Islam and Muslims, especially in relation with women's rights. Teachers face challenges while discussing such issues in their Islamic education classes:

Our children at the school are subjected to that negative view which presents a challenge to the teacher not only in teaching Islamic education to children, but also to counter the negative image of Islam in the media. Just looking at Afghanistan for example, the Americans and to a lesser extent in the Canadian media, the matter is presented as liberating a nation from the shackles of a certain culture that keeps them backward. We are there to liberate women and give them rights — there are many subliminal messages in those statements made by the politicians and the media. Because if you say you are going to a place where the Islamic culture is prevalent, and you are giving them those rights, that means that in that culture they have no rights. One question a student will ask is why does it take a western army to invade a Muslim country so that women can go to school?

These and other perceptions from the interviewees about the negative influence of the media and global events on the BCMS confirm that, as noted in the literature review, the pressure on the Islamic schools and Islamic education has increased since September 11, 2001 (Azmi, 2001). Muslim communities and their institutions around the world came under strict scrutiny from both the media and law enforcement agencies (Azmi, 2001). The global war on terror, in many cases, put Muslim communities under psychological incar-

ceration. The poor and often misguided presentation of Islam and Islamic institutions in the media accentuated and perpetuated the general anxiety about Muslims who outwardly express or practice their religion, as illustrated by the current controversy in Québec (Azim, 2001).

The incident in Québec in which young Muslim girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were turned away from a Tae Kwon Do competition because they wore the hijab shows the increasing challenges that diversity poses for Canadians (Globe & Mail, April 17, 2007: A3). The media often exaggerate and generalize such events, and as a result negatively influence the general public. Canadian Muslims are subjected to discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping, because they are believed to have different values than that of the Canadian mainstream (Elmasry, 2005: 6-7). Because they feel marginalized, some Canadian Muslims have slowed their positive integration into Canadian society (Elmasry, 2005:5). The apparent unwillingness of some Muslims to accept liberal multiculturalism does not mean that Muslims in general oppose multiculturalism. The Muslim community itself is very diverse and multicultural.

In order to draw attention to increasing Islamophobia in the world, the UN General Assembly held a very important conference in November, 2008 to promote a global dialogue about religious, cultural, and common values. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described Islamophobia as a new term for anti-Semitism. In a speech he encouraged delegates to promote tolerance amongst all people in the world, and to strive to enhance better understanding among people of different backgrounds. He stated:

Islamophobia has emerged as the new term for an old and terrible form of prejudice. And other kinds of faith-based discrimination and racism show a dismaying persistence. Sometimes it seems as if none of history's awful lessons have been learned. With knowledge and leadership, we can live up to the best of all traditions, and ensure human dignity for all (as quoted in Al Ameen newspaper, published in Delta BC, Canada, December 26, 2008).

School boards in Canada have the responsibility to prepare students to face Islamophobia and any other types of racism and discrimination against Muslims and other marginalized minority groups. As Zine (2002) indicates there is an educational initiative prepared in Canada for public schools to help these school boards provide multicultural education based on social justice, equality, and peaceful coexistence. In this context, the Muslim Educational Network Training and Outreach Service (MENTORS), a community-based charitable organization based in Toronto, developed resource kits for schools as a

response of the backlash against the Muslim community. The MENTORS initiative, *Toward Understanding: Moving beyond Racism and Islamophobia* is funded by the Ministry of Canadian Heritage in collaboration with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. Its goals according to the president of MENTORS, are “to counter Islamophobia and related forms of oppression such as racism and xenophobia through public education by developing resource kits that help students understand and challenge racism and Islamophobia ” (Zine, 2002). According to MENTORS, public schools in Canada should reflect the changing reality that school populations in Canada come from many different linguistic, religious, social, and cultural backgrounds. These schools must provide policies and programs that create an environment of tolerance and acceptance for people of diverse backgrounds. To tackle the issue of Islamophobia for example, Canadian public schools should present Islam from a perspective of peace and social justice rather than from the negative media perspective that presents Islam as a religion based on extremism. They should also provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand the politics of marginalized religious identities, challenging the Eurocentric focus of the Canadian education system which often alienates many Muslim and other minority students from the dominant culture. This approach would help to create a multicultural society based on equality and peaceful coexistence among different people with different backgrounds. Next, we will examine perspectives on the compatibility of Islamic education as found at the BCMS with the Canadian system of multicultural education.

#### **4.3.1 Developing multicultural competence at the BCMS**

According to some interviewees, the BCMS should focus on developing multicultural competence to prepare students for a positive integration with the wider Canadian society. One student notes that the Islamic education program at the BCMS does teach students to respect all people, regardless of their religious and cultural backgrounds:

Manners are a very big part of Islam. So we learn about respecting your elders, and respecting people that are younger than you, too... We learn that you have to respect everyone, including non-Muslims.

While the student perceived that Islamic education teaches respect towards Muslims and non-Muslims alike, there is no indication of how the program specifically promotes such respect to non-Muslims, or provides the necessary skills and knowledge for students to respect non-Muslim beliefs and cultural systems.



One Islamic education teacher provided a detailed account of some issues that are taught at the BCMS, including teaching Islamic cultural values such as being good to others, being good Muslims and good citizens who contribute both to the Muslim community and to the wider Canadian society:

To put in the simplest terms, we teach students about their culture and their background, where they came from. We also teach them morals, how to live and how to be productive in society, to be good members of society, to contribute, to better themselves as human beings as best as they can, because that is what Islam teaches us. And then, they have to be the best for the people around them, and of course further from their school community to the bigger community, from British Columbia to all of Canada and to the whole world.

A parent also explained that students at the BCMS have the opportunity to develop multicultural competence by interacting with other Muslim students who come from very diverse backgrounds. “Students at the BCMS get the opportunity to mix with people from all parts of the world, since Muslim children and parents of the BCMS come from all over the world”.

While students at the BCMS are exposed to the diversity of the Muslim community itself, the goal of Canada’s multicultural system is to empower students to effectively participate in a larger, more diverse, and fair society, engaging in human rights activities and providing equal opportunities for all cultural groups, and in all aspects of life (Gosh, 2004). The assumption of the interviewees in this study is that enhancing students’ Islamic manners, including respecting non-Muslims, being good Canadian citizens and mixing with Muslim students of diverse backgrounds, will, by default, lead to students developing multicultural competence. This raises the question of whether teaching Islamic moral values and manners is enough to develop true multicultural competence. Multicultural education aims to educate citizens about interacting with people of different backgrounds and living in a multicultural society (Kubow, Brossman, & Nonomiya, 2003:131).

The reality that faces the board of education at the BCMS, as well as parents and teachers, is how to make the Islamic education reflective of the reality of the cultural mosaic that is Canadian society. Most of the BCMS students are born to Muslim families in Canada, call Canada their home, and live in a world that is getting ever more interconnected, due to the advancement of technology (Kubow, Brossman, & Nonomiya, 2003:131). In this context there is an argument to be made for a balanced curricular approach that ensures maintaining these multiple identities, and enhancing the students’ skills and knowledge of diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic groups, while strengthening their Islamic beliefs and

identity, all within an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in accordance with the principles of Canadian multiculturalism ((Lee, 2002).

In relation to the school's appreciation of multiculturalism and its ability to equip students with an understanding of the core principles, interviewees made the further point that while all the students are Muslims, they come from many different racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and are thus exposed at a young age to diversity and multiculturalism. This exposure, they believe, facilitates the students' positive integration within Canadian society. As one parent remarked, by the very fact that an Islamic education encourages multiculturalism, students of varied backgrounds will develop multicultural social competence as they interact with each other:

Islamic education in principle promotes multiculturalism; that is the bottom line. Since Muslim children and parents come from all parts of the world, it's a good opportunity for the children to mix with people from all parts of the world.

The chairman of the school board agrees that, as students experience cultural diversity from an early age, they should easily integrate into the Canadian multicultural system:

I see the Canadian experience, in some aspects ... as a kind of a mirroring of the multiculturalism that existed when there was a vast Islamic state, from the borders of China to Andalusia, under the rule of the Islamic caliphate. As Islam spread into [other] countries, the Arabs who were the original bearers of Islam did not impose their language or their particular way of life in Africa or India or in Spain. Those people maintained their languages, the way they dressed, their culture and food.

Even if we teach our curriculum without reference to the Canadian context, the students will still find the Canadian experience something they can fit into because they have lived it in the school where you will find students with Chinese background or Somali background or Arab background or Middle Eastern background or European. When these students interact they really interact as Muslims. They probably speak their mother tongues, they have their choices and preferences in terms of food and dress, and especially, during Eid (religious festivals) we see that diversity. But they are grounded by faith.

As an Islamic education teacher puts it:

There is harmony between Islamic teachings at the BCMS and Canadian multiculturalism because they [students] live multiculturalism. There is no contradiction between their education and multiculturalism in Canada. Islam teaches how to treat others and how to respect them.

It could be argued that the school provides access to people from different geographical regions and ethnic backgrounds and that this access provides insights not available in a more homogenous setting. Nonetheless, the students at the BCMS are all Muslims. Inter-

acting with individuals who share your belief and faith is markedly different from interacting with non-Muslims in a wider Canadian context.

Moreover, the students at the BCMS are taught that all Muslims are brothers and sisters in Islam, that they all belong to one big ummah (nation) and that they should all show solidarity with all Muslims. The importance of solidarity and brotherhood amongst Muslims is illustrated in the following saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him):

The example of the believers, in their love, kindness, solidarity for one another is like the example of a single body that when a part of it feels pain, the whole body feels the same pain. The whole body will be covered with pain and fever (Shaikh, 1997).

One parent stated that he sends his children to the BCMS to preserve their Islamic values, identity and culture, and wants the program to protect his children from external negative influences, maintaining loyalty to Islam first, then to Canada.

When I sent my daughter to a preschool there was some kind of peer pressure on her about some cultural practices that I did not agree with in principle such as celebrating Halloween, Valentine's Day and Christmas, which do not match my religion and culture. Therefore, I do not want my children to celebrate nonsense holidays, like Halloween. I do not see it as a principled celebration, same with Valentine's Day. I also did not want them to be under pressure from the majority of the community, because the majority is non-Muslims. They are free to celebrate what they like. If I put my kids in a public school, where the majority is celebrating Halloween, then they do not feel like they are part of the community because they do not celebrate those holidays, and that will reflect on their Islamic identity. First of all they are Muslims and then they are Canadians. I have no problem interacting with the outside community, but the Islamic identity has to be preserved, and it's really important, especially in the early ages. So, if I put them in a Muslim school, there will be no social pressure on them.

The discussion of festivals such as Halloween, Christmas and Valentine's Day seems to be the focus of parents' concerns regarding their children's interaction with the wider Canadian society. This orientation could be considered a narrow understanding of the issue concerning integration with mainstream Canadian society. In addition to challenges related to cultural differences as discussed above, Muslims in Canada face more serious daily challenges as they interact with the wider society. For example, Zine (2007) believes that many new-comers from the Muslim world face issues in Canada due to differences in cultural social norms such as consuming alcohol, dating, and premarital relations. In addition, Merry (2005) indicates that many Muslim students in the public system face further cultural challenges including issues related to gender sensitivity, such as modest dress (e.g.,

the hijab), sanctioned food (halal), provisions for prayer, and character education. As Zine (2007) discusses, Muslim communities in Canada seek to protect their children and youth from the negative outside influences of the dominant culture, while at the same time striving to integrate positively with the wider society

One teacher also emphasised that the BCMS program focuses on teaching Islamic manners, developing good citizenship skills, promoting solidarity and brotherhood among Muslims all over the world, and celebrating Islamic events only. The teacher noted that they do not teach students about non-Islamic cultures, instead briefly mentioning such cultures in a very insignificant manner. This teacher's main focus is to discourage students from celebrating non-Islamic events such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day in order to protect them from non-Islamic influences:

We also teach students Islamic manners and behaviour on a daily basis. We also teach them how to be good citizens on this earth. It does not matter if it's in British Columbia or anywhere else on earth. It's about how to be a good citizen wherever you are, when you are with Muslims or among non-Muslims, how you treat other cultures. We do not specifically teach students about other cultures, we just talk about them in general. We came from different cultures but we are all the same as Muslims. So, there is no difference in your background if you have the same religion. So we treat each other as equals, as brothers and sisters in one unity. But with other cultures, we have to treat them fairly, and it is their choice and we do not offend them if their religion is different than us. Because we also believe that there are other religions that Allah has sent before Islam, but we as Muslims accept Islam for ourselves. We do not exactly expose children that much to other cultures but we celebrate our two main Islamic festivals and when it comes to Canadian celebrations such as Halloween or Christmas we do not celebrate these non-Islamic celebrations.

It is clear from these statements as well as an analysis of curriculum documents (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997) that the BCMS gives high priority to preserving students' Islamic belief system and identity, and providing a safe environment to practice Islam as a way of life. However, it is important to recognize that Halloween, Christmas and Valentine's Day celebrations are extremely popular in Canada, and may have some effect on Muslim children that attend the BCMS. These children are well aware of these celebrations and some of them may be tempted to take part in such events, especially Halloween, with or without the approval of their parents. As a former Islamic education teacher at the BCMS (1992-2007), I remember that during the Halloween season, Islamic education teachers would ask students to put anti-Halloween posters around the school compound. Some of these posters read as follows: Helloween [sic] leads to Hell.

The misspelling is intentional, implying if you celebrate Halloween as a Muslim it may lead you to hellfire in the hereafter. In addition, printed materials that discouraged taking part in celebrating Halloween were distributed to students as well as sent to their parents. However, there was no effective method of measuring the success of such a widespread campaign. Many students still took part in the Halloween celebrations, in some cases with the help of their parents.

In keeping with the relative lack of engagement with wider multicultural issues, an examination and analysis of the curriculum at the BCMS reflects very little evidence of any engagement with multiculturalism (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). In order to put the issue in perspective, the data collected from the interviewees were compared with detailed analysis of the textbooks of the Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS. This analysis concluded that the main aims of the Islamic education are to preserve the Islamic identity of students and cultural heritage and strengthen their belief system (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). For example, each textbook contains a unit called the Islamic code of conduct. The lessons in this unit aim to develop in students' positive attitudes, skills and knowledge that will help them to strengthen their Islamic identity and preserve their belief system. The followings are a few illustrations of some of the topics in the Islamic education curriculum included in the code of conduct: obedience to parents, respecting elders, treating the guest well, safeguarding the rights of neighbours, honesty and truthfulness with everybody, kindness to children, helping the poor and the needy, equality and justice to all, and mediating fairly between people in conflicts, justice, fairness, truthfulness, honesty, and respect for all.

The overall views of these textbooks may strengthen students' Islamic identity and cultural heritage. They may also lead to harmony, respect and better understanding among diverse Muslim communities, as well as a better understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, respecting parents and kindness to children may promote harmony in the family in the micro level. Then, if more families succeed in implementing these qualities of respecting parents and kindness to children, it will create love and respect among Muslims and that may also have a positive impact on the wider non-Muslim Canadian society. In addition, qualities such as respecting elders, treating the guest and the neighbours well, and helping the needy may promote respect within the community at the macro level. Also, developing good manners such as truthfulness, honesty, trust and bravery, may strengthen students' Islamic identity and help them to become good Canadian

citizens. Moreover, the Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS covers topics regarding negative social issues such as suspicion, backbiting, slandering, gossip, jealousy, envy, bribery, dishonesty, unfairness, discrimination and cheating. The Islamic perspective is that eliminating or minimizing these social problems may contribute to building trust, cooperation, and respect within the society in general.

It is evident from the above analysis of the textbooks that there are some qualities that can be considered universal and, which therefore, indirectly promote multicultural competence. Such qualities include equality, justice, fairness, truthfulness, honesty, and respect for all, as analysed in this chapter (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). These qualities aim to develop in students' positive attitudes, skills, and knowledge to strengthen their Islamic identity while leading them to live with others in peace and harmony. As Parekh (2003:1) suggests, Muslims in general respect many Western and other universal values such as equality, freedom of speech, tolerance, and peaceful resolution of differences. However, while the curriculum gives priority to the basic principles of Islam, there is no evidence in the curriculum that it provides the necessary skills and knowledge to develop a strong multicultural competence in the Canadian context. These skills and knowledge are, specifically, to promote understanding, equality, co-existence, harmony, and respect among all Canadians, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, and to eliminate any barrier due to discrimination (Messés & Gardner, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Islamic education curriculum in its present model takes a very narrow approach to developing multicultural competence as it mainly focuses on the Muslim community and issues that concern its members (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). The curriculum seems to be directed to students living in the Muslim world, and emphasises the differences of Muslim society from the society of others (Ramadan, 2004). The priority here is given to ritual technicalities and promotion of a dualistic approach that creates the notion of "us" as opposed to "them" (Ramadan, 2004).

A thorough analysis of the interviews indicates that the interviewees do not consider teaching multicultural competence and preparing students for full participation in the Canadian multicultural society to be an integral part of the Islamic education curriculum, and therefore, is not a priority. Instead, the interviewees consider the main goal of the curriculum to be the basic principles of Islam, to help students adopt Islam as a way of life in a friendly environment and to enhance their Islamic identity and cultural heritage. In other words, the school focuses on the importance of instilling in students qualities that help

them to gain the blessings of Allah in this world and in the hereafter. Such good qualities include kindness and respect to all human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, helping others around them, truthfulness, and honesty. Of course these qualities are universal moral values shared by other religions such as Christianity and Judaism. However, it is surprising to find that while most of the interviewees (except students) are educated professionals who often interact with the wider Canadian society in different capacities, they do not see any merit in making the Islamic program more reflective of the nature of the Canadian multicultural society. This may be because the interviewees considered the BCMS students' interaction with the non-Muslim Canadian population as a low-level priority, as they assumed that Islamic education promotes multicultural competence. For example, an Islamic education teacher at the BCMS remarked that:

There is harmony between teaching Islamic education at the BCMS and Canadian multiculturalism. Muslim students do not need to be taught about multiculturalism, because they live multiculturalism as they are from all over the world and [there is] no contradiction between Islamic education and multiculturalism. Islam teaches how to treat others and how to respect others.

As one parent said:

I send my children to the BCMS because the school provides a very good basic knowledge and information about Islam. It also addresses our own multicultural needs through teachings of the Qur'an.

This is in line with the position of Islam, which encourages its followers to interact with their respective wider societies and to contribute to the improvement of such societies. According to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah (God) be upon him:

The Muslim that interacts with other members of the society and exercises patience in the course of trying to make some improvements is better than the one that isolates himself from the society and does not exercise patience (Ahmad).

The general assumption of interviewees is that the Islamic education at the BCMS promotes multicultural competence, and students have first-hand experience with diversity due to their varied backgrounds. However, the school curriculum provides a very narrow and exclusive understanding of the concept. In the next section we discuss particular perspectives on the issue of compatibility of Islamic education with Canadian multicultural policy and practice, a notion at the heart of the concept of developing multicultural competence among students who attend faith-based schools in a multicultural society. The following section discusses particular perspectives on the issue of isolation. Isolation in

this context means limiting the engagement of students at the BCMS with the wider Canadian multicultural society.

#### **4.3.2 How the BCMS deals with isolation while providing Islamic education for its students**

In a schooling system where the focus is on educating a specific group of students about a specific ideology or culture, and the chance of interacting with the wider society is limited, the school, particularly a Muslim school, is often accused of promoting isolation and discouraging their students from interacting with the wider society, and therefore, breeding extremism and prejudices (Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2005). However, the majority of the interviewees in this study believe that the BCMS does not isolate students from the larger society, and therefore does not limit their participation in Canadian multiculturalism. The isolation in this context means limiting the interaction and inter-cultural integration of the BCMS students with the wider Canadian society. These interviewees justified their reasoning by pointing out that students at the BCMS come from diverse backgrounds, play sports with other schools, go on educational field trips, and visit public libraries and sports facilities. The perception is that the students enjoy an enhanced multicultural competence, and are able to fully integrate with the wider society. As one student remarked:

I am still interacting with people in and out of the school (BCMS). In school, sometimes, we play soccer and basketball matches against other schools. People will respect me for who I am, that I am not trying to run away from Islam.

According to a parent, the issue of isolation is a question of perception:

The school is doing a good job in terms of integration with the Canadian society. Kids interact with other kids from all parts of the world and they learn toleration of each other. Accusing Islamic schools of isolationism is a question of perception. People may perceive that Muslim school students cling among themselves only and do not mix with others. I have seen students from the school that are doing well socially, when they go to the public schools. My daughter is now in public school and has no problem mixing with others; in a few weeks she was able to make many friends.

One teacher suggests that multiculturalism has always been part of the Muslim communities' outlook throughout history, and an Islamic education helps students to develop positive relationships with people of other cultures:

Islamic education at the British Columbia Muslim School does not encourage isolation. On the contrary, Islamic education never encourages isolation. Muslims consist of many cultures. Many people, many languages as well as many different religions lived together in harmony under Islamic states. Islamic history teaches us



tolerance and accepting others. At the school, we strengthen their identity, and then they are comfortable dealing with other people from a strong Islamic background position. They are not feeling inferior, they are not feeling superior and they do not have to feel like they have to imitate anyone.

As one student pointed out, the school encourages its students to participate in extracurricular activities to enhance their multicultural competence “In our school, they let us do many things like go to other peoples’ schools and have sports day over there. They let us have field trips. We do not get stuck in our school”.

According to one parent, the school does not encourage isolation, as the Islamic education program teaches students to respect their neighbours, and students benefit from going to public facilities such as libraries and sports facilities. This parent remarked that:

All private schools do not interact with public schools in general. The British Columbia Muslim School does not isolate students from the public. Parts of the Islamic education teaching is how to deal with your neighbours — Muslims or non-Muslims. The students go to the public libraries, public sports facilities. My two children take swimming lessons. The problem is parents who do not help their children to integrate with the wider society. So the school is doing its part but not the parents.

As one teacher remarked, the school promotes the integration of students with the wider society by teaching them to be good human beings. The problem, says this teacher, is the media, which promotes negative perceptions about Muslims:

Many Muslims come to this country by choice and want to be part of the society. In Islamic studies classes we teach students to be good human beings with a special belief system. That is not isolation. The media promotes wrong perceptions about Muslims. Muslims face discriminations when they apply for jobs.

The non-Muslim teacher interviewed for this study also believes that Canadian multiculturalism is generally tolerant of other cultures and religious beliefs. However, she also believes that Muslim students are isolated from the larger community, and she has suggested a few steps to overcome such isolation:

First, there should be better integration in the curriculum of Islamic education and social studies as well as personal planning. Social studies in Canadian culture are offered in Grades 3, 5, and 9, and that should help kids to see how they fit into Canadian society. Second, another problem is some parents may not help their children integrate with the larger community. They do not let their kids go to community centres. They do not encourage any of their children to mix, and that is where the community and Islamic education department breaks down.

This teacher believes that it takes more than a few trips to public facilities, often under the close supervision of parents, relatives, or community members, to fully develop competence in a multicultural context. She argues that whenever possible, Islamic studies should be integrated with personal planning and social studies. She also advises that students should attend public high schools to better integrate into the wider society.

The British Columbia Muslim School can be a part of the multicultural society in the way it's defined in Canada, up to a point: the end of elementary school. You could teach children the basics of their faith up to elementary level. After that, they have to see how that faith can be practiced in a multicultural society. They have to learn how to deal positively with others and see the tolerance and to be tolerant. After elementary school, students should go to the public school. High school (faith-based school) would isolate students from the broader society. Isolation may lead to a problem. Young adults will learn tolerance and others can learn from them. If you introduce them into the broader society where they meet people from different religions and cultures, then there is more chance for multicultural society working to their advantage as well as vice-versa. And yet they have still had a very good basis for their own religious beliefs, ethics and morality. That should be enough to give them the strength of character, with parents' support and their community support, to withstand peer pressure.

Her viewpoint is that sending students to local public high schools after they have acquired the basics of Islam at the elementary level gives them the opportunity to mix with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. That may give them the opportunity to retain their religious belief and also learn tolerance for others' beliefs and cultures. One parent observed that the school focuses on religious teachings, and does not give enough consideration to multiculturalism, and suggests that teachers should teach Islam in that context. "Teachers of Islamic studies should integrate any positive aspect of the Canadian culture, which reflects sound education or Islamic values".

The literature review of this study also confirmed that the issue of Islamic schools is a highly debated issue (Hewitt, 1997; Lemo, 1999; Merry, 2005). While some proponents suggested these schools may help students maintain their Islamic identity and the heritage of their community (ummah) (Lemo, 1999), some parents oppose Muslim schools in general for several reasons; among them, the lack of ability to integrate into the larger society (isolation), the fear of promoting fundamentalism, and the belief that many of these schools are divisive and intolerant towards non-Muslims (Hewitt, 1997; Merry, 2005). It is undeniable that the nature of Muslim schools will isolate students from the larger student population in mainstream society in one way or another though all religious schools are

subject to such criticism. However, the focus today is more often on Muslim schools due to the irrational fear within some elements of western society (Hewitt, 1997).

Analysis of the Islamic education curriculum at the BCMS, its mission statement, policy document, and the perspectives of interviewees indicated that the curriculum takes a narrow approach in relation to developing multicultural competence. The curriculum mainly focuses on teaching the basic principles of Islam, its practical aspects of faith as well as good manners (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 2000, 1998; Parents' School Handbook, 2005:5; Philips, 1997). This lack of intercultural activity may limit the students' opportunities in tackling prejudice, racism, and cultural ignorance. According to Ramadan (2004), the challenge is that the curriculum of Islamic education in the West in general is limited to the very technical memorization of the Qur'an verses, prophetic traditions, and values without a real spiritual dimension, and also ignores the American and European realities. For example, the content of the curriculum seems to be directed to students living in the Muslim world, and emphasises the differences of these students' society from the society of others (Ramadan, 2004). The priority here is given to ritual technicalities and promotion of a dualistic approach that creates the notion of "us" against "them" (Ramadan, 2004).

Students and teachers at the BCMS indicated that while the school provides a safe and friendly environment to practice Islam, they face challenges in practicing Islam in public, especially in observing the female Islamic dress code (hijab). They attributed such external pressure to wrong perceptions partly created by the media, and global events. Some studies also suggested that this pressure is a result of Islamophobia, following the tragic events of September 11, 2001 (Adams, 2007; Al-Ameen newspaper, December 26, 2008: 1-2; Azmi, 2001). To reduce this overall external pressure, policy makers of Canadian public schools and other government departments should take the responsibility to honour the ideals of Canada's multicultural policy (Canadian Heritage Department, 2006; Messes & Gardner, 2006), to instil in students a better understanding of different groups' rights, and create future generations that strive for equality and social justice. As Bank (1994) and Gosh (2004) indicate, the hope is that today's students will be better equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the goals of multicultural education in the future.

According to Zine (2004), the Muslim Education Network ([www.mentorscanada.com](http://www.mentorscanada.com)) advocates that the responsibility for developing comprehensive policies and programs aimed at creating an environment of multicultural acceptance and tolerance lies with the Canadian public school system. MENTORS advocates that to tackle the issue of Islamo-

phobia for example, Canadian public schools should present Islam from a perspective of peace and social justice, and not from the negative images found in popular media which presents Islam as a religion based on extremism. Public schools should also provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand the politics of marginalized religious identities, and to challenge the Eurocentric focus of the Canadian education system which often alienates Muslim students and others from marginalized cultures.

According to Taylor (1994) the real challenge lies in how to deal with the sense of marginalization without compromising basic liberal-political principles. To address such a challenge, Taylor takes a reconciliatory approach that presents cultural survival, equality, and their acknowledgement as acceptable and collective goals. In the light of the above analysis, the Canadian public school system should provide the skills and knowledge required to accept minority groups and their cultures. The Canadian public education system should present Islam from the perspective of peace and social justice, and not from the perspective of terrorism and extremism as promoted by the media. This approach may reduce the external pressures placed on Muslim students practicing Islam in public, and facilitates their positive integration with the wider Canadian society. The following section will present perspectives on compatibility of the Islamic education program with Canadian multiculturalism in terms of practice

#### **4.3.3 Compatibility of the Islamic education program with Canada's multiculturalism in terms of practice**

In a predominantly secular, multicultural society such as Canada's, faith-based schools, particularly Muslim schools, are scrutinized, and accused of limiting students' participation with the wider society (Azmi, 2001; Hewer, 2001; Merry, 2005). The majority of the interviewees in this study believe that the Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS is compatible with Canada's multicultural system. Parents and educators point out that the BCMS students live and study among a very diverse community of Muslims; that both Canadian society and Islam share universal values such as respecting others, honesty, fairness, and justice; and that the school has been operating in accordance with the government's human rights legislation and the Independent Schools' Act (ISA) (Ministry of Education in BC, 2009) for about 20 years.

One parent sums up this belief:

I do not see any conflict between the Canadian multiculturalism and Islamic education at the BCMS. Most of the conflicts we hear about are misunderstandings, by taking text out of context and presenting it wrong. Canadian multiculturalism

protects individual and group rights. Minority groups enjoy the protection of the Charter of Rights. The minorities should not breach the main principles of Canadian multiculturalism.

Another parent noted that both Islam as it is taught at the BCMS and the Canadian multicultural system discourage any form of prejudice or discrimination, adding that this is a good indication of their compatibility:

Islam abolishes racial superiority. So do Canadian values. They are compatible, but need to be shown in action, and the generation that comes out of Muslim schools should show it when going into the workforce.

The chairman of the BCMS school board argues that an Islamic education is not only compatible with multiculturalism; it enriches it by encouraging equality and coexistence:

The curriculum enhances the idea of multiculturalism and coexistence, which is by nature the teachings of Islam, that is, the belief that God created humanity as one. He made us tribes and nations to know one another, not about superiority.

In addition, the principal of the BCMS indicated that:

Canadian multicultural policy provides a reasonable framework, which could be used as a ground for a dialogue. However, it is important to note that the policy was not developed to accommodate Islamic education. It was developed by minority groups who happened to be from different ethnic groups but share the same faith and a considerable cultural capital with the mainstream society.

The senior non-Muslim teacher at the BCMS gave an account of her experience over the last twenty years. According to her, at the beginning she was not accepted by the Muslim community in general. Her own non-Muslim community also did not approve of her working at a Muslim school. However, through the years, with better interaction and education, the community began accepting her and appreciating her valuable contribution to the school. In her own words:

I went through a series of stages over the last twenty years as a teacher at the British Columbia Muslim School. Working at the BCMS at the beginning was very difficult as I was subjected to discrimination, misunderstanding, and lack of acceptance at the school by the community in general. I had the most problems with parents and with the wider members of the Muslim community. However, the administration and Islamic education teachers were supportive, understanding and helpful. Now, with tolerance and education things are better. The new generation is more accepting. Often, my personal friends did not like the idea of me working at a Muslim school. They were inclined to believe the stereotypes. However, they also have changed over the years, and with education are more tolerant. I believe that the good thing about the school is it employs non-Muslims, unlike the Catholic

schools that employ only Catholics. This is one way to introduce students to people of different belief systems and break down religious barriers.

This teacher's experience can be taken as evidence of the impact of education, mutual understanding, and practical multicultural experience in reducing prejudices and wrong perceptions, and promoting mutual respect. Having worked with this teacher for 14 years, I can recall numerous incidents of unwarranted prejudices and misunderstandings against her in the early years of her appointment, due mainly to the ignorance of both parties. However, the latter years were full of positive experiences in interacting and working together. Education and a better understanding of different perspectives were important factors in promoting mutual understanding in this case.

As an Islamic education teacher puts it:

There is harmony between Islamic teachings at the BCMS and Canadian multiculturalism because they [students] live multiculturalism. There is no contradiction between their education and multiculturalism in Canada. Islam teaches how to treat others and how to respect them.

Also, one parent said:

I send my children to the BCMS because the school provides a very good basic knowledge and information about Islam. It also addresses our own multicultural needs through teachings of the Qur'an.

This is in line with the position of Islam, which encourages its followers to interact with their respective wider societies and to contribute to the improvement of such societies. According to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah (God) be upon him:

The Muslim that interacts with other members of the society and exercises patience in the course of trying to make some improvements is better than the one that isolates himself from the society and does not exercise patience (Ahmad).

It is important to report that the views expressed by the interviewees are in agreement with some research findings which conclude that Muslims in general have positive views about Canada. According to Adams (2007), the vast majority of Muslims (94%) say they are proud to be Canadians (the national average is 93%). Canadian Muslims love many Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, multiculturalism, and peace (Adams, 2007:95). That of course does not mean Canadian Muslims do not face some challenges including discrimination, prejudice, unemployment, and underemployment. However, they put issues in perspective as they focus on their overall living conditions. Canadian Muslims

in general are satisfied to be living in Canada where their overall quality of life is high and where they are better off than many fellow Muslims in other Western countries as well as in their own birth countries (Adams, 2007: 97-102). While Canada is considered the most tolerant country in the Western world according to some international surveys, where it ranked at the top in welcoming minority groups like Muslims (Canada Immigration Newsletter, February 2007), still the majority of non-Muslim Canadians, have expressed some concerns about lack of integration of some minority groups including Muslims with the wider society (Adams, 2007). They believe that some immigrants such as Muslims are not willing to adopt the Canadian way of life. For example, according to 57% of Canadians, Muslims are not open to adopting the Canadian norms and way of life. A majority of Canadians also believe that Muslims wish to maintain their own identity and be distinct. It is also important to mention that 57% of the Canadian Muslims believed that their fellow Muslims are committed to fully integrating with Canadian society, and an additional 13% believed that Muslims wish to positively integrate with Canadian society while at the same time remaining as a distinct community (Adams, 2007). That means seven in ten Muslims in Canada believed that their fellow Muslims are interested in positively integrating with the wider Canadian society:

The disjunction between how Muslims view their own desire to integrate and how other Canadians view it is pronounced: while Muslims see themselves as wanting to participate in and adapt to Canadian society, the population at large tends to doubt this willingness. It's precisely the underlying anxiety about minority religious group's willingness to integrate that infuses more superficial debates (such as those about clothing) with such passion and fear (Adams, 2007:95).

The persons interviewed for this study are seemingly in agreement with these findings in relation to the perception of Muslims about Canada and the perception of the mainstream population about Canadian Muslims (Adams, 2007). According to the interviewees, the most appealing values about Canada are its commitment to the protection of individual and group rights through the Charter of Rights, abolishing notions of racial superiority, as well as the commitment to equality among all humans. As indicated earlier, Canadian Muslims in general love many Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, multiculturalism, and peace (Adams, 2007:95).

The implication here is that Canadian Muslims, including the BCMS community, love Canada in theory, as long as it accommodates their religious and cultural aspirations. However, in practice their dissatisfaction with the Canadian multicultural system begins when it

comes to accepting or simply understanding some of the practices in Canada such as Halloween, Christmas or Valentine's Day that clearly contradict Islamic teachings. For example, one of the parents expressed his happiness with the Canadian multicultural system, especially with its Charter of Rights that protects minority groups' rights. However, this parent became very critical of some of Canada's practices when they contradict with his religious or cultural values:

If I put my kids in a public school, where the majority is celebrating Halloween, then they [my children] do not feel like they are part of the community because they do not celebrate those celebrations and that will reflect on their Islamic identity. First of all they are Muslims and then they are Canadians. I have no problem interacting with the outside community, but the Islamic identity has to be preserved, and it's really important, especially in the early ages. So, if I put them in a Muslim school, there will be no social pressure on them.

As is clear from the previous discussions in this section, even though Muslims favour many core Canadian values, there is a ground for frequent tensions and mistrust between the majority of the population and the Muslim minority in Canada. Possible causes of such tensions have been attributed to perceptions created by the media as described by some interviewees, as well as philosophical differences as discussed in the literature review of this study, where clearly the Canadian multiculturalism is based on a liberal / secular perspective that separates religion from politics (Kymlicka, 2006). The following chapter presents general analysis and discussions of the findings regarding developing a better understanding of multicultural competence amongst students of the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS).

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter focused on the challenges and opportunities in implementing an Islam-based educational system in the context of Canada's multicultural policy and practice, as represented by the British Columbia Muslim School. It analysed the views of teachers, parents, students, administration and the school board, and established that the majority of the interviewees want the Islamic education program at the school to provide the necessary skills and knowledge to develop a strong Islamic identity and belief and to prepare them to adopt Islam as a way of life. They further want the program to indirectly help students enhance their multicultural knowledge and skills.

The study further found that the majority of interviewees strongly link the notion of multicultural competence to the diversity of the population at the BCMS. They assumed



that since students at the school come from different backgrounds, they are automatically competent in multiculturalism. However, the study established that is not the case. Even though students at the school are very diverse linguistically, racially, culturally, and nationally, the interviewees overlooked the fact that they are all Muslims, and their shared faith is the most important uniting factor among them, as it is among Muslims world-wide. As discussed in the study, Islam promotes solidarity and unity among its followers under the concept of brotherhood or ummah (one community or nation).

Students at the BCMS need more exposure to multiculturalism to develop more competence. One way of expanding the students' multicultural competence in addition to participation in school field trips, is to visit public facilities such as libraries and sports facilities. The concepts of Islamic manners should be expanded to also include the concept of multiculturalism and preparing students to be good Canadians as well as good Muslims.

Some interviewees, especially females, indicated that they face some external challenges in practicing Islam in public due to negative media presentations, wrong public perceptions and world events in presenting Islam. The study established that there are still some gaps between Muslims and mainstream Canadian society.

Interviewees expressed a great deal of interest in positively integrating with the wider society, regardless of prejudices and discrimination. They are very positive about the compatibility of Islamic education with Canadian multicultural policy and practice. They love many of the general Canadian values such as respecting and protecting individual and minority rights but were quick to refrain from participating in some Canadian practices such as Halloween, Christmas and Valentine's Day. It appeared that they are happy with the Canadian values as long as such values do not contradict Islamic values, and in any conflict between the two systems, they favour Islam. However, since multicultural engagement requires two way negotiation and compromise, the above interviewees should realize that others' values and cultures are important as theirs, and therefore, they have to find a way to respect other cultures without giving up their own cultural values.

The majority of the mainstream Canadian population expressed some concerns about the lack of willingness of some minority groups, including Muslims, to integrate with the wider society. They believed that Canadian Muslims are not genuinely committed to fully integrating with the wider society, or to adopting Canadian values. Such negativity is due to mistaken impressions of Islam, as depicted in the media, as well as global events mostly involving Western military interventions in Muslim countries. However, developing a mu-

tual better understanding is possible, and could be achieved through education, modification of the Islamic education program to include lessons about other cultures and religions including English, French, Chinese, Indian and Aboriginal cultures, better interaction opportunities, and more effective and accurate portrayals of Islam in the media.

The following chapter will focus on general reflections: moving the debate forward.

## Chapter 5: Moving the Debate Forward

### 5.1 Introduction

This is an overarching analytical chapter that focuses on general analysis and discussions of the findings. It tries to bring all the findings together to develop a better understanding of the multicultural competence among the students of the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS). In asking how to instil multicultural competence in terms of a multicultural model, the chapter will utilize Taylor's (1994) multicultural liberal theory, "politics of recognition", that promotes giving equal recognition to all cultures. This model could help in developing a better mutual understanding that accommodates both the desires of Canada's multicultural system and the needs of Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS.

The chapter will also use Ramadan's (2004) model for Muslims in the West, which proposes developing an Islamic education curriculum that focuses on finding a balance between preserving students' Islamic faith and identity and developing their respective national identity. According to this model, the current Islamic education curriculum and teaching methodology in the West has not yet provided students with the necessary skills and knowledge to face the challenges of their societies. This curriculum ignores the Western society's realities, and seems to be directed to students living in the Muslim world, thus emphasising the differences between Muslim society and that of others. This chapter will also focus on the implications, recommendations, and conclusions of this study. It was not until well into my interviews and discussions for this dissertation that I began to see the emergence of two main themes that arose directly from the voices of my interviewees. The first theme focuses on how Islamic education is perceived at the BCMS, expressed through the thoughts and impressions of teachers, the principal, parents and students about how the school teaches the principles of Islam, and helps students to adopt an Islamic way of life, strengthening their identity and cultural heritage as Muslims.

The second theme focuses on issues of the compatibility of an Islamic education within Canada's multicultural society, exploring both the challenges and the opportunities such a society affords.

In Chapter 4 I raised several questions about the practical implications of integrating a Muslim-based education in Canada's secular, multicultural society. In the following section I will attempt to address each of these questions as specifically as possible. In the process, I hope that these themes will merge into a coherent view towards a future in which a student educated in the Muslim faith and traditions can embrace, without compromise, the best promises of a truly inclusive multicultural society such as Canada aspires to be.

### **5.1.1 Addressing the questions one by one**

#### **1. What are the goals of the Islamic education program as viewed by students, teachers, parents and policy makers of the British Columbia Muslim School?**

The BCMS is in the front line in creating a safe environment from negative, non-Islamic influences in the public schools and society at large. The work of the British Columbia Muslim Association in establishing the BCMS in 1984 is essential because it illustrates how committed this organization is to Islamic education, establishing the first Muslim school in Western Canada, and becoming a major catalyst for other schools in British Columbia. The BCMS plays an important role in providing students with the opportunity to fill the gap between a Muslim lifestyle and the secular world of the public schools in providing an environment that is free of racial and religious discrimination.

#### **2. How does the British Columbia Muslim School deal with the issue of isolation that faith-based schools in general, and Muslim schools in particular, are accused of?**

It could be argued that the main reason for the harmony among the students of the BCMS is their shared faith. Most of the interviewees I spoke with believe that, far from being isolated, students at the BCMS are well-equipped to take their place in a multicultural society. The assumption of the interviewees is that when students learn Islamic values such as respecting others, truth, honesty, justice for all, and equality, they become good Muslims, and consequently develop multicultural competence and minimize the impact of isolation. Maybe, however, expanding the multicultural horizons of students would improve their integration with the wider society. That viewpoint may reflect wishful thinking on the part of the parents, teachers and administrators at the BCMS. The study found that most of the parents, educators, and students interviewed

have a narrow interpretation and understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. Most of the interviewees want the Islamic education program to focus on the basic principles of Islam such as the five pillars of Islam, the belief in Allah, the revealed books, and the prophets to prepare students to be good practicing Muslims who adopt Islam as a way of life. Although some interviewees suggested that Islamic education is related to multicultural ideals such as kindness, respect to all, helping all human beings, and truthfulness, it can be argued that this narrow focus promotes only a low level, indirect multicultural competence (Ghosh, 2004). Interviewees seemed uninterested in providing explicit multicultural competence for the students of the BCMS. At this time it seems unlikely that the BCMS will provide the necessary skills and knowledge that will help students develop a respect for diversity and the skills to integrate into a multicultural society readily and positively

### **3. Is the Islamic education provided by the British Columbia Muslim School compatible with Canadian multicultural educational practices?**

The simple answer to this question is “yes”, but with some reservations. The study found that the majority of the interviewees in this study believe the Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS is generally compatible with Canada’s multicultural system. Parents and educators point out that the BCMS students live and study among a very diverse community of Muslims; that both Canadian society and Islam share some universal values such as respecting others, honesty, fairness, and justice; and that the school has been operating in accordance with the government’s human rights legislation and the Independent Schools Act (Ministry of Education in BC, 2009) for about 20 years.

These interviewees appreciate many core Canadian values, such as protection of minority rights, human rights, justice, fairness, and equality which are all ensured under the Canadian Charter of Rights, because these values accommodate their way of life and preservation of their cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, there are gaps and potential grounds for tensions between Islamic education, as practiced at the BCMS and Canada’s multicultural system. In some cases, philosophical differences between multiculturalism ideals and Islamic traditions are contributing factors in such tensions. For example, the study found that some interviewees reject some popular practices in Canada such as Halloween, Christmas and Valentine’s

Day, without showing an understanding or recognition of the differences found in a multicultural society.

The dissatisfaction with Canada's multicultural system begins when some elements of this system contradict Islamic education principles as illustrated in the above examples. In such cases, interviewees prefer to maintain their loyalty to Islam and want the Islamic education to protect their children from negative non-Islamic influences.

Exacerbating the issue are the negative perceptions fostered by popular media about Islam, global issues, and the involvement of a small number of Muslims in terrorist activities.

#### **4. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing an Islamic-based education system in the Canadian context?**

The study found that the interviewees have a very narrow understanding of the concept of multiculturalism in Canada. These interviewees perceived that since students who attend the BCMS come from very diverse backgrounds and since Islam as a religion promotes multiculturalism, students should be automatically competent in terms of multicultural skills. These interviewees felt that the diversity in language, nationality, and race of students' population at the BCMS is sufficient to help these students develop multicultural competence. The interviewees clearly overlooked a main factor in this regard, which is religious diversity.

In any case, this is an issue that could be disputed: Is diversity of any kind alone good enough to promote multicultural competence? Is following Islam as a faith alone good enough to help students develop competence in multiculturalism in the Canadian context? Some could argue that even though students at BCMS are very diverse linguistically, racially, culturally, and nationally, they are all Muslims, and Islam is the most important uniting factor among these students.

I believe that rather than encouraging Islamic students to reject popular practices such as Christmas, Halloween and Valentine, it would be more reasonable to help them understand and recognize that other cultures and beliefs are as important as their own. Such an open-minded approach towards other cultures may help these students develop the necessary skills and knowledge for multicultural competence (Messés & Gardner, 2006). The challenge is that the curriculum of Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS has not been successful in finding a balance between helping students to preserve their Islamic

identity and at the same time to maintain their Canadian national identity (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997).

This challenge is not limited to the BCMS, but rather it is a common challenge that other Muslim schools in the West also face. According to Ramadan (2004), the Islamic education curriculum and teaching methodology in the West has not provided students with the necessary skills and knowledge to face the challenges posed by their societies. He observes that, for example, the curriculum is limited to the very technical memorization of the Qur'an verses, prophetic traditions, and values, and ignores the North American and European realities. The content of the curriculum seems to be directed to students living in the Muslim world, and emphasises the differences of these students' society from the society of others. The priority here is given to ritual technicalities and promotion of a dualistic approach (Ramadan, 2004).

It would be a mistake to argue that Islamic education program does not teach any multicultural competence skills, since the program promotes qualities such as respect for others that indirectly lead to multicultural competence. However, a high level of multicultural competence requires, in addition to respect for others, an understanding of, and willingness to take responsibility for the rights of others (Canadian Heritage Department, 2006; Esses & Gardner, 2006).

The students at the BCMS need more than their faith to develop the skills and knowledge to interact positively with the wider Canadian society. They need to interact more with non-Muslims, and to learn about the cultures and beliefs of diverse communities and to be exposed to different perspectives and cultures. Providing a broader opportunity for students in a multicultural society may broaden their horizons and help them, develop some multicultural competence skills in general (Banks, 1994; Ghosh, 2004). The following sections will focus on towards developing multicultural tolerance among Canadian society in general.

### **5.1.2 Towards developing multicultural tolerance among Canadian society in general**

This section will present a general analysis and discussion regarding developing a better understanding of multicultural competence amongst students of British Columbia Muslim School.

As Kymlicka (2001) notes, the Canadian multicultural system appears neutral on the surface but in reality it favours the dominant groups. Kymlicka (2001) further observes

that “it is the majority language that is used in public institutions, the majority holidays that are recognized in the public calendar, and the majority history that is taught in schools” (P. 43). Also Azmi (2001) notes that, the liberal multicultural discussion mainly focuses on issues that are related to public institutions, and often addresses the needs of secular ethnic minorities. It often does not accommodate the aspirations and needs of diverse ideologically-motivated minorities who feel that current policies and institutions marginalize their values and beliefs (Azmi, 2001).

In spite of the above, Taylor’s (1994) multicultural liberal theory, entitled “politics of recognition”, suggests developing a mutual better understanding that satisfies the needs of both Canada’s multicultural system and Islamic education, such as that practiced at the BCMS. Grounding his analysis around Canada’s Charter of Rights introduced in 1984, which guarantees equal treatment of citizens in all aspects of life, and protects citizens against any form of discrimination, Taylor promotes a liberal model that is organized around preserving a collective goal of protecting unique cultures while respecting diversity and basic rights at the same time. This model of a liberal society provides a better balance between maintaining certain forms of uniform treatment and preserving cultural survival, especially in modern multicultural societies (Taylor, 1994:61). Cultural variations, for example, will be accommodated in applying a schedule of rights, excluding murder, or disrupting the peace, as in the case of author Salman Rushdie in the United Kingdom (Taylor, 1994: 61-62). Taylor’s model is not only open to recognizing the value of different cultures as found in Canadian society, but it also recognizes their worth as cultures that deserve acknowledgement.

Taylor remarks that:

It is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings of diverse characters and temperaments over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable — are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps one could put it another way: it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility a priori (1994:66).

This model may contribute to promoting positive integration of minority groups with the wider Canadian society. It may also help in reducing marginalization, prejudice and discrimination against the cultures and faiths of minorities in the context of Canada’s multicultural society. Furthermore, Taylor’s model offers the opportunity for people of different backgrounds to co-exist and live in peace with one another, while working to-



wards achieving the common good while preserving their own unique backgrounds. Another model that could offer a mutual understanding that accommodates both the desires of Canada's multicultural system and the need of Islamic education is Ramadan's model, entitled "Muslims in the West, 2004". While this model's emphasis is on preserving the Islamic identity of students and their cultural heritage in the West, it also proposes making the Islamic education reflective of the realities of Western multicultural societies. Ramadan's model further proposes negating Islamic education curricula developed for Muslim children in the Muslim world, and instead developing a curriculum that prepares students to find a balance between their Islamic identity and loyalty to their respective nations.

Muslims may not accept some non-Muslim values, cultures, or beliefs; however, they may have to demonstrate understanding and recognition of other ways of life. Indeed that is the aim of Canada's multicultural policy, which focuses on the survival of ethnic groups and their cultures, tolerance of diversity, and eliminating prejudice against ethnic minorities (Messés & Gardner, 2006). As Gosh (2004) notes, promoting multicultural competence is a challenging task that requires ongoing dialogue among the different cultures that comprise Canadian society. Fostering respect for other cultures may help students as adults participate in creating a just and fair society where human rights are respected and protected (Gosh, 2004). Also, Kubow, Grossman & Nonomiya, (2000) and Lee (2002) argue that success in this endeavour requires a better understanding of diversity and a celebration of differences as strengths, not weaknesses.

Developing multicultural competence means that both parties are willing to engage in a fruitful dialogue to create a peaceful society that coexists harmoniously with one another (Banks, 1994). Engaging in such a positive two-way dialogue between Canadian Muslims and non-Muslims (including those interviewed for this study) may help in bridging the gap and reduce tensions created by negative media influences, the impact of some global events, and the isolated actions of a small number of Muslims (Adams, 2007). Such actions, while totally abhorrent and unjustified, might be fuelled by events such as the infamous Guantanamo prison, the Abu Ghraib scandals and invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Modood, 2007). As Modood (2007) states, any positive change must come from both sides, as multiculturalism is a two-way conversation.

For example, Islam as a religion promotes solidarity, unity, and brotherhood among Muslims under the concept of one ummah (one nation). The Qur'an considers all Muslims as brothers (and sisters): "Believers are nothing but brothers" (Qur'an, 49:10). In order to

strengthen the brotherhood, Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to support one another in personal and collective affairs. He considered the best believer to be the one who often helps his/her Muslim brother in all worldly affairs. By helping fellow Muslims in need, one will qualify to receive Allah's blessings during challenging times, as promised by Prophet Muhammad (PBUP): "Allah (God) always supports the Muslim that supports fellow Muslims" (Shaikh, 1996:86). To strengthen such solidarity and collective commitment to Islam, the Islamic education program at the BCMS, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), presents Islam as a way of life that aims at establishing an ideological community (ummah) with universal principles based on the teaching of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Halstead, 2004). These sources establish not only the spiritual and ethical guidelines, but also make Islam the primary source of identity for its followers. The ideals of Islam are to provide cohesion and solidarity, which enable its members to establish common institutions such as mosques and schools (Halstead, 2004).

### **5.1.3 The role of Islamic education in fostering tolerance**

The Islamic education program at the BCMS should expand its discussion of respecting others, their rights, beliefs, and cultures. Because Islamic manners in general include respect for others, this could provide an opportunity to extend the notion of being a good Muslim to include qualities that also promote good citizenship and respect for the rights of others. It would be a mistake to argue that Islamic education program does not teach any multicultural competence skills, since the program promotes qualities such as respect for others that indirectly lead to multicultural competence. However, a high level of multicultural competence requires, in addition to respect for others, an understanding of, and willingness to take responsibility for the rights of others (Canadian Heritage Department, 2006; Esses & Gardner, 2006).

The question that arises from this discussion is how the Islamic education as practiced at the BCMS can develop the multicultural competence of students in the context of Canada's multicultural system. I believe that a modification of the curriculum could reflect the reality of multiculturalism. Such a modification could be in the form of additional units that address other cultures and faith groups in the Canadian mosaic, as well as international communities. These cultures could include the First Nations, English, French, Chinese, Indian, and other groups. Emerick's approach may contribute to enhancing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards tolerance, respect, and better understanding of others' beliefs and cultures (Emerick, 1998, 2000). For example, the following illustrates

some of the lessons Emerick discusses in his books: respecting others' beliefs, freedom of belief, respecting diversity, tolerance of differences, justice, equality and respect for human rights. Also, Emerick sheds some light on the great need for enhancing the students' multicultural competence and better understanding of diversity as well as equality and justice. Emerick further suggests that regardless of our differences in terms of beliefs, Islam teaches its followers to respect diversity in belief and culture (2000). However, Emerick's attempt at increasing students' understanding and appreciation for diversity is mainly in theory, and represents only a small step in such direction.

I believe more participation in extracurricular activities, visiting public libraries and public sports facilities, modifying the content of the Islamic education curriculum to be more relevant to the Canadian context, and integrating the curriculum with the Canadian social studies program could contribute to enhancing the students' positive integration with the wider society. It may also reduce fears that the BCMS isolates its students from the wider society, thereby contributing to extremism. The following section will focus on the implications of this study for the nature of providing Islamic education at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural system.

#### **5.1.4 Implications for this study**

This study has some theoretical, methodological and practical implications for the nature of providing Islamic education as provided at the BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural system.

##### **1. Theoretical Implications**

First, in terms of theoretical implications, the research suggests that the multicultural theory ignored including religion in the ongoing discussion related to diversity and multiculturalism in line with race and ethnicity (Modood, 2005). Currently, multicultural theory is based on Western liberal/secular principles that promote accommodating minority groups as long as they are in agreement with Western political principles (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994). Religion in this perspective is not directly an essential consideration (Azmi, 2001). Consequently, religion is alienated and excluded from theoretical discussions (Franklin & Brummelen, 2006). The research concludes that excluding religion from multicultural theoretical discussions may hinder realization of religious groups in preserving their cultures and identities (Modood, 2005). It may also hinder these groups' positive integration with wider societies. In the context of this research, all interviewees suggested

that practicing Islam in public presents challenges that are partially due to external pressures from the majority culture, and partially due to negative perceptions fostered by the media. Examples of some challenges are illustrated in performing the five daily prayers and observing the mandatory Islamic dress code (hijab) for women in public. These interviewees are often caught in the middle, between fitting into mainstream society along with different cultures, and preserving their Islamic culture and identity. Therefore, researchers should be aware of the importance of including religion in theoretical multicultural discussions in line with ethnicity and race (Modood, 2005).

Second, this research further suggests that while the philosophy of Islamic education in theory aims at forming an identity that is based on faith (Abdullah, 1982), there is no fully developed model applicable to Muslim schools in the West or in the Muslim world (Ramadan, 2004). Muslim schools provide two parallel education programs (religious and secular) (Ramadan, 2004). As a consequence, it can be concluded that the theory of Islamic education has not been able to present a practical model applicable to modern societies that leads to forming an Islamic identity in the context of Western multicultural societies or in countries where Muslims constitute majority of the population (Ramadan, 2004). In the context of the BCMS, the Islamic education program is not designed to provide an education system based on the philosophy of Islamic education. Rather, it provides two parallel educational programs — religious and secular.

## **2. Methodological Implications**

In methodological terms, the research affirms the importance of conducting multiple and follow-up interviews with participants in research studies (Creswell, 2007). This could help researchers fill possible gaps, explain reasons for contradictions and gain better understanding of participants' experiences in different settings in contrast. In the context of this research study, the follow-up interviews I conducted with BCMS students at a later time while they were in public schools (in Gr.8) gave students the opportunity to describe their experiences at public schools in contrast to their experiences at BCMS (in Gr. 6 and 7). This research concludes that such students reported facing challenges in public schools regarding preserving their religious identity such as wearing hijab (headscarf) for girls, performing prayer (for both sexes), consuming halal food and male-female relationships. As a consequence, this research affirms the importance of conducting follow-up interviews at a later time to explore participants' experiences in different settings in contrast.

Second, the research further suggests that researchers have to ensure validity and reliability of their research studies (Canon, 2010). Analysing multiple documents such as curricular guidelines, mission statements and textbooks, as well as conducting in-depth interviews may help researchers achieve the above goal (Creswell, 2007). As a consequence, this research indicates that constantly comparing and contrasting data collected provides a check on validity, and allows the discovery of distortions or inaccurate representation of the data (Hutchinson, 1988). In this study, I accomplished this through the process of triangulation, using multiple sources to provide corroborating evidence to shed some light on the nature of providing Islamic education as found at BCMS in the context of Canada's multicultural society. These sources included analysing Islamic education curricular guidelines and textbooks, school mission statement and objectives, and data collected through interviews and follow-up interviews.

Third, this research suggests that researchers have to be careful with gaining access to schools while conducting research studies (Creswell, 2007). Researchers studying their organizations in particular need to exercise extra care, as they may face potential challenges such as jeopardizing their jobs if participants they interview reveal unfavourable data, or disclose private information that could have a negative influence on the organization (Creswell, 2007). However, this research suggests that researchers with in-depth knowledge and experience of institutions, participants and subjects under study may have the advantage to gain access to inside or hidden information that may not be available for outside researchers. In the context of this study, my extensive knowledge of Islamic studies and positive relationships with colleagues and parents at BCMS played a major role in gaining access to valuable information that enriched this research study. As a consequence, this approach could help researchers to appropriately interpret views, ideas, assumptions, and meanings of school documents.

### **3. Practical Implications**

First, there is a challenge in how to practically implement the theory of Islamic education in our modern setting, and how forming an Islamic identity based on such a theory could be achieved, especially in the context of Canada's multicultural society (Ramadan, 2004).

Second, a practical balance should be found between teaching Muslim students the basic principles of Islam, and strengthening their Islamic identity and enhancing their multicultural competence in a diverse society (Ramadan, 2004). The content of the curricu-

lum of Islamic education in the West seems to emphasise the differences between these students and others (Ramadan, 2004). The study suggests that the priority at the BCMS is given to ritual technicalities and promotion of a dualistic approach that creates the notion of “us” against “them”. Therefore, there is a need to develop an Islamic education curriculum that is multicultural in nature which fits the thinking and the environment of Muslim children in the West.

Third, the interpretations and meanings of the curricular unit on Islamic manners taught at the BCMS should be expanded (Abdul-Aziz, 1992; Emerick, 1998, 2000; Philips, 1997). While this unit covers universally positive qualities such as kindness, honesty, respect to all, and helping others, the focus remains Muslim, and promotes only a low level, indirect multicultural competence. The discussion on this unit should be expanded to cover the concept of respecting others’ rights, beliefs, and cultures, extending the notion of being a good Muslim to include qualities that also promote intercultural competence. In addition to respect for others, multicultural competence requires an understanding of, and a willingness to take responsibility for the rights of others, a sensitivity that would help Muslim students integrate successfully with the wider Canadian society.

Fourth, current public school policies and curricula in Canada should adequately address issues of multicultural acceptance and tolerance, by, for instance, tackling the question of Islamophobia ( Zine, 2004). The public schools should present Islam from a perspective of peace and social justice, and not from the negative images that present Islam as a religion based on extremism. These schools should also provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand the politics of marginalized religious identities, and to challenge the Eurocentric focus of the Canadian education system which often alienates Muslim students and others from marginalized cultures (Zain, 2004). The study concludes that the Islamic education program at the BCMS provides for its students the necessary skills and knowledge to practice Islam at the school and in public. However, some students may neglect practicing Islam in public, due to discrimination, peer-pressure and the media, which promotes negative perceptions about Muslims.

The following section will present the limitations of this study.

### **5.1.5 Limitations of this study**

The literature review of this study has revealed that the Islamic point of view on education takes a balanced approach that promotes integration, which aims at producing a well-rounded person who is not only faithful to God, but also equipped with a modern education

for success in everyday life (Abdullah, 1982). Islam further considers education as a process which requires the involvement of the whole body with all its components. In this approach, all subjects must be taught from an Islamic viewpoint "The dualism in the curriculum is not an inherent aspect of the Qur'anic outlook where it exists; it is to be attributed to socio-political factors, both internal and external" (Abdullah, 1982:138). However, while the philosophy of Islamic education in theory aims at forming an identity that is based on faith, there is no fully developed model applicable to Muslim schools in the West as well as in the Muslim world. In the context of the BCMS, the Islamic education program is not designed to provide an education system based on the philosophy of Islamic education. Rather, it provides two parallel educational programs — religious and secular. Nevertheless, the perceptions of the interviewees focused on strengthening the students' belief system and Islamic identity. Also, these interviewees did not view the concept of multicultural competence as a priority. Therefore, the main limitation of this study remains its inability to present a model of Islamic education applicable to modern societies that leads to forming an Islamic identity which is in harmony with other national identities in Western multicultural societies. Based on this limitation, the following are some recommendations for future research.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

First, there is a need for further research on the applicability of the theory of Islamic education in our modern setting, and how forming an Islamic identity based on such a theory could be achieved, especially in the context of Canada's multicultural society.

Second, while aiming to provide an in-depth analysis, this study consisted of selected participants from a single school, and thus cannot be considered to be representative of other Muslim schools in general. A larger selection of data obtained from a broader selection of Muslim schools in Canada may uncover a wider range of challenges and opportunities in providing an Islamic education in Canada's multicultural society. A study of this kind becomes more important in view of the reality that Canadian-Muslims are still among the least studied minorities in Canada in general (Elmasri, 2005). A further, more wide-ranging study may also shed some light on how Canada's multicultural policies and practice could better accommodate the needs, values, and beliefs of diverse ideologically-motivated religious minorities who feel marginalized by their values (Azmi, 2001). As a

newly emerging phenomenon, Muslim involvement in the West will continue to experience the transition from a static to a more integrative approach by future generations.

Third, further research is needed to find a balance between teaching Muslim students the basic principles of Islam, and strengthening their Islamic identity and enhancing their multicultural competence in a diverse society. The content of the curriculum of Islamic education in the West seems to emphasise the differences between these students and others (Ramadan, 2004). The priority at the BCMS is given to ritual technicalities and promotion of a dualistic approach that creates the notion of “us” against “them”. Therefore, there is a need for further research to develop an Islamic education curriculum that is Canadian in nature, which fits the thinking and the environment of Muslim children in Canada. Additional research should also explore the possibilities of integrating Islamic education with Canadian public schools’ social studies curriculum to address cultures and faiths of other groups in Canada. The Islamic identity must be shaped in the context of Canada’s multicultural society to help students see themselves as Canadian Muslims, rather than as Muslims in Canada.

Fourth, it would be useful to conduct a new study to expand the interpretations and meanings of the curricular unit on Islamic manners taught at the BCMS. While this unit covers universally positive qualities such as kindness, honesty, respect to all, and helping others, the focus remains Muslim, and promotes only a low level, indirect multicultural competence. Further study would explore the possibility of expanding the discussion to cover the concept of respecting others’ rights, beliefs, and cultures, extending the notion of being a good Muslim to include qualities that also promote multicultural competence. In addition to respect for others, multicultural competence requires an understanding of, and a willingness to take responsibility for the rights of others, a sensitivity that would help Muslim students integrate successfully with the wider Canadian society.

Fifth, additional follow-up study is needed to examine the extent of external pressures placed on Muslim students when they attempt to practice Islam in public. Students and teachers at the BCMS indicated that while the school provides a safe and friendly environment to practice their faith, they face challenges in public, especially in observing the female Islamic dress code (hijab). They attributed such difficulties to wrong perceptions partly created by the media, and global events. It would be useful to examine in detail the role played by media and global events in creating a negative environment for Muslim students attempting to practice their faith in public.



Finally, future research should be conducted to determine whether the current public school policies and curricula in Canada are adequately addressing issues of multicultural acceptance and tolerance, for instance, tackling the question of Islamophobia. Do the schools present Islam from a perspective of peace and social justice, or from the negative images that present Islam as a religion based on extremism? The research should also explore in depth how public schools in Canada provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand the politics of marginalized religious identities, and to challenge the Eurocentric focus of the Canadian education system which often alienates Muslim students and others from marginalized cultures. It would be a useful to conduct studies that could compare Muslim students who attend Islamic schools in Canada with Muslim students who are in the public school system or who have both Muslim and public school experiences. Furthermore, it might be interesting to see how the experiences of students who graduate from Muslim schools differ from the experiences of students who graduate from public schools, or who have a dual experience, with regard to practicing Islam in public. The following section will focus on the conclusion of this research study.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

There are few studies published about Muslim schools in Canada, or in North America in general. Among the studies that do exist, few recognize the complexity of providing Islamic education in a multicultural society. This study is an attempt to unravel this complexity, using the British Columbia Muslim School (BCMS) as its example, although I recognize that my work falls short of giving due recognition to the BCMS experience,

It is not a secret that faith-based schools in general, and Muslim schools in particular, are frequently accused of isolating their students from the wider society, hindering these students' positive integration with the wider society. Because of the perception of a narrow orientation, these schools are often considered inadequate arenas for civic engagement in a pluralistic society. As this study establishes, my interviewees believe that the Islamic education offered at the BCMS is compatible with Canada's multicultural system. The interviewees believe that the BCMS students are comfortable with multiculturalism because they live and study among a diverse community of Muslims, and because Islam shares universal values such as respect for others, fairness, and justice with the wider Canadian society .

However, my study establishes that there are gaps and potential grounds for tensions between Islamic education and Canada's multicultural system. Philosophical differences

and negative perceptions fostered by the media about Islam contribute to such tensions. In order to narrow potential gaps and satisfy the needs of both Canada's multicultural system and Islamic education the study utilized Taylor's (1994) multicultural liberal theory, "politics of recognition", which offers the opportunity for people of different backgrounds to coexist peacefully, preserving their unique cultures, while working towards achieving the common good. It also used Ramadan's (2004) model, which proposes a balance between preserving an Islamic identity while embracing a national identity. According to this model, the current Islamic education curriculum and teaching methodology do not provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to face the challenges of their societies. The existing curriculum ignores Western social realities, and instead emphasises the differences between the Muslim world and the society of others.

Implementing Ramadan's model at the BCMS may help Muslim students to develop multicultural competence. It may also help them to recognize that in a multicultural society, they have to accept that non-Muslim values, cultures, or beliefs are as important as theirs. In the end, it may lead to both Muslims and non-Muslims towards a peaceful society with members who coexist harmoniously with others in a multicultural world.

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## **APPENDIX A1: Letter to the Chairman of the School Board of British Columbia Muslim School**

April 10, 2008

Dr. Abdulazim Zumrawi  
Chairman of the School Board, British Columbia Muslim School,  
12300 Blundell Road, Richmond, BC,  
Canada, VV3W 1B3  
Tel: 604-270-2511

### **Re: Permission to conduct Research Study**

Dear Mr. Zumrawi,

I am a post graduate student currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD.) program at University of Durham, England. Through this medium, I kindly request your permission to conduct a research entitled: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”.

Purpose of the study is to increase understanding of the nature of Islamic education in Canada with an emphasis on its compatibility with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice. It also explores how the British Columbia Muslim School balances between providing Islamic education and complying with the Canadian multicultural policies. It further explores how the Canadian Multiculturalism deals with diversity both in the level of policy and practice.

The Duration of this study is from March to May 2008. Interviews will be conducted with three teachers, four students, three parents, the principal and chairman of the School Board.

Parental consent will also be sought from the parents/guardians for each of the four students from the British Columbia Muslim School that will be interviewed for this research. The researcher will also ensure that identities of the students are protected and that students will not be interviewed for more than one hour and half. All participants will also receive information regarding the results of this study.

Educational policy makers, multicultural education researchers and Muslim schools’ authorities may find this research interesting. If you may require further questions on the rights of subjects or potential problems please do not hesitate contacting at Tel: 604-448-1854, Cell: 604-999-4603 or email [faisalali21@hotmail.com](mailto:faisalali21@hotmail.com) or [f.m.ali@durham.ac.uk](mailto:f.m.ali@durham.ac.uk)

Sincerely, Faisal Mohamed Ali, Doctoral Student, University of Durham, England  
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**APPENDIX A2: Letter to the Principal of British Columbia Muslim School**

April 10, 2008

Mr. Abdullahi Omar  
Principal, British Columbia Muslim School  
12300 Blundell Road, Richmond, BC  
Canada, V6W 1B3

Dear Omar,

I am a post graduate student currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD.) program at the University of Durham, England. Through this medium, I humbly request your permission to conduct a research entitled: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”.

Purpose of the study is to increase understanding of the nature of Islamic education in Canada with an emphasis on its compatibility with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice. It also explores how the British Columbia Muslim School balances between providing Islamic education and complying with the Canadian multicultural policies. It further explores how the Canadian Multiculturalism deals with diversity both in the level of policy and practice. The duration of this study is from March to May, 2008. Interviews will be conducted with three teachers, four students; three parents, the principal and chairman of the School Board.

Parental consent will also be sought from the parents/guardians for each Grade Seven student that will be selected for the study. The researcher will ensure that the identities of the students are protected and that not more than two and a half hours is utilized to conduct the interviews. All participants will also receive information regarding the results of this study. Finally, it is hoped that this research will provide policy makers, Multicultural and Islamic Education researchers and Muslim schools’ authorities some guidelines and recommendations for better approaches to mutual understanding in the Canadian Multicultural society. If you have additional questions on the rights of subjects or potential problems please contact me at 604-448-1854 or email [faisal-ali21@hotmail.com](mailto:faisal.ali21@hotmail.com) or [f.m.ali@durham.ac.uk](mailto:f.m.ali@durham.ac.uk)

Sincerely, Faisal Mohamed Ali, Doctoral student  
University of Durham, England

## **APPENDIX A3: Letter to Parents**

April 10, 2008

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your child will be interviewed for a research study. The study will focus on “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”. The interview will be audio-taped. The following questions are provided in order to fulfil the legal and ethical requirements in complying with the University of Durham, School of education guidelines which ensures that all educational research are conducted within an ethic of respect for individuals, knowledge, democratic values and equality of educational research. Purpose of the study is to increase understanding of the nature of Islamic education in Canada with an emphasis on its compatibility with the Canadian multicultural policy and practice. It also explores how the British Columbia Muslim School balances between providing Islamic education and complying with the Canadian multicultural policies. It further explores how the Canadian Multiculturalism deals with diversity both in the level of policy and practice.

Your child will be asked to participate in the study by answering the following questions:

1. How many periods of Islamic education do you take per week at British Columbia Muslim School?
2. Please explain why do you learn Islamic education at British Columbia Muslim School?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in learning Islamic Education at British Columbia, Canada?
4. How do you feel studying Islamic education in Canada? Please explain
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and believes of minority groups? Please explain.

The interviews will take place within the school premises wherever the principal prefers under the guidelines of the researcher. An interview with a student may take one hour to one hour and half minimum. Please be reminded that the parent or the researcher may withdraw a student from the interview with just cause. Specific information about individual student will be kept strictly confidential but could be obtained from the school principal if desired. If the results are published, no reference will be made of individual students since only relations among groups of data will be analyzed. The purpose of this form is to

acquire your permission to allow your child to participate in the study. Parental consent for this study is strictly voluntary without due influence or penalty. The parent signature below also assumes that the child understands and agrees to participate cooperatively. If you have any further question regarding the study, the rights of subjects or any potential problems, please call the principal at the schools telephone number 604-270-2551 or the researcher Mr. Faisal Ali 1t 604-448-1854

Sincerely, Faisal Mohamed Ali, Doctoral student, University of Durham, England

Consent Form

Name of the Parent/ Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I agree my child to be interviewed for this research study\_\_\_\_\_

No, I do not agree my child to be interviewed for this research study\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B1: Parental consent form for students to be interviewed**

TITLE OF PROJECT: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”

Note: The participant should answer the following questions individually. Please circle Yes or NO. Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received sufficient information about the study? YES / NO

Do you agree your child to be interviewed and tape-recorded for a period of one hour to one hour and half? YES/NO

Have you spoken to Mr. Faisal Ali about the study? YES/ NO

Do you consent your child to participate in the study? YES/ NO

Do you understand that your child has the full right to withdraw from the study any time without any reason and consequence? YES / NO

Signed ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of witness..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK ETTERS) .....



## APPENDIX B2: Consent form for parents

TITLE OF PROJECT: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”

Note: The participant should answer the following questions individually. Please circle Yes or NO

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers for all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received sufficient information about the study? YES / NO

Do you agree to be interviewed and tape-recorded for a period? YES/ NO

Of one hour to one hour and half?

Have you spoken to Mr. Faisal Ali about the study? YES/ NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/ NO

Do you understand that you have full right to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason and consequence? YES / NO

Signed ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of witness ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

### **APPENDIX B3: Consent form for teachers**

TITLE OF PROJECT: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”. Note: The participant should answer the following questions individually.

Please circle Yes or NO

Have you read the Information Letter sent to your Principal? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received sufficient information about the study? YES / NO

Do you agree to be interviewed and tape-recorded for a period of one hour to one hour and half? YES/NO

Have you spoken to Mr. Faisal Ali about the study? YES/ NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you have the full right to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason and consequences? YES / NO

Signed ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of witness ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK L ETTERS) .....

**APPENDIX B4: Consent form for the principal**

TITLE OF PROJECT: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”.

Note: The participant should answer the following questions individually. Please circle Yes or NO

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received sufficient information about the study? YES / NO

Do you agree to be interviewed and tape-recorded for a period of one hour to one hour and half? YES/NO

Have you spoken to Mr. Faisal Ali about the study? YES/ NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/ NO

Do you understand that you have full right to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason and consequence? YES / NO

Signed ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of witness ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

**APPENDIX B5: Consent form for chairman of the school board**

TITLE OF PROJECT: “The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing an Islam-based Education System in Canada’s Multicultural Society: The Case of British Columbia Muslim School”.

Note: The participant should answer the following questions individually. Please circle Yes or NO

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received sufficient information about the study? YES / NO

Do you agree to be interviewed and tape-recorded for a period of one hour to one hour and half? YES/NO

Have you spoken to Mr. Faisal Ali about the study? YES/ NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/ NO

Do you understand that you have full right to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason and consequence? YES / NO

Signed ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of witness ..... Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

## **APPENDIX C1: Questions for students**

1. How many periods of Islamic education do you take per week at British Columbia Muslim School?
2. Please explain why do you learn Islamic education at British Columbia Muslim School?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in learning Islamic Education at British Columbia in Canada?
4. How do you feel studying Islamic education in Canada? Please explain
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and beliefs of minority groups? Please explain.

## **APPENDIX C2: Questions for teachers**

1. How long were you teaching at British Columbia Muslim School?
2. In your opinion, why is Islamic education taught at British Columbia Muslim School?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing Islamic education at British Columbia?
4. Do you believe that Islamic education is compatible with the Canadian Multicultural policy?
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and beliefs of minority groups?
6. How does the School balance between providing Islamic education system and meeting the requirements of the Canadian multicultural policy?

### **APPENDIX C3: Questions for parents**

1. How long were your children attending British Columbia Muslim School?
2. Why did you choose to send your children to attend British Columbia Muslim School?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in learning Islamic education at British Columbia in Canada?
4. Do you believe that Islamic education is compatible with the Canadian Multicultural policy?
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and beliefs of minority groups?

#### **APPENDIX C4: Questions for the chairman of the school board**

1. What are the aims of Islamic education at British Columbia Muslim School?
2. Do the aims of Islamic education at British Colombia Muslim School reflect on the reality of the Canadian multicultural society?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in learning Islamic education at British Columbia?
4. Do you believe that Islamic education is compatible with the Canadian Multicultural policy?
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and beliefs of minority groups?
6. How does the School balance between providing Islamic education system and meeting the requirements of the Canadian multicultural policy?



## **APPENDIX C5: Questions for the principal**

1. What are the aims of Islamic education at British Columbia Muslim School?
2. Do the aims of Islamic education at British Colombia Muslim School reflect on the reality of the Canadian multicultural society?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in learning Islamic education at British Columbia in Canada?
4. In your opinion is Islamic education compatible with the Canadian Multicultural policy?
5. Do you believe that Canada accommodates cultures and beliefs of minority groups?
6. How does the School balance between providing Islamic education system and meeting the requirements of the Canadian multicultural policy?
7. In your opinion what are the challenges and opportunities in providing religious education at British Columbia in Canada?
8. How does the government balance between protecting the rights for religion based-education system- and implementing the Canadian multicultural policy?

## APPENDIX D: Glossary

**Ahadith:** Plural of hadith, ahadith refers to the authentic sayings or actions of Prophet Muhammad, recorded in his lifetime. Ahadith is considered the second most important sources of Islamic law (Shariah).

**Culture:** The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group.

**Fiqh:** Literally means jurisprudence.

**Fiqh al-ibadat:** Refers to Islamic law and jurisprudence related to religious regulations.

**Hadith:** One of the recorded and authentic sayings or actions of Prophet Mohammad.

**Identity:** Also called sameness, identity is that which makes an entity definable and recognizable.

**Ijtihad:** Independent thought, the opposite of taqlid (following traditional scholars).

Widely practiced in the Muslim world during its golden age, ijtihad largely disappeared from Islamic scholarship shortly afterwards.

**Imam:** A person trained in Islamic studies whose main duty is to lead the five obligatory prayers at the mosque.

**Liberal theory:** A theory that looks on the individual as an autonomous person with the ability to act. Liberal theory focuses on individual freedom, and promotes tolerance and respect for the rights of others. Freedoms of expression, conscience, and association are some of the rights associated with liberalism and liberal democracies.

**Madrasa:** In Arabic, madrasa literally means a place of study.

**Multiculturalism:** Refers to the coexistence of people from different backgrounds, of diverse cultural or ethnic origins, living in a pluralistic society. Multiculturalism is based on equality, harmoniousness, and tolerance of diverse languages, and religions.

**Muslim:** A person who believes that there is only one God and that Muhammad is the final messenger of God.

**National minorities:** Groups that have in common some or all of history, community, or culture. Each of these is sometimes referred to as nation, people, or culture. Each of these may have become a minority involuntarily through conquest, colonization, or expansion, or could have voluntarily agreed to enter a federation with one or more other nations, peoples, or culture. In Canada, for example, French Canadians and aboriginal peoples are national minorities.

**Polyethnic rights:** Rights belonging to ethnic groups who wish to retain some aspects of their culture, such as language, religion, or traditional dress.

**Qur'an:** The book of Allah. Muslims believe that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel over period of 23 years. While the angel appeared to the Prophet in various human forms, he also appeared in his heavenly form on occasion. The Qur'an was recorded during the Prophet's lifetime, but was gathered into one book during the time of the second Caliph Othman.

**Secularism:** The separation of religion and state including educational institutions.

**Shariah:** Islamic law covering all aspects of life of Muslims, based on the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

**Sira:** The bibliography and life history of Prophet Muhammad.

**Sunna:** What Prophet Muhammad said, did or approved of during his lifetime, based on authentic sources.

**Ta'dib:** From the root ad-daba, ta'dib means to be cultured, well mannered, refined, or disciplined. It describes good social behaviour.

**Ta'lim:** Meaning to know, to learn, or to be aware, it refers to knowledge that is obtained through instruction.

**Taqlid:** In contrast to ijihad (independent thinking), taqlid describes a method of thinking that relies on blindly following the traditional scholars of authoritative knowledge.

**Tarbiyah:** From the root raba, it means to increase, to grow or to nourish, to perform the gradual process of bringing or growing of something to the stage of completeness or maturity.

**Ulama:** Plural of Islamic religious scholars, either graduates of Islamic religious universities or informally educated under other Islamic religious scholars. It comes from the Arabic root 'ilm, meaning knowledge, including divine, religious, and secular knowledge.

**Value-freedom:** Also referred to as bias, a qualitative research term that means systematic error, where a specific research finding deviates from a true finding. This might happen for example through errors in interviewing, or by errors in sampling.

## APPENDIX E: An example of coded transcript

According to Douglass (2003) tape recording each interview will help the grounded theory analyst to give special attention to the words used by an interviewee (hermeneutics), instead of focusing on the transcripts of researcher's "limited capacity to capture that said by the interviewee.

The following is a fragment taken from an interview transcription: The interviewee is a Grade 6 student, and the focus is on perceptions around learning Islamic education at the BCMS:

... Basically this year, they (teachers) were telling us about Islam (Five pillars of Islam) and Iman (Six pillars of faith), and furthermore into the prophets. They did a whole biography about prophet Mohamed and prophet Musa (Moses).

... We learn about new stuff that we might not know, and about why we are Muslims, and why Islam is the perfect religion, how everything started, and how Allah is the only God.

... We talk about Iman, and how everything started, when Allah created the universe, and Prophet Adam came as the first man, and then how everything happened, and how it's going to end on the Day of Judgment, where we will be judged to see if we can go to Janna (paradise) or Hell.

... We learn about the faith of a Muslim, and how we're supposed to be good Muslims by behaving well, praying our Five Salats (Five daily prayers), and following the Five pillars of Islam, and just not saying any bad words and behaving well with teachers and elders, and respecting everyone, and being responsible.

... Well, even if someone is younger than you, you should still respect him/her, because they are your brother or sister in Islam. So we should be nice to anyone because he/she your brother or sister in Islam, and a part of being a Muslim is to be nice to others, and part of being a Muslim is to be responsible for all the duties you are given.

... Even if they are not Muslims, you should still respect them, because they are Allah's creation and Allah has created them, so we should respect everything that Allah has created.

... We have covered some topics before. Even though it is not written in the book, the teachers will take some periods telling us how we should respect others, and behave well towards them; because we are all Muslims and Allah wants us to be well behaved Muslims.

... We learn many things we did not know; and since we come to school for Eight hours a day, and our parents do not have us for such a long time, they want us to get a lot out of it. So that we should learn more about our religion, and what we're supposed to do and what we are not supposed to do, who we are supposed to believe in, who we are supposed to follow, and what is going to happen in the Day of Judgment.

... We can prepare ourselves for the Day of Judgment. And we also learned that we have to pray the five daily prayers in order to make Allah happy and go to Jannah (paradise).

... We learn to control our anger, and how to respect people in this world, and how to handle situations when people ask us questions about Islam, and we can help them turn into Muslims by telling them about what we have learned.

... Unlike other countries, they do not force people (Canada); like they're not allowed to wear the hijab and stuff. All types of religions are in Canada without any restrictions and you can live freely without any trouble.

### **Open Coding application to the words**

1. They (teachers) were telling us about Islam (Five pillars of Islam) and Iman (Six pillars of faith).
2. We learn why we are Muslims?
3. Why Islam is the perfect religion?
4. How Allah is the only god?
5. When Allah created the universe.
6. End of the universe on the Day of Judgment.
7. Day of Judgment will determine who will go to Janna (paradise) or Hell.
8. Importance of being a good Muslim in life.
9. Behaving well will help to be good Muslims.
10. To be a Muslims, a Muslims should Pray Five Daily Prayers.
11. Performing the 5 daily prayers will lead to Jannah (paradise).
12. Islamic education teaches exercising self control during anger.
13. Islamic education as an agent to enhance respect for everyone.
14. Respecting people in general.

15. Presenting Islam to non-Muslims.
16. Unlike other countries, Canada gives people freedom of religion: e.g., to wear the hijab (head scarf).
17. Canada as a diverse and a multicultural country.

From the above transcript, what emerged as the coding is that this student was conveying the importance of Islamic education in his life and the benefits he gets from learning Islamic principles in this world and in the hereafter. He stressed how it's essential to learn the above principles to develop strong Islamic belief system and solid Islamic identity. He also implied that displaying good manners in dealing with others, Muslims and non Muslims alike is part of Islamic teachings.

### **Axial Coding**

After the open coding stage, where I discovered and developed the above categories, I assembled the data by making connections between categories and identifying relationships across such categories. At this stage, I re-grouped categories according to similarities and the following categories emerged. Student's perceptions of learning Islamic education.

1. Student's perceptions on what constitute to be a Muslim?
2. Strong relationship between practice and belief in Islam.
3. Perceptions of student-Allah's relationship.
4. Perceptions on pleasing Allah to be granted paradise in the hereafter.
5. Connection of Islamic manners to forming Islamic identity.
6. Relationship between learning Islamic main principles (Five pillars of Islam and Six pillars of faith) and preserving Islamic faith and identity.
7. Relationship between displaying Islamic manners and respecting others: Muslims and non-Muslims alike.
8. Perceptions on Canada as a tolerant country.

### **Selective Coding**

At this stage, I selected the main themes that emerged from the axial coding process. Whenever I conducted another interview, I examined themes and categories; each new incident that fits into a code was compared with previous interviews by constant comparison. I was able to develop ideas about categories and at the end identified two main themes

through the process. The first theme focused on how Islamic education is perceived at the BCMS. It examines the ways in which the school teaches students the principles of Islam to strengthen their faith while providing a safe environment in which to practice Islam, and helps them to adopt an Islamic way of life, strengthening their identity and cultural heritage as Muslims. This theme also explored the challenges and opportunities Canadian multiculturalism affords. The second theme focused on perspectives on compatibility of an Islamic education at this school within the Canadian multicultural system. It specifically analyses the BCMS perspectives on developing multicultural competence in the Canadian context—how the BCMS deals with the issue of isolation for its students, and the compatibility of an Islamic education with the policies and practices of Canada’s multicultural society.