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Biography of Author

Born in Scotland, raised in Toronto, Canada, Omaira Alam has been teaching for almost 10 years in public, private, and Muslim schools. Omaira graduated with a BSc from the University of Toronto with a double major in Neuroscience and World History. She then went on to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, an affiliate of U of Toronto, for her BEd. After a brief sojourn to Egypt, she completed her Masters in Transition Special Education at the George Washington University, specializing in secondary students with emotional and learning disabilities. As the Education Director of the Mustafa Center School, Omaira heads up the teacher training program designed to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development with an emphasis on the prophetic paradigm. Currently, she is a special education biology teacher at a local high school in Virginia.

Abstract

This paper presents standards of true discipline (i.e. guiding student behaviour) based upon the discipline with dignity paradigm, which emphasizes dignified conduct by the teacher. In developing these standards for classroom discipline, the author draws upon the teaching methodology of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) in perfecting good character, as well as best practices in discipline as found in western models of education. Concentrating on the aims of Islamic education, Muslim educators can authentically apply these standards within a modern context, and thus, bring students closer to the prophetic model of behaviour and conduct in the family, in the community and with God.

Introduction

*And this world, to perish is its destiny,
And those who belong to it, have to leave it;
It is very sweet and fresh and alluring;
It rushes towards those who seek it;
It settles down in the hearts of those who cast a glance over it.
Leave it, therefore, after you have taken the best of it as your baggage (for the journey after death).
Do not ask of it more than what is necessary; and do not seek
from it more than is sufficient.
[Ali ibn Abi Talib]¹*

This paper as presented by the author attempts to develop eight critical standards for classroom discipline in Muslim schools. These standards are derived from best practices in western educational theory and research, as well as from the teaching methodology of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). These eight standards around which any discipline plan must be shaped are:

¹ Rizavi, 1986, p.114

- 1) Nurture confidence in children's abilities and talents,
- 2) Develop a supportive and caring learning environment,
- 3) Teach self-control,
- 4) Promote concern and empathy for others,
- 5) Establish clearly defined limits,
- 6) Emphasize responsibility rather than obedience,
- 7) Teach conflict-resolution skills, and
- 8) Facilitate cooperation and meaningful connections with others.²

Each of these standards together fulfills the aims of an Islamic education. They also facilitate the implementation of an Islamic educational framework. The author argues that the onus is on the teacher to model the behaviours that will lead to the establishment of practices inside and outside the classroom that foster the desire in a child becoming a respectful and righteous global citizen. For educators a parallel is drawn from the teaching methodology of the best disciplinarian and teacher. All this is done within the discipline with dignity framework; where discipline should dignify children as human beings and not simply as individuals to be controlled.

The Aims of Islamic Education

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

[Mortimer J. Adler]³

Ever-increasingly in present society, the utilitarian purpose of education is emphasized over all else; "to be perfect in religion, to awaken one's intelligence, to have a companion in one's loneliness, to establish social contacts, and to get money."⁴ According to the Quran, however, the aims of Islamic education as extrapolated from the following verse, are greater:

"We have created mankind and the jinn, except that they should perform 'ibadah.'" *Ibadah* or worship in Islam ... is not only formal observances of certain rites. It connotes a complete submission to the law of God and His will, in every phase of life. Formal prayers are nothing but preparation for such a submission. This in Islamic creed, the idea of omnipresence of God permeates life in its totality...A Muslim is supposed to be in communion with God throughout his life ... in short, while doing anything and everything...what reaches Him is the piety or *taqwa*...The criterion of excellence in the Quranic code is piety and conforming got dictate of *taqwa*...Hence the whole matter precipitates down to this: Islam aims at preparing persons who are termed as *muttaqin* (pious) – those who can lead their lives in a just way.⁵

Therefore, according to the Pakistani educationalist, Sayyid Sajjad Rizavi

the ultimate aim of an Islamic education is to prepare individuals who live in a society, which is just and in which the idea of omnipresence and omnipotence of God as well as a believe in His justice predominates...The individualmust lead a normal ... life, performing all their worldly

² Mendler & Curwin, 1999, pp. 95-96.

³ Haq, 2005

⁴ Rizavi, 1986, p. 113.

⁵ Ibid., pp.113-114

functions but having a clear-cut notion of what they are and what they are for; orienting their lives to one goal – the life to come.⁶

This is in accordance with the great scholar, Imam Az-Zarnuji who stated, that “the object of education is to attain the pleasure and goodwill of the Almighty and win eternal life.”⁷ Rizavi concurs and states that,

this is in fact the fundamental point. From this aim emerge all others. This our position is that, if the study of the Qur’an and the Traditions leads one to negate this ultimate aim, it would definitely be against the spirit of Islam, and if the students grasps the spirit of Islam without specializing in jurisprudence and memorizing ten thousand Traditions, and choosing some other field of specialization, his education is Islamic on all accounts.⁸

Rizavi further emphasizes his point by quoting and expounding on the great philosopher, scholar, and *mujadid*, Imam Al-Ghazali:

“He who pursues learning in order to make money, so that he may attain social position or reduce his taxes and evade his obligations towards the sultan; he who studies for the sake of any other ambition save that of serving God exposes himself to dire consequences.” When we read this statement and know that he treated *fiqh* as a worldly subject, we may very well deduce that even the study of the basic principles of Islamic Law may become un-Islamic if it does not fulfill the Islamic aim of education – to be pious, righteous and just.⁹

Therefore, according to Rizavi, the aim of Islamic education is twofold: “seeking the pleasure of God in achieving a state of righteousness, and in acting according to the canons of Islamic justice.”¹⁰ This is in line with Imam Zaid Shakir of the Zaytuna Institute, who further asserts that

Sometimes we miss the greater objective of an Islamic education. That objective, in terms of what is necessary for the immediate success of our children in this world, and their ultimate success in the next, is nurturing balanced, wholesome, honest human beings who live lives based on principle and who exemplify good character in their dealings with other people. The basis for the obtainment of this objective is captured in the following prophetic tradition, “Be mindful of God wherever you are, and follow up any misdeed you might do with a good deed that will wipe it out (being weightier in the scale). And deal with people on the basis of good character.”¹¹

As such, the Turkish philosopher, Fethullah Gulen has mentioned that “the purpose of learning is to make knowledge a guide in life and illuminate the road to human betterment.”¹² According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a renowned educationalist, the aim of an Islamic education is two-fold. The first is the

recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.¹³

This is, in fact, *adab* which is the second tier of the goals of Islamic education. When one has *adab* they have the knowledge of how to know the “proper places of things in the order of creation” and they are

⁶ Ibid., p.115.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp.115-116.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.117.

¹¹ Shakir, 2006, *What we*

¹² Gulen, 2002.

¹³ Al-Attas, 1980, p.11.

aware of the “place of God”. Finally, they are able to do this such that it “preserves man from errors in judgment.”¹⁴ As stated by various educationalists, the aims of Islamic education are to instill that desire to seek the pleasure of God, and success in the Hereafter. The eight standards presented in this paper focus on establishing those aims within the framework of discipline with dignity.

Definitions of Discipline

*Control gained by enforcing obedience or order.
Orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behaviour. Strength and self-control.
A rule or system of rules governing conduct or activity. Punishment.*¹⁵

There are many definitions of discipline; however, for the purposes of this paper, the educational perspective will be used. The term ‘discipline’ is defined in the field of education as “methods in guiding behaviour”. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, discipline is “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character”.¹⁶ As such, this definition of discipline – the molding and perfecting of moral character – lends beautifully to the prophetic mission and paradigm as described by the Prophet, himself: “I was only sent to perfect good character.”¹⁷

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

*Aisha, wife of the Prophet, mentioned that his character
was an embodiment of the Qur’an. In other words,
his character was godly, for the Qur’an is the eternal Speech of God.*¹⁸

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

As stated by Dr. Muhammad Kamali, Professor of Law at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, and in agreement with other scholars across the centuries, “the Sunnah of the Prophet ... provides the authority for protecting the dignity of the dead in almost the same manner as that of the living.” It is narrated that as a funeral procession of a Jewish man passed by, the Prophet rose to his feet out of respect. He was questioned given the faith of the deceased. His reply, “Was he not a human being?” affirms his commitment to recognizing the inherent dignified status within every individual.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary; discipline.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Shakir, 2006, *The Ethical Standard*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kamali, 2002, pp. xvi&2.

The level of respect and honour that the Prophet bestowed on the living was unsurpassed. He addressed each individual based on what he understood to be as his or her cognitive abilities and spiritual nature.²⁰ This insight into the human psyche formed the basis for the Prophet's interactions. For example, when talking to someone the Prophet always faced the person with his full body. This simple action indicates his complete devotion in attending to the speaker.

It is because of the Prophet's acknowledgement and recognition of the innate needs of people that permitted him to be a man of noble character and a role model for people of all faiths. As Habib Umar bin Hafiz, a notable Muslim scholar, has mentioned, the prophetic model that must be followed is one that provides,

...excellence in translating the beauty, majesty, and completeness of Islam through ... verbal conveyance and public interaction—all expressed in accordance with the sacred law, with both those near and far—and by spreading the carpets of the good and noble character that has been received from the magnificent Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Therefore, ... work hard to both manifest and self-actualize this level of noble prophetic character ... familial interactions, as well as in other human relations.²¹

According to the Prophet, the best thing that a parent can give his or her child is a good education.²² As mentioned before, a good education leads to good character. A good educator results in a good disciplinarian: one who guides student behaviour based on their dignified conduct.

Modelling Dignified Conduct

In the Islamic tradition...the teacher is both a mu'allim (a transmitter of knowledge) and a murabbi (a nurturer of souls).²³

In order to properly teach the morals, ethics, and character of the Prophet, teachers must embody these traits within their own personalities. According to Rizavi,

the teacher is the most important factor in the educational system in Islam. He enjoys a supreme position of respect and authority. He is a master of destinies of the students and, thus, has a very important responsibility. He has to be an example for students.²⁴

If they do not have these traits they must strive to develop them in order to facilitate the ethical learning process of their students. Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, an Islamic scholar based in California, traces this history of moral education from the time of the ancients:

Regarding education, the ancients understood that its primary purpose was not economical but ethical, and while they knew ethics could not be taught, they knew it could be induced through moral example and wise childrearing techniques that ultimately resulted in moral and intellectual excellence.²⁵

²⁰ Adhami, 2005.

²¹ Bin Hafiz, 2005.

²² Kamali, 2002, p.26.

²³ Henzell-Thomas, 2004, p.8.

²⁴ Rizavi, 1986, p.123.

²⁵ Hanson, 2003, p.79.

For teachers, discipline with dignity, and moral education delve deep into the aims of Islamic education. When teachers respond with dignity, they inadvertently model the behavior that they expect of their students. Dr Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, an educator based in France, concurs with this approach to traditional education:

In authentic spiritual traditions, the teacher is not only responsible for the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge, but also with the education of the whole being. Such traditions never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul.²⁶

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

Not equal are good and evil. Repel [evil] with what is best; you will unexpectedly see one with whom you had enmity become an intimate friend. [Quran 41:34]²⁷

The Prophet advised his companions to take the high road based on his example. In turn, teachers should also respond in a way that preserves his or her dignity when approached with offensive behaviour. This shows students that the teacher is competent enough to handle the problem. “Constantly sending the student to the office to let the principle handle it, or responding in such a way that diminishes the teacher’s dignity indicates to students that the teacher is inadequate and ineffectual to be teaching.”²⁸ Furthermore, as educators, Dr. Allen Mendler and Dr. Richard Curwin, have stated, every time an educator successfully defuses inappropriate student behaviour in a manner that preserves dignity, he or she also succeed in modelling effective techniques to students. In this era of impulsive, aggressive and “have-the-last-word” behaviour, teachers play a vital role in modelling the best response for students.²⁹ “Good teachers intuitively know that attacking students even in a momentary lapse of weakness takes something away from themselves” and negatively impacts their own dignified status.³⁰

Teaching within the framework of discipline and dignity results in a *mutually transformative experience*.³¹ This is an interaction between the student and the educator where they engage in actions that result in the improvement of the individual parties and of the overall relationship leading to a substantial net benefit for all.

²⁶ Henzell-Thomas, 2004, p.8.

²⁷ Shakir, 2006.

²⁸ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.81.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.71.

³¹ Husain, 2005.

Authentic Standards of Discipline

*I have come to a frightening conclusion.
I am the decisive element in the classroom.
It's my personal approach that creates the climate.
It's my daily mood that makes the weather.
As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated,
and a child humanized or de-humanized.
[Haim Ginott]³²*

In order for teaching and learning to be a mutually transformative experience, where conditions of souls are changed such that they are in line with the aims of Islamic education, educators in Muslim schools must adopt authentic standards of discipline. These standards are referred to as authentic because they encompass the key elements as mentioned previously in this paper. These elements are modelling dignified conduct based upon the example of the Prophet, and focusing on establishing *adab* as defined by Al-Attas,

recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.³³

These standards provide preventative measures for issues and concerns arising from disciplinary problems. Each of the eight standards presented in this paper overlap and strengthens all the others; they build upon one another and should be used collectively.

1) Develop a supportive and caring learning environment

*The more suffering caused by disciplining, the more likely hatred and alienation will result
and the less likely students will be [able] to make good choices on their own.³⁴*

Before delving deeper into the concept of a supportive and caring learning environment, it is critical to highlight what “discipline” is not; and discipline is not “punishment”.

Discipline vs. Punishment

*Aisha, the blessed wife of the Prophet, may God be pleased with her,
was asked to describe the character of the Prophet. She responded:
“He was not foul in his actions, nor in his speech; he was not boisterous in the marketplace;
he did not retaliate in kind to vile acts perpetrated against him; rather he pardoned and forgave.”³⁵*

The Prophet has stated, “He who is not kind to children is not one of us.”³⁶ The implications of this statement lend themselves to the method of instruction of the student not just in knowledge, but also in

³² Ginot, 1972.

³³ Al-Attas, 1980, p.11.

³⁴ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.95

³⁵ Shakir, 2006.

³⁶ Kamali, 2002, p.26.

character. Ibn Khaldun, the great historian, highlights the results of severe punishment whether verbal or physical, that are no more different today than when they were presented centuries ago in *The Muqaddima*:

Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children, because it belongs among (the things that make for a) bad habit. Students ... who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking, because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth). Thus, they are taught deceit and trickery. This becomes their custom and character. They lose the quality that ... makes people human, namely, (the desire to) protect and defend themselves and their homes, and they become dependent on others. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities. Thus, they fall short of their potentialities and do not reach the limit of their humanity. As a result, they revert to the stage of “the lowest of the low.”³⁷

It is for this reason that teachers, especially those who are in the Islamic schools, must practice disciplinary methods that maintain the dignity of the child and does not shame or humiliate the child. The effort to perfect good character as presented by the Prophet is the main premise to teaching and disciplining based in human dignity and upheld in the *Shariah*. As Kamali has mentioned:

It is not permissible to violate the personal dignity of anyone, regardless of whether the person is pious or of ill-repute, Muslim or non-Muslim, [adult or child]. Even a criminal is entitled to dignified treatment. For punishment is meant for retribution and reform, not indignity and humiliation.³⁸

That level of harmful engagement has serious consequences not only in the *Shariah*, where child abuse is considered a major sin due to the injustice inflicted on those unable to defend themselves, but also in the long-term implications resulting in physical or emotional damage. If a child is “criticized, belittled, and shamed” then that child may develop a “lack of confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth”.³⁹ Those least able to defend themselves are the children.⁴⁰ For this reason, a teacher is not permitted to be too severe to the student when trying to educate her or him, simply out of the possibility of transgressing these bounds.⁴¹ Kamali further elaborates on the crux of a dignified interaction between teachers and students:

The dignity of man is identified as a strategic value of overall significance, and therefore all measures that are devised to protect and promote human dignity are *a priori* upheld and sanctified by the *Shariah*.⁴²

Most, if not all, teachers will say that they have never physically harmed a child. This may be true. However, for teachers, one key question needs to always be asked even with verbal attempts at guiding student behaviour: does this method of discipline attack or preserve dignity? Mendler and Curwin, stress that “while youngsters may cognitively process an experience differently than an adult would, their feelings

³⁷ Ibn Khaldun.

³⁸ Kamali, 2002, p.2.

³⁹ Helminski, 2004.

⁴⁰ Rabbani, 2006.

⁴¹ Ibn Khaldun.

⁴² Kamali, 2002, p.102.

toward it are much the same as the adult's."⁴³ As adults, one recognizes the humiliation that one experiences when treated in a less-than-dignified manner, yet, as teachers, one is quick to forget the long-term implications of treating students in a similar manner.

Educators must actually develop classroom practices that make students feel a sense of welcome, importance and belonging.⁴⁴ Teachers must encourage positive attention-seeking behaviour and address negative behavior in such a way that it is not reinforced. A healthy amount of attention may result in an individual who is balanced in terms of their mental and emotional capacities.⁴⁵

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

2) Nurture confidence in children's abilities and talents

For a teacher to be effective, humiliating a student or shaming a student will not have the desired results. Educators must nurture students in a way that promotes confidence in themselves and increases their self-esteem and self-worth. Students who worry about looking stupid will either withdraw –sleep or hide behind their desk – and become unmotivated, or act out when they should be working. They may direct their feelings of inadequacy on other students by calling them names, when they themselves cannot do the work; if they cannot do the work, no one else can.⁴⁷ Generally these students are well-behaved except when they are required to show mastery or competency. The educator must instill in the student the belief that if they make an effort, they can and will succeed. Students need to feel appreciated for their efforts and for what they have already accomplished. They also need to know that their effort is at least as important as their achievement. The best practice is to continue to challenge the student when they are feeling successful.⁴⁸

3) Teach self-control

Many students have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and are ruled by their impulses. Sometimes students are unaware of their behavior. This can lead to difficult behaviour and hard-to-achieve success, which when reached is short-lived. These students respond well to positive reinforcement, structure, self-monitoring and self-control. Educators must clearly define the expectations to the student and guardians, and then monitor the progress in an organized way.⁴⁹

⁴³ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.71.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.57.

⁴⁵ Helminski, 2004.

⁴⁶ MacLeod, 2006.

⁴⁷ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.57.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.59-60.

When dealing with children who are angry, educators need to teach them to express themselves appropriately. At the same time, educators must acknowledge that the student's anger is legitimate. Students who first enter school are sometimes very angry. As the months progress, these same students begin to manage their behavior in more appropriate ways, and visibly try to control themselves. This is definitely based on the persistence of the adults who work with them.⁵⁰

4) Promote concern and empathy for others

The largest increase in student misbehavior is due to a lack of empathy across all levels and forms of schooling; it is, in fact, reaching epidemic proportions in some schools in the United States. In most cases, the lack of empathy is due to a behavior that was not learned during their developmental years. However, when given the opportunity to do good, students will do good. Teachers must generate opportunities for students to do good deeds and praiseworthy acts within the school and outside, in the larger community. This form of civic action must be encouraged.⁵¹

5) Establish clearly defined limits

Teachers should always assume that appropriate standards of behavior need to be taught and modelled, not simply announced; knowing expectations improves student behaviour, as well as understanding the rules and the reasons behind the rules.⁵² Educators should ensure that the rules and expectations set up in his or her classroom are clear and they promote student learning. There is no harm in revising the rules and including student input as the year progresses. Students will take greater ownership in their learning experience when given the opportunity to develop the guidelines. For students who constantly break rules, a teacher should have at least five separate sessions to practice appropriate behavior.⁵³

6) Emphasize Responsibility Rather than Obedience

Mendler and Curwin further emphasize that teaching responsibility rather than obedience through a program of discipline based in human dignity is equally important for all students no matter how difficult they may be.⁵⁴ Bin Hafiz concurs and extends this concept to all of God's creation: "One should ... display gracious interaction with all the children of Adam, as well as the animal kingdom, and even inanimate objects."⁵⁵ Henzell-Thomas elaborates on the teaching of children within the paradigm of human dignity as akin to developing God-consciousness:

"The Islamic educational system never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul." Islamic education ideally aims to provide a milieu for the total and balanced development of every

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.66-67.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.64.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p.59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. xiv.

⁵⁵ Bin Hafiz, 2005.

student in every sphere of learning - spiritual, moral, imaginative, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, emotional and physical - directing all these aspects towards the attainment of a conscious relationship with God, the ultimate purpose of man's life on earth.⁵⁶

7) Teach Conflict-Resolution Skills

As society declines in areas of civility and increases in crass, in-your-face, and have-the-last-word attitudes, developing strategies that encourage conflict-resolution skills is imperative. As educators opportunities must be given to students to reflect on misbehaviour and to determine a course of action which will diminish conflict. The goal is for a peaceful resolution. This goal, however, will not be manifested nor implemented initially. Students must be provided with strategies that give opportunities for reflection even when conflicts have escalated (i.e. what could have been a better alternative?). The teacher must also refrain from engaging in the *conflict cycle* which usually accelerates a conflict rather than decreases it. Disengaging from the conflict cycle give teachers opportunities to model good conflict-resolution skills.⁵⁷

8) Facilitate Cooperation and Meaningful Connections with Others

Humans by nature are social creatures. With the increase in the proliferation of technology, reality-TV, and cyber-communication, essential elements of communication are lost and replaced by a vacuum of superficial interactions. In order to develop cooperative and meaningful connections and relationships with others, children must be given teamwork and group work opportunities with their peers, and instances of developing lasting relationships with those in the greater community. Visiting orphanages or elderly homes on a regular basis is an excellent way to foster that kind of relationship. Connecting with people from various backgrounds allows children to develop social skills that improve their ability to deepen existing relationships. Educators in Muslim schools must strive to establish opportunities for students to have these types of meaningful relationships.

Conclusion

These eight standards of discipline – nurture confidence in children’s abilities and talents, develop a supportive learning environment, teach self-control, promote empathy for others, establish clearly defined limits, emphasize responsibility, teach conflict-resolution skills, and facilitate meaningful connections – designed not to punish, but to guide student behaviour and to strive to further the prophetic model of teaching and learning, raise the standards of classroom discipline in a dignified way. These standards, if implemented correctly, espouse a fundamental goal in establishing the aims of Islamic education, and, thus, put the onus on the teachers and educators to conduct themselves with dignity. In following these standards for themselves and their students, educators can hope to produce students like the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who was taught by the best teacher:

⁵⁶ Henzell-Thomas, 2002.

⁵⁷ Mendler & Curwin, 1999, p.112.

Looking at the personality of 'Ali, we find an illustration of this ideal; a man of nerves and courage, words and deeds; never failing in a battle, never turning away from it (*karrar ghair farrar*); absorbed completely while saying his formal prayers; alert absolutely while in contact with the physical reality; whose name was a terror for the militants and a source of perpetual inspiration for the peaceful; a man who always upheld the rule of justice even if it was against his own interest; a scholar of unparalleled excellence and an orator none else to match. He lived in the world but not as a slave of the world. Such is the ideal to create which is the aim of Islamic philosophy of education.⁵⁸

This is what Muslim educators should want of their students.

⁵⁸ Rizavi, 1986, p.119

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