Hands-On Books-Closed: Integrating Core Subjects into Islamic Studies for K-6

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Abstract:

Recent studies and surveys have shown that hands-on activities enhance the learning abilities of students and improve their academic performance. In this workshop we will discuss hands-on, center based activities and project-based learning that integrate core subjects and Islamic Studies. Traditionally, teachers have taught Islamic Studies through direct instruction by way of having students read from a text, listen to a lecture, or answer comprehension questions. In this workshop we not only adopt a new hands-on approach to teaching Islamic Studies but we also provide a starter kit to take back to your classroom.

About the Author:

Tatiana Coloso has been in education for 8 years. She is currently teaching Islamic Studies, Kindergarten through 4th grade at Al-Iman School in Raleigh, NC, where she has helped reinvigorate and develop the Islamic curriculum for the past four years. Her line of research focuses on integrating core subjects into Islamic Studies curriculum using hands on activities. Tatiana has a passion for teaching, nurturing, and stimulating young minds. This has created an enthusiastic environment within her classroom. She has successfully completed the Islamic Teacher Education program from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto.

Aishia Neal has taught students ranging in grades three to eight for over 10 years. Working in Islamic schools has encouraged her to explore ways to integrate and “islamify” the curriculum taught in her core content classes. Mentoring others as a Lead Teacher, she has been one who strives to promote application of the latest research based strategies, and the importance of creating a classroom environment that is safe, stimulating, and supportive to all learning styles. She is currently working at Amplify Learning with Math Curriculum Development in Durham, NC.

Introduction:

The mission of an Islamic Studies teacher is that of any other teacher; to give their students the tools they need to become successful citizens. However, the Islamic Studies teacher has an added objective; success in the Hereafter. In order to achieve this objective, the Islamic Studies teacher has to broaden their resources and instructional strategies in order to fully impact their students. This paper will explain how creating a solid instructional framework as well as
using unconventional resources, center based activities, and project based learning to integrate core subjects into Islamic Studies, will lead to better student achievement.

Establishing a Framework:

“Effective framework in language, literature, and the content areas begins thoughtful, artful organization and planning” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001)

Establishing a solid framework in which the routine is regular, students identify the expectations of the teacher. This allows the student the ability to focus on the content taught, not wondering “what comes next”. Setting up the routine early in the year, simplifies instruction and ensures unit objectives are the only changes made. This process is extremely important in order to be successful in developing a center based classroom or project based learning.

“One suggested framework is initiating a workshop style environment. By organizing learning time in three parts (a mini lesson, independent/small group practice, and conclusion) the Islamic Studies teacher will be able to provide students with time to apply concepts learned as well as target areas of improvement/enrichment through small groups, and thus reaching all students.

The pictures below display a mini lesson, an independent assignment, and teacher conferencing. The first fifteen minutes of the class mini lessons are conducted on the community carpet. After mini lessons, students return to their desk and complete independent practice (picture #2 and #3) while the teacher works one on one or in small groups (picture #4). This allows the teacher to work with struggling or advanced students. It can also be used for oral testing. Aside from enriching student learning, conferencing one on one with students gains the opportunity to personally get to know their students and create lasting bonds.
Unconventional Resources:

Instead of being limited to the Islamic Studies text, exploring unconventional resources such as websites, anthologies, novels, or various manipulatives, will allow Islamic Studies teachers to enhance the objectives taught.

Currently Islamic Studies resources are suffering from outdated material. With continuously changing standards and teaching demands, Islamic Studies teachers must begin to look beyond the traditional resources and branch out into other subject areas to enhance the effectiveness of their lessons. For example, during a typical Ramadan lesson on sighting the new moon, teachers can refer to a Science text to explain in-depth moon phases. Online resources like kidastronomy.com can bring the Islamic Studies lesson into the 21st Century by utilizing technology.

In addition to using Islamic text, teachers can enhance their Akhlaaq (Islamic value) lessons and activities by using resources from character trait websites, books, and other materials. The BIAE (Bureau of Islamic and Arabic Education) encourages the Islamic Studies teacher to integrate a character trait monthly into the lessons. Using this as a base tool for teaching, the Islamic Studies teacher can then use great websites such as goodcharacter.com. This website offers many student activities, discussion questions, writing assignments, and more. There are also many character trait short stories that teachers can use to create comprehension worksheets and themes for the week.

Language Arts material is the handiest resource for an Islamic Studies teacher. Using the resources as a template is a great start to enhancing your Islamic Studies curriculum.
you are creative or not, using premade material as a template, is effortless for anyone. Language Arts tools such as the *Story Wands* from Lakeshore (picture #5) are wonderful manipulatives to use when teaching stories of the Prophets or the seerah of the Prophet Muhammed (sallahu alayhi wa salam). Questions such as “Who was in the story?” and “How did the story end?” help to reinforce comprehension skills. Using non-fiction children’s books to teach about Allah’s creations is another excellent resource for children. A teacher can take a simple book like “Miles and Miles of Reptiles”, read it aloud to the whole class, discuss how Allah creates reptiles, and then have the students create a Reptile Reflection journal. This not only offers various opportunities to grasp the concept, but differentiates the instruction for all types of learners, offers formative assessment, and hands on application. The teacher can teach many lesson aside from Allah created everything. During this unit the teacher can begin to discuss are reptiles’ halal or haram and transition to this topic.

In order to be an effective Islamic Studies teacher it is important that the teacher know what students in each grade level they is learning in Language Arts. This makes all the difference in whether or not the students will comprehend the content being taught and for the teacher to know what types of activities is age appropriate. For example, knowing that your 1st grade students are beginning to write paragraphs and short stories the Islamic Studies teacher can have students make a short story on the content being taught (Picture #6). In this way, integrating Science, Language Arts, and the Islamic Studies objective of identifying Allah’s creation, becomes more than just a lesson and students begin to relate all subjects to Islam.

![Picture #5: Story Wands](image1)

![Picture #6: Mini Story](image2)

**Project Based Learning:**

Project-based learning is a new strategy that is gaining momentum among teachers looking to teach multiple objects through one large project. Although the research shows that project-based learning is proven to increase student achievement, the lack of training teachers how to implement project-based learning effectively is limited (David, 2008). There are no particular curriculums developed for project-based learning and it is not an easy task when developing a complete project. What is project-based learning? Jane David explains the concept clearly in her 2008 article *What Research Says About Project-Based Learning:*

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“The core idea of project-based learning is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience.” (David, 2008)

Islamic Studies is an ideal subject for project-based learning. Since Islam teaches us core beliefs and akhlaq (Islamic values) we can create a project such as traveling to Hajj or a community service initiative and turn it into an entire project. Given the example of Hajj, each year an Islamic school offers a Hajj Fair. This fair can be turned into a huge project that will teach students art and design by creating and building the landmarks for the Hajj Fair. Students could use computer programming to design the locations of Hajj which incorporates technology. Math is incorporated through measurement and time. In elementary schools the airport process could be reenacted. They can learn about customer relations through taking on jobs within the airport. Throughout the entire process the teacher is taking the role of a facilitator. Students are in charge of the process and the teacher is available as a resource. The teacher asks the students questions to guide their project and help them discover realistic goals. It is vital that the teacher fully develop their project before implementing it in the classroom. The benefits and research show the positive impact that project-based learning offers but there are the factors of extensive planning and the long process that it requires. However, if a teacher plans effectively by creating a project that will cover many objectives and skills taught through one project the outcome will be amazing.

**Centered Based Activities:**

“The student benefits from the center by becoming a more self-directed learner, and the teacher benefits from a classroom where she facilitates as a learning coach, rather than constantly giving direction and instruction to the group.” (Stover, 2011)

The final part of this paper discusses the creation, the implementation, and the assessing of center based activities. Center based activities are needed in order to incorporate critical thinking skills, creativity, and differentiated instruction. These activities also develop independence in students’ time management skills.

"When students worked on individual and cooperative projects in the centers, they were engaged with the content at deeper, more meaningful levels. The learning centers contained multisensory and differentiated activities that helped meet the diverse range of
student interests, ability levels, and needs." (Moritz and Holmes, 2007)

Center based activities expand on multiple dimensions of learning by using, enhancing and connecting our student’s skills and knowledge. Using center based activities in Islamic Studies will enable students to demonstrate all levels of thinking – remembering, describing, explaining, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. (Revised Bloom's Taxonomy)

Creating centers are not as difficult as it may seem. There are many resources available to teachers. Using Language Arts resources and changing the words to meet the Islamic Studies objectives is simple. For example in Picture #7, a Language Arts sequencing center was modified to sequence events in Islamic history. In Picture #8, a store bought pocket chart is used to create an objective based interactive game. The game integrates health, science, language arts, and Islamic etiquette. The pocket chart can easily be changed with weekly objectives. Centers such as these can also be used for students who complete class work early throughout the day.

It is important to establish a routine and review its effectiveness when implementing centers. A great way to foster student organization and a weekly routine for centers is through a center checklist. Students receive a weekly checklist with the task they are to accomplish by the end of the week. They know exactly what your expectations are, they learn to manage their time, and stay organized. This fosters independence and allows the student to take ownership of their own learning.

Assessing center work can be simple too. Using a rubric to assess a part or whole of the center checklist is possible. Table 3 shows an example of a simple center rubric. Every center activity should not be graded. A teacher can decide which centers are for practice and which centers are to be graded. Providing the students with the rubric as well is a great way for them to know what the teacher is looking for.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student completed all 6 centers above average, neatly, and on time.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student completed all 6 centers with some errors, neatly, and on time.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student completed some or all of centers, correctly or with some errors, neatly, and on time.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center work was not complete, neat, or on time.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Students are more willing to take risks in a safe learning environment than they would be if everything were too graded.” (Wong and Wong 2009)

By the students knowing your expectations and providing a rubric they will know what effort they are putting forth and will not feel the pressures of always have to ‘make the grade’. They will gain the love of learning when class work is not always confined to seat work.

**Conclusion:**

With thoughtful planning and organization, teachers will discover that they too can enhance their lessons by creating an environment where students develop self directed skills and take ownership of their academic achievements. Students’ engagement and achievement increases when the Islamic Studies teacher approaches instruction as Literacy teachers. In using this method, students will discover how Islam is connected to their Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science content.

**References:**


Picture#5:
http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/seo/ca%7CsearchResults~~p%7CJJ728~~f%7C/Assortments/Lakeshore/ShopByCategory/languagetools/viewall.jsp