

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
ISLAMIC
PEDAGOGY

DR. MOHAMMED SABRIN



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Whatever is contained herein which is correct, then this is from the blessing of Allah, and whatever is contained herein which is wrong, then it is only due to my own shortcomings.

Dr. Mohammed Sabrin

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Preface

For the Muslim *ummah*¹ (lit: “people” or “nation”) without a place to fully practice Islam since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there is pressing demand in the Muslim world²

¹ Muslims believe that all the prophets (i.e., Adam, Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, etc.) all originally came with the same central message of *Tawhid* (worshipping only One God), but different branches/details (how to pray, etc.) contextual to their time/location; each Prophet had their own “branches” for their particular ummah (the ummah of the Jews, Christians, etc.), but all still technically “Muslims” as long as they followed whatever Sharia (legislation) their Prophets came with at that time. Basically, they chose to do “*istislaam*” or “Islam” (which means submission) to whatever message their Prophet came with; hence, they were Muslim. Prophet Muhammad is believed to be the last prophet in this line of prophets, from his time till judgment day, for humanity. The Muslim ummah refers to the Islamic belief that all humans born after Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood are technically considered from the ummah of Muhammad in a general sense (the *ummat al dawa* or “invitation”), but those who choose to accept this invitation by believing and following him are the more specific *ummat al ijaba* (ummah of those who responded), who we would call Muslims today. Differences between the three major world religions over even the central meaning of monotheism today (the status of Jesus being more than a Prophet, etc.) are believed to be due to tampering/alterations of the older scriptures by various theologians and others throughout history. For a fuller discussion, see Dr. Umar Ashqar’s *Belief in Allah*.

² “Muslim world/countries” will be used to conserve space although it is important to note that what is implied is merely that the majority of such a location identify themselves as “Muslim,” not necessarily that everything that happens therein is some absolute embodiment/representation of Islam itself as expressed in theological scriptures. Muslims are merely human after all. Namely, Islam might be the reason/motivation for some things that occur in such places, but there are obviously countless other factors (race, class, gender, local customs, individual idiosyncrasies, etc.), not to preclude the fact that non-Muslims live in such places as well.

Preface

for an Islamic pedagogy extracted from the Qur'an and Sunnah (and the rich scholarship that exists concerning them) that illustrates the Islamic perspective of knowledge and education and how it could be practiced in the various disciplines of the educational system to promote human development (Cook, 1999; Cook, 2001). Renewed identification of the general public of Muslims with pre-colonization identities has been particularly on the rise since the 1970s—which is commonly known as the beginning of the “Islamic Awakening” in the Muslim world (Cook, 2001, p. 381; Haddad and Esposito, 1991, p. 1). However, similar to many other institutions in most modern-day Muslim-majority countries, formal education mostly consists of teaching methods inherited from previous colonizers, like rote memorization (Gesink, 2006, pp. 328-329; Ofori-Attah, 2008, pp. 15, 18). This dissonance of values is perpetuated by corrupt authoritarian puppet regimes that seek to maintain their power by supporting Western hegemony in the region; hence, providing quality education that enhances critical thinking skills that might challenge the status quo is not an initiative that receives much support (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2004, p. 149).

While teachers in the Muslim world often teach Islamic Sciences (theological knowledge) and empirical sciences (from a positivist perspective), both are taught through a Banking Theory approach that does little to develop critical thinking skills, let alone master basic conceptual knowledge. Aside from the ineffectiveness of such methods, such a teaching philosophy spreads a passive slave-like mentality to education, which does not cultivate active citizens who will work for social justice.³

³ See Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2003)

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How one teaches reflects their values. The following exemplar of an Islamic pedagogy hopes to offer a culturally relevant solution. The intent of this research is to develop an Islamic pedagogy that inspires an active approach to creating change in one's society by changing oneself and working to be an active contribution to societal change simultaneously.

This book focuses on Islamic Pedagogy as it relates to two branches: developing caring student/teacher relationships; and utilizing these relationships to apply a case-based learning approach where students learn how to apply knowledge directly from the educator and from their peers. This pedagogy is then compared and contrasted with similar Western analogs, due to the tremendous growth of Islamic schools, Islamic universities, and Islamic Education/Pedagogy courses and majors—within public universities and online Islamic universities—over the last five years.