**Enhancing Human Development and the Appropriation of Islamic Material: Feeling, Doing, Speaking, and Inquiring Together**

By Claire Alkouatli

Marketing Blurb

Join us in exploring ways of enhancing the value of what we feel, do, say, and inquire with students in the exploration of Islamic material using two pedagogical approaches in Islamic classrooms: affective participation and dialogic inquiry. These approaches can be catalytic for learning and development. Together, we will examine these approaches as illustrated in data excerpts from a qualitative study in a weekend mosque school in Canada. We will make further meaning of this topic by engaging in a *halaqa*, or dialogic circle, at the end of the presentation.

Paper Abstract

Drawing from a larger qualitative study of Islamic educators in a weekend mosque school in Canada, contextualized in sociocultural literature on human learning and development, this paper explores two developmentally generative ways to enhance the appropriation and application of Islamic material. *Affective participation* involves creating a stimulating and supportive community of active learners in the classroom that privileges emotion as well as cognition. *Dialogic inquiry* involves cultivating inquiry embedded in dialogue—thinking together to think alone. These two pedagogical approaches hold potential for enhanced learning and development and more effective appropriation of Islamic material for both the reproduction of Islamic practices and renewal of Islamic principles in a contemporary, global age.

Speaker Bio

Claire Alkouatli is currently a doctoral student in Human Development, Learning and Culture at The University of British Columbia. She completed an MA in the same program, with a concentration in Social and Emotional Learning. Her research drew from a sociocultural perspective to examine the practices, objectives, and challenges of Islamic education and the learning and development of Muslim children in Canada and worldwide.

Introduction

Thinking, inquiring, collaborating, and communicating lie at the heart of educating students for a changing world. These skills, in service of Islamic education, are imperative for Muslim learners specifically. This paper takes a sociocultural developmental perspective in exploring how teachers might teach and model these skills to enhance Muslim students’ *appropriation* of Islamic practices and principles. Reciprocally, the teaching and learning of Islamic material holds potential in enhancing the multiple domains of human development, including cognitive, social-emotional, and spiritual. From a sociocultural perspective, learning leads development (Vygotsky, 1987) through participation in social practices whereby the student participates, assimilates, transforms, and re-contributes (Wells, 1999). Al-Sadan (1997) identified the importance of pedagogy when he said: “The issue of effectiveness in pedagogy is of vital importance…as the whole communication of faith ultimately depends on the way in which it is taught” (p. 39). Islamic material is already perfect. How we, as educators, engage students with this material determines whether or not they will appropriate it and whether or not it will expand their cognitive, social-emotional, and spiritual development. Toward these two goals, this paper examines two pedagogical approaches that could be used in Islamic Studies classrooms: affective activity and dialogic inquiry.

*Affective participation* refers to supportive and stimulating active learning approaches that privilege both emotion and cognition in the process of learning. It also highlights participation as a mechanism in that process. *Dialogic inquiry* refers to inquiring together in dialogue. Both work best in community. These two concepts are drawn from data collected through participant observation and active interviews in a qualitative study of Muslim educators’ perspectives on human learning and development in a Sunni Muslim mosque school in Canada (Jamma Mosque School; Alkouatli, 2015) and contextualized within the sociocultural literature. I suggest that affective activity and dialogic inquiry are two catalytic ways in which educators can enhance students’ learning, mastery, and appropriation of Islamic principles and practices, while stimulating total human development in the process. Further, these pedagogical approaches support two goals present in every Islamic classroom but which are particularly poignant in Islamic classrooms situated in non-Islamic cultures: goals of cultural *reproduction* and goals of cultural *renewal*. Reproduction, which Zine (2007) calls “resisting cultural assimilation and engaging cultural survival” (p. 72), is a key objective of Islamic education in schools in Canada. In Western countries more generally, Ramadan (2004) elaborated:

At the heart of every family, in every organization, and in Western Muslim communities generally, the same concern and fear are expressed about passing on Islamic values to the children. How can the flame of 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? (p. 126)

Here, Ramadan identifies the issue that Islamic principles and practices, by their very existence within prevailing non-Muslim cultures and educational systems, are threatened, which heralds the call for cultural reproduction. Yet, Ramadan (2004) also pointed out that this cultural reproduction may not be successful if the ways in which educators aim to reproduce culture actually turns students *away* from that culture. In critically claiming that Islamic education, to a large extent in non-Muslim contexts, has lost its way, Ramadan called for reconsideration of what is usually offered to young Muslims in the West:

[W]hat is called ‘education’ (which should be the passing on of knowledge and of knowing how to be) is in fact an ill-administered ‘instruction,’ simply a handing on of knowledge based on principles, rules, obligations, and prohibitions, often presented in a cold, rigid, and austere manner, without soul or humanity. Some young people know by heart long *surahs* (chapters) of the Qur'an and a dizzying number of verses and hadiths that have absolutely no impact on their daily behavior; on the contrary, inevitably, they have taken on the outward form but have no contact with the base. (pp. 127-128)

Here, Ramadan suggested that Islamic educational institutions are actually failing at cultural *reproduction*, let alone the more challenging and creative educational goal of cultural *renewal*, which he also addressed as a crucial task in Islamic educational institutions. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said that Islam will undergo continual renewal. Ramadan (2013) explained, “This renewal is only in the way that the religion is understood, implemented, and lived in different times and places rather than in the actual sources, principles, and fundamentals” (Ramadan, 2013, p. 106). Educating children in the Islamic system of principles and practices aims to ensure that the children master and appropriate the system in order to contribute to its reproduction. This is necessarily a renewal as they express and live the Islamic system in a new generation and sociocultural context.

Nowhere are the demands of cultural reproduction and cultural renewal so clearly illustrated as in an Islamic school embedded in a non-Muslim community. The Jamma Mosque School, where this study took place, stood the intersection between cultures, between worldviews—Islamic and secular—and its teachers were charged with the task of mediating the two. In this paper, I provide excerpts from data gathered through observations in the classroom of an exemplary educator called Amira to illustrate the pedagogical approaches of affective participation and dialogic inquiry, which may be particularly generative in helping students make meaning of Islamic material.

What we *feel*, *do*, *say,* and *ask* in Islamic studies classrooms shape the ways in which we think, make meaning of, and appropriate Islamic material. The two pedagogical approaches presented here hold potential to draw human development forward and each has a key role to play in both the cultural reproduction and cultural renewal that is imperative in Islamic education.

1. Affective Participation: Feeling and Doing Together

We know that students learn more when they are happy. Vygotsky went even further in suggesting, “Affect is the alpha and the omega, the first and last link, the prologue and epilogue of all mental development” (1998, p.227). We also know that students are more likely to emulate a teacher who is warm and approachable. In these ways, emotion is the engine behind cognition.Creating a safe and happy environment in which to learn is the very first step in enhancing students’ experiences of Islamic material. It starts with creating a *community*, defined as a group of people bound by mutual interests and where both participation and benefit are shared (Cam, 1995; Dewey, 1938). Key in cultivating a generative learning community is the construct of *intersubjectivity*, or shared focus of attention among teachers and all students that includes both affective and cognitive involvement in communication (Göncü, Abel, & Boshans, 2010). Just as a mother and a baby develop shared communication based upon mutual care and attention, a teacher with her students is attentive and responsive. The teacher listens and honors the students’ perspectives and knowledge flows in multiple directions. To be optimally educative, the interactions that take place within the community draw from emotion as well as cognition and must include challenge as well as consensus (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The teacher solicits reasons behind students’ claims and facilitates the critique of ideas, rather than individuals.

The learning activities that happen within communities have the potential to draw development forward (Vygotsky, 1987): external social processes become internal through participation in mature cultural forms of behavior. In other words, what we do becomes what we think. Children’s ongoing participation in the Islamic acts of worship, like congregational prayer, for example, is a process of internalization. This internalization can be understood in terms of two aspects: mastery and appropriation. Mastery involves learning how to do something with expertise. An example would be mastery of the recitation of the Quran. But, in addition to mastery, internalization can also be understood on a deeper level, in terms of *appropriation*, or the process of making something one’s own (Wertsch, 1998). An example would be enhanced intimacy with the Quran such that the words and concepts become part of one’s identity, one’s cognitive structure—whether mastery in recitation had been attained or not. Mastery and appropriation are sometimes intertwined and sometimes distinct. One might master a range of Prophetic dua (supplication), but never appropriate the words and meanings into themselves. Or, one might have not yet mastered Arabic, but have appropriated the language into their sense of self.

This refinement in understanding internalization as mastery and appropriation is important in the field of Islamic education, where mastery may be sufficient for some practices and principles, but others, ideally, must be appropriated in order to be applied authentically in daily life (Alkouatli, 2015). The implications of mastery and appropriation are crucial: by participating in the Islamic principles and practices, children may come to internalize them. But the transformation of psychological functions from the social to the individual plane is not a simple matter of participation. The *ways* in which children participate, and the affective and cognitive *context* surrounding participation, determine how generative that participation will be. The role of emotion, of affect, clearly plays a role in the process of appropriation. Further, internalization is most effective when it happens at the outer edge of a child’s ability, called the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 2011). This is the zone beyond that of independent ability, in which the child can act only with the interaction with a more experienced other. Learning activities are most effective when they happen in this sensitive zone, and they drive development forward (Vygotsky, 2011).

The following data excerpt is an example of affective participation whereby Amira, the teacher, worked with a group of four girls, aged 8 to 10 years, on memorization of the Quran (Alkouatli, 2015). Amira called her pedagogical practice “Stages” and it involved grouping girls who working on the same verses of the Quran together. Instruction was differentiated and aimed at the outer edge of each girl’s ability. Each group worked on memorizing for two minutes, during which time Amira went around the room correcting and assisting. Then the girls presented what they had memorized:

Amira drew a table on the whiteboard. Along the top row of the table, she wrote in Arabic the chapters (surahs) of the Quran that each girl in the class was working on. Lima was working alone; Bayan was working alone. Dalia and Sahar were working together. On the left hand column of the table, Amira wrote: Round 1, 2, 3. Then she said, “We’re going to do three rounds, ok?” and she started her timer for two minutes. The girls began reciting to themselves.

First, Amira went over to Lima and listened to her reciting Surah Naziat. Lima’s recitation was fluid. Amira offered little corrections along the way. When Lima finished, Amira said, “Ok, you went up to āyah 13, so you can now work on 14 and 15.”

Amira went over to Bayan: “Let’s go!”

Bayan was reciting Surah Al Alaq. Amira counted how many ayas Bayan had done—13. Meanwhile, Sahar and Dalia were working as a team on Surah Al Bayyinah. Amira went over to them.

Amira: Ladies, how are you?

Sahar: Not good.

Amira: You are so *amazingly* good!

Sahar: I know [she smiles].

This is an example of intersubjectivity and how Amira built rapport with the girls using humor, affection, and encouragement.

Sahar and Dalia started reading together—they were not reciting because they hadn’t memorized it; they were actually reading the Arabic text. Amira showed them with her mouth how to pronounce the difficult words. While Amira was with Sahar and Dalia, the other two girls were reciting quietly to themselves at different tables. Amira returned to Lima, listened to her reciting, then stopped her to give a bit of meaning: “What is Wadi al-Muqaddasi Tuwa? Read the English!” Lima read it from the textbook and Amira expanded upon the meaning: “Yes, it’s the valley where Musa, *‘alayhi al salām* (upon him be peace), met Allāh, *subḥanahū wa ta‘ālá* (above, beyond and exalted). Good job! Sixteen ayas!”

Next, Amira went on to Bayan, who was very focused on her recitation. Soon, Amira and Bayan were on the floor together, in prostration, side by side. When they got up, the other girls asked them what they were doing.

Amira: This sign here [pointing to a mark in the text of the Quran] means you have to do *sajdah* (prostration).

Sahar: What is *sajdah*?

Amira: Beautiful question. Remember sajdah in prayer? So what do you do when you see this sign? You say *Allāh akbar* (God is most great) and you go into *sujūd* (prostration) and you do three, *“Subḥana rabbi al ‘ālá* (above and beyond is my lord).” It’s called *sajdah al tilawa*. Say it!

Children: Sajdah al tilawa!

Amira: Who did this? The Prophet did it.

Sahar and Dalia stumbled through their surah. Amira gave them some pronunciation instruction. Then she said, “You guys need to do the first three ayas in under two minutes or no break for you. I know you can do it.”

She went back to Lima and got down on her knees, leaning her arms on the desk, face-to-face with the child. She listened as Lima finished. Lima went to write how many ayas she did on the whiteboard.

Sahar and Dalia looked at each other and smiled. Sahar said to Dalia, “I think we can do it.” Lima finished writing on the whiteboard and went over to help them.

They were all quiet listening to Bayan. Bayan got to the part where they do sajdah at-tilawa. Amira and Bayan bowed down in prostration.

Amira: Ok, Bayan, go on break.

Meanwhile, Sahar and Dalia were worrying together: “I hope we can do it!”

Amira went over to them.

Sahar: We did it like *ten times*!

They started and stumbled through it. Amira gave corrections. Lima was there, watching; she started leaping in circles around them. The girls finished.

Dalia: See? Less than two minutes!

Amira: How do you feel?

Sahar: Great! Now we can have our break!

Amira: There is no regret. Once you have done your best, then you let it go. (FN, Amira, PO 5, 3/8/15)

In this data excerpt, Amira was engaging the students in memorizing the Quran using a range of pedagogical elements for pronunciation, memorization, and interpretation that seemed to be meaningful and engaging for the children. Her Stages method employed individual and group work, reading, reciting, and even physical actions. It involved the whiteboard, a visual aid tracking the girl’s progress, and a timer. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it featured Amira’s own engaged participation in facilitating the process and working each girl at the very edge of her ability, in the zone of proximal development. She made Stages cognitively stimulating by keeping it moving at a fast pace—only two minutes per segment—and exploring pertinent meanings in English along the way. As well as differentiating the instruction, Amira modeled correct pronunciation and ways of approaching mastery of the Quran.

Amira’s attentive intersubjectivity with each student, and her participation, is significant in this excerpt. Amira going into prostration alongside Bayan, foreheads on the ground together, is an example of how Amira was an active participant in the learning activity. Through encouraging, loving, and participating, Amira made memorization of the Quran, and attempts towards understanding its meanings, an affectively-positive experience (Alkouatli, 2015). Finally, Amira nurtured the girls’ support for each other. When one girl was finished, she went to encourage the others. This contributed to the construction of community in the classroom.

These qualities of community, the sharing of emotion and cognition in active engagement, and in an environment of both support and challenge, contribute to the qualities of teaching and learning that happen within. This community itself becomes the site and source of a student’s human development through both actions and words.

2. Dialogic Inquiry: Inquiring Together to Inquire Alone

Recognition of the constructive nature of learning, over the past 40 or so years, has led to increasing interest in dialogic inquiry, specifically, as an approach to teaching and learning (Wells, 1999). Classroom talk is a form of intermental activity between and among students and teacher (Wertsch, 1998). It holds potential as both a source for the development of thinking, inquiring, collaborating, and communicating skills and a site for their mastery and appropriation (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Vygotsky (1994) highlighted that communication between people using language, or social speech, is a primary tool for developing individual thinking:

Originally, for a child, speech represents a means of communication between people, it manifests itself as a social function, in its social role. But gradually a child learns how to use speech to serve himself, his internal processes. Now speech becomes not just a means of communication with other people, but also a means for the child’s own inner thinking processes. (p. 353)

In this way, speech plays a key role in the development of thinking and the words we share with others become our inner thoughts. Vygotsky’s description illustrates the internalization of social speech as inner speech, or verbal thinking (Vadeboncoeur, Alkouatli & Amini, 2015).

*Inquiry* is a specific type of social speech composed of questions that inspire curiosity and the desire to understand. Wells (1999) described inquiry as a stance toward experiences and ideas as “a willingness to wonder, to ask questions, and to seek to understand by collaborating with others in the attempt to make answers to them” (p. 121). Cam (1995) referred to inquiry as a social practice that students internalize:

If we want children to question themselves, they should first learn to question one another. If they are to reason with themselves, they must first learn to reason with one another. If they are to think of how things stand from the other’s point of view, they should first learn to inquire of the other. In sum, if we want children to learn how to think for themselves, we should engage them in thinking together. (p. 17).

Here, Cam (1995) described, step by step, how thinking and inquiring together enhances thinking and inquiring alone. Lipman (2003) suggested that when the process of inquiry is internalized by the participants, “they come to think in *moves* that resemble its *procedures*. They come to think as the process thinks” (emphasis in original, p. 21). In this way, the teacher models inquiry as a way of thinking, learning, and being; as a process that becomes internalized by individual students.

One final point is that inquiry involves cultivating with students a sense of wonder, awe, and puzzlement (Wells, 1999). Inquiry is as much about “being open to wondering and puzzlement and trying to construct and text explanations of the phenomena that evoked these feelings as it is about mastering any particular body of information although, of course, the two facets of inquiry are ultimately interdependent” (Wells, 1999b, p. 10). The study of the Quran, from this perspective, would become a journey, led by the teacher, of wonder, awe, and puzzlement of its exalted content.

In Islamic educational contexts, inquiry is not only important given the imperatives of the contemporary, plural, knowledge-based worlds within which Muslim children are growing up, it important for at least two other reasons. First, the goal of Islamic educational institutions, and that of many Muslim parents, is to help Muslim children appropriate to apply the Islamic system of principles and practices. If social speech through dialogue is a source of our inner, individual thoughts (Vygotsky, 1994), inquiry is the doorway to dialogue (Lipman, 2003). Inquiry, and the use of questions, is “more narrowly a quest for truth, more broadly a quest for meaning” (Lipman, 2003, p. 95). Inquiry, then, may be a key way in which educators can help children make meaning of Islamic material and *appropriate* it as their own.

Second, there is historical precedent for the use of inquiry. Traces of inquiry are present in both the Quran and the Sunnah of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. The Quran contains myriad questions posed to the reader—prompting inquiry as reflection and inquiry as reason—such as: “In this way God makes clear unto you His messages, so that you might reflect (Quran, 2:219[[1]](#footnote-1)). At least 23 times in the Quran, the words “use your reason” appear, often in question form, in verses such as: “Do you bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own selves—and yet you recite the divine writ? Will you not, then, use your reason?” (Quran, 2:44).

Questioning was a pedagogy used in the earliest days of Islamic education. Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, as the first Muslim educator, worked with each of his companions, taking into consideration their individual characteristics, asking questions and soliciting opinions, encouraging them to develop their critical faculties (Ramadan, 2007). “Both by asking questions and by formulating paradoxical or seemingly contradictory statements, the Prophet stimulated his Companions’ critical sense and their ability to go beyond mere blind obedience or mechanical, mind-destroying imitation” (p. 103). Traditions of Islamic education that developed after the death of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, included a teacher’s ability to use questioning effectively, which was deemed important because “questions are the tools of communicating between the two agents [teacher and student] in the teaching and learning process” (Sha’ban, 1997, as quoted in Rufai, 2010, p. 202). Thus, inquiry in Islamic education is both a contemporary imperative and an Islamic one.

The following data excerpt is an example of dialogic inquiry in the Jamma Mosque School classroom. Here, Amira was leading the students through memorizing *Ayat al Kursi*, the Throne Verse. After they had recited the verse several times, Amira offered a question, as a lead in to dialogue, based upon a line in the verse that says God never gets tired and does not sleep:

1. Amira: “Does *Allah* (God) need to sleep?”
2. Students (chorus): No!
3. Amira: Does Allah need to take a nap?
4. Girls (chorus): No!
5. Amira: That is what Allah is saying here [in Ayat al Kursi]. That is what Allah said—
6. Bayan: But He can if He wants to.
7. Amira: Yes, exactly. But He doesn’t need to.
8. Dalal: But then he can’t see what we are doing—
9. Amira: —OH! *Excellent*!—
10. Dalal: —He can’t see what we are doing: Good or bad!
11. Amira to the class: Did you get it? Dalal said, if Allah is going to take a little nap or sleep, He won’t be able to watch us. And He is watching us all the time!
12. Iman: Maybe He sees us when He sleeps.
13. Amira: You know what? Allah can do whatever He wants.
14. Sahar: He sees eeeverythiiiing!
15. Amira: Allah doesn’t need to nap because He is different than us, he is awake on everything. And we have to sleep. Why do we have to sleep?
16. Sahar: So that we can have a good day—
17. Dalal: No!
18. Amira: Yes it is. And you know what? We cannot live without sleeping. It’s a weakness. We have to sleep.
19. Iman: It’s something we have to do.
20. Amira: If we don’t sleep, what’s going to happen to our body?
21. Sahar: We could die.
22. Amira: We couldn’t do our chores, our homework. We could not do anything—
23. Dalal: Then you would be bad. And then you won’t even know how to talk—
24. [The girls laugh]
25. Dalal: Because you are not going to learn.
26. Bayan: When you’re sleeping—
27. Amira: I like *so much* your ideas, *tamammun* (perfect). Raise your hand up and wait for your turn. *Nam* (yes), Sahar.
28. Sahar: When you are sleeping you are half dead.
29. Amira: Ummm hmmm.
30. Dalal: No, when you’re sleeping, you’re—
31. Amira taps the desk: Everyone stop talking [at the same time].
32. Cala: If you have a baby, it’s hard to sleep. It’s hard for me to sleep with my baby sister.
33. Amira: *Habibiti* (dear). May Allah make it easy for you.
34. Dalal: If we don’t sleep our brain cannot work because we need to sleep to give our brain a break.
35. Sahar: 24 hours.
36. Amira: Ok, did you hear what did Dalal said now? She said something extremely important. About sleeping and the brain… *Nam,* Sahar.
37. Sahar: I have a question, can I say it?
38. Amira: Yes, sure!
39. Sahar: Actually two. Can you die from not sleeping?
40. Iman: Yes, you can, that’s true.
41. Amira: You cannot focus. It’s a witness of the human body. So that’s why Allah does not have any witnesses—He’s perfect. That is why he does not need any sleep.
42. Iman: Because he’s perfect.
43. Sahar: Can your dreams come true?
44. Amira: Only Allah knows, *habibiti*.
45. Iman: I don’t think that you can learn while you are sleeping…
46. Everyone laughs.
47. Sahar: You learn from your dreams
48. Amira: Sometimes a dream is a message from Allah, subhana tala, and we learn from this message.

(FN, Amira PO4, 12/14/14)

This data excerpt provides examples of several important points regarding the use of dialogic inquiry in the classroom. The first was the warm, dialogic climate that Amira created by responding sensitively and intersubjectively to the girls. The teacher was not the only one speaking. Amira spoke, but also listened and created an environment where the children felt free to speak and share their connections to the subject matter. She encouraged their contributions and accepted answers, whether they were technically correct or not, without evaluation. In line 27, she encouraged: “I like *so much* your ideas, *tamammun*.” In line 8, Dalal offered the suggestion that God doesn’t sleep because then He wouldn’t see what we are doing; Amira accepted her suggestion with the words, “OH! *Excellent*!” here, even though the answer wasn’t technically correct. Amira encouraged her contribution. In line 32, when Cala said, “If you have a baby, it’s hard to sleep. It’s hard for me to sleep with my baby sister,” Amira turned to her and said warmly: “*Habibiti* (dear). May Allah make it easy for you.” Amira was not only responding intersubjectively to Cala’s difficulty, she also offered a dua, seizing a chance to model the function of dua in immediate context.

Modeling inquiry, as an approach to learning, is a social practice that, when shared with the students, can be internalized (Cam, 1995). In this excerpt, significant is the way in which Amira modeled the posing of questions and encouraged the students to pose questions themselves. Further, Amira’s responses to the questions posed acted as points of departure for new questions and dialogue, illustrating that the teacher’s follow up holds the most promise for expansion or restriction of learning in the classroom (Wells, 1999).

Inquiry is a reciprocal investigation into making meaning of lived experiences. Where Lipman (2003) described the reciprocal way in which a teacher translates a society’s experience to the students and the students’ experience to a society, Amira here engaged in a form of this reciprocity: mediating both her interpretations of the Islamic system within the prevailing cultural context, and welcoming the students questions drawn from their own interpretations of Islam embedded in their own lived experiences. This is another place where inquiry plays a key role. The students come to the teacher with questions generated in lived experience in attempts to make sense of both the Islamic system and its embedded cultural context.

But the talk in this except stopped short of the most generative type, called *exploratory* *talk* by Mercer and Littleton (2007), as can be seen in lines 15–17. When Amira asked, “Why do we have to sleep?” Sahar responded: “So that we can have a good day—.” Dalal interrupted: “No!” When Dalal issued this challenge to Sahar’s idea—“No!”—Amira did not ask Dalal to provide any reasons behind the challenge. The purpose of this particular dialogue was to make meaning of Ayat al Kursi, as a cultural tool itself in the Islamic system. But there is no reason why Amira could not *simultaneously* work with the students towards more exploratory talk, which, as Mercer and Littleton (2007) pointed out, sharpens the use of cultural tools valued in Western, as well as other, cultures, including accountability, clarity, constructive criticism, and awareness of and “receptiveness to well-argued proposals” (p. 66). The Jamma Mosque was situated in a Canadian cultural context that values such cultural tools; there is evidence to suggest that they are also valued within an Islamic worldview also (Ramadan, 2013). Amira in particular, and Muslim educators in general, could use these cultural tools in ways that would not detract but enhance the teaching and learning of Islamic material.

Conclusion

Tying affective participation and dialogic inquiry together—acknowledging the importance of feeling, doing, speaking, and inquiring—we start to get a sense of how a teacher might enhance students’ participation in the practices of worship, imbued with Islamic principles, leading to their *appropriation*. But the process of learning and development doesn’t end at appropriation. The end result is actually transformed individual use of knowledge itself, contributing to cultural renewal. Wells (1999) described the learning process as a triple transformation:

First there is the transformation of the learner—a modification of his or her own mental processes, that changes the ways in which he or she perceives, interprets and represents the world; second there is a transformation of the artifact itself, as its use is assimilated and reconstructed by the learner on the basis of the learner’s existing knowledge; finally, in using the artifact to mediate further action, there is a transformation of the situation in which the learner acts which, to a greater or lesser degree, brings about change in the social practice and in the way in which the artifact is understood and used by other members of the culture.” (Wells, 1999, p. 137)

This triple transformation is particularly pertinent to consider in the context of Islamic education, where educators are ultimately aiming at the reproduction of Islamic culture in successive generations and where students apply their learning in lived experience and contribute to cultural renewal. By enhancing the affective and cognitive value of what we feel, do, say, and inquire with students in the exploration of Islamic material, we are not only enhancing their human development and facilitating their appropriation of the material itself, we are encouraging students’ contributions to culture and the renewal of Islamic principles and practices in the current age.

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1. All translations of the Quran in this paper come from Asad, 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)