

Article

An Autoethnography of an Islamic Teacher Education Programme

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Abstract: This article explores Islamic Teacher Education through an autoethnographic account of the author's experience with the Graduate Certificate of Education (Islamic Pedagogy) at the University of South Australia. It addresses the lack of research on how Islamic Pedagogy is taught, contributing to the growing scholarship on faith-based teacher education. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that combines autobiography and ethnography, emphasising personal experiences to explore cultural communities. It is especially useful in studying emerging concepts like Islamic Pedagogy and faithful praxis. This approach challenges Western positivism, promoting epistemic reflexivity, and offering critical insights into marginalised perspectives and educational practices. This paper employs autoethnography to present the author's faithful praxis journey as a transformative pedagogical shift, shaped by their experiences with Western and Islamic epistemologies, aiming to empower Muslim voices in education and challenge marginalisation, with the Graduate Certificate fostering epistemic reflexivity and providing a platform to reconcile Islamic and Western knowledge in the classroom. This paper also clarifies the distinction between Islamic Pedagogy and Islamic integration through autoethnography by highlighting their complementary nature as opposed to the author's initial assumptions around their interchangeability. Whilst this article contributes to the growing Islamic Teacher Education scholarship through an autoethnographic perspective, further research to assess broader program efficacy is still needed.



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1. Introduction

This article contributes to the emerging scholarship exploring how Islamic teacher education programmes are delivered through an autoethnography of the author's experiences completing the Graduate Certificate of Education (Islamic Education) at the University of South Australia, herein referred to as the 'Grad Cert'. The flourishing body of Islamic Pedagogy scholarship thus far has focused on a philosophical grounding within, amongst other theoretical approaches, faithful praxis (Memon et al., 2024b), curriculum renewal (Memon et al., 2021), Islamic Pedagogy (Memon, 2021), learner development from an Islamic perspective (Alkouatli, 2021), and the centrality of a Muslim ethos within Muslim schools (Trevathan, 2018). This proliferation of scholarship emphasises just how much has been written about *what* Islamic teacher education programmes in the West should deliver, whilst underscoring the ongoing need to synthesise a greater depth and nuance in Islamic Pedagogy as a philosophy of faith-based education that is grounded in an Islamic worldview (Memon et al., 2024a). However, little has been written on *how* Islamic Pedagogy is taught within Islamic teacher education programmes. Memon et al.'s (2024a) introduction for this Special Issue on Islamically grounded teacher education foregrounds the need to

address this paucity in the scholarship on Islamic teacher education programmes, where ‘the journey of Islamic school educators grappling with what it means to carve out a distinct identity and sense of self-efficacy requires ongoing research.’ (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 18) This paper’s contribution to this ongoing research is marked by an autoethnographic focus on the formative process of achieving faithful praxis within the Grad Cert.

2. Theoretical Framework

The autoethnography is a form of qualitative and ethnographic research that seeks to understand a specific cultural community. As an emerging research methodology, there is a growing body of literature seeking to assess autoethnography (Herrmann & Adams, 2024). It involves the researcher drawing on their own experiences, even employing poetic performance (Yan, 2025), as the primary source of qualitative data. It can be considered a combination of autobiography and ethnography that ‘emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal via writing, leading to the discovery of the relevancy of one’s personal life to their professional role(s) (and vice versa)’ (Hibbs, 2024, pp. 425–426). Its ability to emancipate marginalised voices from the Global South is showcased in Wayfinding and Critical Autoethnography in the way (Iosefo, 2021), which uncovers the way diverse voices expand understandings of autoethnography as a critical, creative methodology that represents a versatility that is useful in exploring faithful praxis, which is itself an emerging concept that similarly adopts a critical approach from a marginalised perspective.

The autoethnography naturally lends itself to exploring the Grad Cert’s ability to inculcate faithful praxis through a number of key strengths. One of these strengths is its ability to qualitatively capture the rich nuances of faithful praxis by capturing its practical manifestation within the educator experience of understanding, internalising, reflecting upon, embodying, and implementing Islamic Pedagogy. The emergent nature of Islamic Pedagogy gives it a limited pool of research participants. This lends itself to explicating my distinct identity and sense of self-efficacy as a Muslim secondary English educator in the Australian (NSW) education system, whilst the paucity of extensive studies with larger samples justifies an autoethnographic focus that addresses the ‘absence of literature from a student’s perspective on the experience of online education’ (Lovegrove, 2020, p. 225). There is also a synergy between autoethnographic research and Islamic Pedagogy, derived from their common approach of challenging the epistemic normativity of Western positivism. Cremin (2018) notes how autoethnographies have been overlooked within academic scholarship due to the positivistic premium placed on quantitative research methods, asserting the value of a ‘qualitative enquiry...that is existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical’ (Cremin, 2018, p. 1). This critically performative role also materialises in Islamic Pedagogy’s pursuit of ‘epistemic reflexivity’, which seeks to achieve epistemic confidence and sovereignty, establish the ontologically anchored role of the educator within an Islamic worldview, and mount a challenge to Western, colonial understandings of education (Memon et al., 2024a). ‘Epistemic reflexivity’ is thus a cornerstone of the Grad Cert as it is a primary means of achieving the Grad Cert’s end goal of inculcating ‘faithful praxis’ within educators. Its criticality towards the normative market-driven, secular, and positivistic assumptions within Western education positions epistemic reflexivity as the vehicle through which the Grad Cert achieves its end goal of inculcating faithful praxis.

There are, however, limitations to an autoethnography in the long term within a dynamic and growing online education space. For instance, how will the efficacy of engaging educators in faithful praxis completing the Grad Cert be longitudinally tracked amongst a large cohort of students? Additionally, as an online course, the Grad Cert faces unique

challenges within online education that arise when tried and true pedagogical approaches need to be modified for online delivery as they were developed and tested for smaller, face-to-face settings (Broadbent, 2020). My sole appraisal within an autoethnography holds minimal weight for a course-wide strategy, which is where quantitative methodologies, particularly longitudinal studies, are better suited to exploring individual views amongst a large cohort. Nonetheless, the purpose of the autoethnography as a ‘dialogic quest to understand the world’ (Cremin, 2018, p. 1) positions it as an ideal empirical starting point.

The sequential structure of subjects within the Grad Cert also aligns with the autoethnographic propensity for dialogical inquiry. As epistemic reflexivity is developed progressively within these four subjects, the educator’s unique experience can powerfully reveal the emergence of faithful praxis in a way that ‘attempts to integrate body, emotion and autobiography with aesthetics and ethnographic research’ (Cremin, 2018, p. 1). The first subject, ‘Principles and Praxis’, lays the foundational theoretical underpinnings of an Islamic worldview within Islamic Pedagogy, positioning educators to familiarise themselves with and/or rediscover the rich Muslim tradition within education that recognises the nurturing of the soul and the importance of good morals and character. The second subject, ‘Quality Teaching and Learning’, seeks to deepen the understanding of Islamic Pedagogy by applying it to both broad educational theories and specific instructional practices. The educator’s principled approach is developed within Islamic theory to reflect their faithful praxis. This is achieved by encouraging epistemic reflexivity by facilitating Islamic Pedagogy’s potential to shape instructional practices and promote pedagogical renewal. The third subject, ‘Managing Learning Environments’, explores the impact of learning environment management on students’ growth, development, wellbeing, and safety to emphasise student-centred priorities in schools with a focus on a more holistic, proactive approach. Faithful practice emerges through a recognition of the intersection between issues of behaviour and discipline with values, morals, faith, and spirituality within Islamic schooling. The capstone subject ‘Critical Perspectives on Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment’ aims to reconnect purpose, coherence, and alignment across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in schools by exploring curriculum models in Islamic schools that promote faithful praxis. Educators embark on an action research approach to actively engage in shaping the course content to address educational challenges and aspirations relevant to the educator’s context.

It becomes clear that measuring the achievement of educator faithful praxis is the key benchmark to measuring *how* the Grad Cert is delivered. For the purpose of this paper, the tangible manifestations of epistemic reflexivity within the Grad Cert, which materialise through assessment deliverables, attest to the ‘coherence between faith inspired beliefs about education and challenging realities within contemporary Islamic schools’. (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 13) The next section will outline how ‘key turns’ within the educator provide cohesive milestones representing epistemic reflexivity within the educator.

3. Method

Memon et al. (2024a) describe the advancement of the Grad Cert curriculum through five ‘key turns’, which represent milestones representing epistemic reflexivity within the educator. It is these key turns that will methodologically guide this autoethnography and act as a productive lens with which to chart the achievement of faithful praxis. These are (1) the ‘inward turn’; (2) the ‘critical turn’; (3) the ‘reflexive turn’; (4) the ‘turn back’; and (5) the ‘pedagogical turn’. Acting as milestones of epistemic reflexivity, these turns are intended to challenge the bifurcation facing Islamic school educators, which becomes evident when there is a clash between the desire to nurture the soul of Muslim learners through education grounded in an Islamic worldview, and the entrenched normativity positioning

educators to deliver a curriculum rooted in Western, neoliberal, secular, positivistic, and market-driven expectations. My decision to embark upon the Grad Cert is rooted in my long-held personal motivation as a Muslim learner seeking an empowered Muslim voice, which acts as a countervailing force that challenges the othering of Muslims. As such, the beginning of the ‘inward turn’ began much earlier than my enrolment in the Grad Cert and in fact began in high school. To illustrate why I chose to undertake Grad Cert, I need to chart my progressive development as a learner by explaining why I became a teacher who values an education from an Islamic worldview. And to do that, I need to take you all the way back to my experiences at Granville Boys High School.

4. Analysis

4.1. Prologue (To the ‘Inward Turn’): ‘The Turbaned Turk’

It was 2005 and I was sitting in the back right corner of the room with my mates Burak and Şahin. We were studying Shakespeare’s *Othello*, where insults like ‘turbaned Turk’ seemed personal, as we were the sons of Turkish immigrants to Australia. Classroom discussions in Year 11 English, contextualising the historical and political milieu of Shakespeare’s time, placated any deep sense of offense from this insult through an expectation we remain stoic under the assumption that ‘She’ll be right mate’. Trying to navigate our identity as Australian or Türk or Muslim was not something new. Around the same time in high school, we were watching a scene from Peter Weir’s 1981 film *Gallipoli* in Year 10 history class. An ANZAC soldier throws a grenade towards the Turks whilst shouting ‘Good morning, Abdul!’, which had me standing up from my chair in a ‘What the...’ moment. This moment was quickly diffused by my down-to-earth history teacher, who smoothed it over with playful banter. You cannot help but take your hat off to Mr Baker, a resolute teacher who was able engage chest-beating, hot-headed, and testosterone-filled 15-year-old boys. Not only did we feel the need to articulate our Muslim identity, but we needed to be taught how to do so positively and productively.

There was another epithet back in Year 11 English class that really jolted me. These rabid words mauled themselves into my long-term memory: ‘circumcised dog’. Circumcision is a religious obligation for all Muslim males that bestows a sense of pride and honour. I had never viewed it in a negative light until that point, apart perhaps from considerations of the pain threshold of young boys. However, in this instance, it was being used in a clearly derogatory manner. My ‘What the...?’ reaction was followed by a simple yet profound question, “Why?”.

Grappling with our Muslim identity in a secular state school was not something new. The students at Granville Boys High School would themselves organise the Friday congregational prayer (Juma) at lunchtime in the gym and sometimes be chastised by teachers for returning late to class following prayer. Our response would involve apologetically placating our teachers out of respect, although the prospect of missing out on 10 min of period 5 business studies on a Friday afternoon was not altogether unwelcomed. One Friday, one of the deputy principals at the time came to the gym to find a boy that was meant to serve a lunch detention. The deputy, seemingly unaware of Juma’s significance and the emphasis placed upon its obligatory nature, approached the boy and addressed him *during* the congregational prayer. The boy did not respond. The deputy then proceeded to pull the boy up from his position of prostration, I guess because he thought the boy was conveniently ignoring him and trying to get out of detention. The boy simply pulled free of the deputy’s hold to return to prostration. The events that followed the conclusion of that Juma prayer are seared into my mind, and it seemed as though the entire congregation moved as one solid structure from the gym to outside that deputy principal’s room. The deputy principal had locked himself inside his room, whilst a lively protest unfolded just

outside his door. Whilst the actions of the deputy clearly came from a place of ignorance, they nonetheless sparked an energetic response that showed me just how resolute and empowered high school Muslims can be.

These memories acted as flickers of candlelight that illuminated my Muslim identity at the time, anecdotes that explain my impetus for empowering the Muslim voice. The “Why?” for the ‘circumcised dog’ epithet was momentary, yet emblematic of how the Muslim identity and voice of learners were subject to throw-away comments and casually downplayed as a geopolitical oddity. The power of language to perpetuate the idea of ‘turbaned Turks’ and ‘circumcised dogs’ remains today, as does the importance of developing Muslim identity and a (counter) voice. I left the school feeling that I needed to continue to develop a strong Muslim voice, both mine and that of the collective, in whatever way I could. This feeling would drive a deep desire to uncover and amplify an empowered Muslim voice within my high school English lessons as an educator.

4.2. The ‘Inward Turn’

Enrolment in EDUC 5262: Principles and Praxis helped to clarify my pedagogical challenge to empower Muslim learners receiving an education dominated by Western epistemologies. I saw firsthand how a Western education, particularly in Australia, predominantly emphasises positivist, empirical, and secular knowledge derived from the European Enlightenment in a way that marginalises Muslim epistemologies, limiting Muslim students’ ability to critique the dominant paradigms and understand their heritage. My pedagogical challenge was articulated by a desire to integrate both Western and Muslim epistemologies to empower Muslim students to succeed academically while critically engaging with societal issues, for example, studying texts like *Othello* in a way where Muslim students critically engage with racial and religious othering through Orientalism (Said, 1979). To do so critically and effectively, there is a benefit in drawing on both Western and Muslim scholarship through an interdisciplinary approach inspired by the German theologian Daniel Friedrich Schleiermacher.

Zimmermann’s *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction* (2015) outlines Schleiermacher’s interdisciplinary approach as a ‘hermeneutic conversation’ (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 24). The hermeneutic conversation aims to mediate conflicts between religion and science by focusing on universal conditions for understanding across various fields like theology, law, and history to defend religion against Enlightenment ideas that sought to reduce it to morality, aesthetics, or reason. Schleiermacher argued that both scientific and religious knowledge contribute to a holistic understanding of reality, leading to a deeper “God-consciousness”, where a “holistic view of reality would mean, for example, that unified field theory in physics, Jesus’s command to love one’s enemy, and Shakespeare’s warning against the destructive power of jealousy in *Othello* all contribute to our knowledge of reality” (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 27). Leaning into a hermeneutic conversation has many benefits for secondary school English which is mandated to teach the literary canon. As Muslims seeking excellence in what we do (ihsan), we must capitalise on teaching the canon, including Shakespeare, which is explicitly mandated in the NSW English syllabus, in ways that still draw on Islamic Pedagogy. This will enable students to make meaningful connections between their studies in English and their wider identity as Muslims and the geopolitical realities of the world. By doing so, students’ own voices are empowered as they too deepen their ontological consciousness to challenge prevailing worldviews with a more nuanced understanding rooted in Islamic principles.

Studying *Othello* in high school was thus crucial for driving my ‘inward turn’ to ‘articulate a clear and compelling pedagogical challenge within [my] practice’ (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 13) of empowering the Muslim voice through English. My enrolment in

EDUC 5262: Principles and Praxis reinforced the idea that teaching practice in the English classroom reflects Islamic Pedagogy, deepens ontological consciousness, is dialogical, and is ethical and justice-oriented (Memon, 2021). By this time, I had been teaching English for six years. Four of these were at a small Islamic school in Western Sydney, Irfan College (IC), where Islamic Pedagogy was embraced and progressively implemented. This context was conducive to my inward turn, which did not occur without initial scepticism. At the time, I applied Islamic Pedagogy in a piecemeal fashion with the planning and delivery of my lessons. I was struggling with the question, at that time, of how to apply Islamic pedagogy that was not superficial by “sprinkling” Islamic ideas and principles onto a lesson or programme. In my prototypical attempts to infuse Islamic Pedagogy, this involved taking a typical English lesson analysing language forms and features within texts and conducting a guided analysis of ‘Surah al Fil’ (‘The Elephant’), the 105th chapter of the *Quran*.

4.3. The ‘Critical Turn’

My enrolment in EDUC 5280—Managing Learning Environments, which was also during my employment at IC, provided the opportunity to critique a traditionally focused school ‘Behaviour Management Guide’ by exploring the potential integration of the ‘Tarbiya’ framework (Tauhidi, 2001), which emphasises holistic development, into teaching practices to foster moral literacy and a noble character in students. By doing so, a ‘critical turn’ seeking to ‘reconnect Islamic school educators to a critical archive’ (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 14) was realised. Whilst it sought to manage student behaviour through positive reinforcement to foster a safe and productive learning environment, the ‘Behaviour Management Guide’ at IC was nonetheless initially grounded in a functional, control-based approach to behaviour management. Whilst functional behaviour management approaches have their place, they are a blunt tool within Islamic schools when rooted solely within a Western paradigm (Charles & Barr, 2011; Richmond, 2007) as opposed to grounding student wellbeing within an Islamic worldview (Alkouatli, 2021; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). The inability of a classical behaviour management approach to fully consider the complex nuances of student behaviour means it ultimately fails in the goals of empowering students and treating them with dignity. The introduction of Islamic Pedagogy in IC resulted in a faith-based focus that proved effective in promoting positive reinforcement in the approach towards student behaviour. IC was pioneering at the time in minimising reliance only upon punitive methods such as detentions and monitoring cards, and instead focusing on strategies like nurturing emotional intelligence, applying logical consequences, and motivating students through self-reflection and ownership of their behaviour.

This subject also consolidated my faithful practice with respect to empowering the Muslim voice within high school English by implementing Islamic Pedagogy in a Year 9 English class at IC. Using the school’s ‘Philosophy of Assessment’ document developed by Samah Taki and a ‘Project Planner’ to integrate Islamic principles into mainstream lessons, the goal was to enhance student engagement and manage classroom behaviour through Islamic Pedagogy, fostering a positive and respectful learning environment. The lessons focused on understanding cultural difference and racism, using the Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) ‘Last Sermon’ as a model for discussion and critical reflection. This approach successfully engaged students, with active participation in speeches and discussions on social justice, demonstrating the effectiveness of Islamic Pedagogy in enhancing academic and social outcomes.

4.4. The ‘Reflexive Turn’

My enrolment in EDUC 5263—Islamic Pedagogy: Quality Teaching and Learning was marked by a critical time of transition within my career. The timing of this move serendipi-

tously supported a deep ‘reflexive’ turn that allowed me to be ‘inspired to think anew...[to] find contextually relevant ways of responding to their practice realities’ (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 15). My transition between three Islamic schools when completing this subject revealed the importance of ‘epistemic multicentricity’ (Memon et al., 2024b), helping to explain why Islamic Pedagogy was embraced or not in each of these three Islamic schools. A progressive shift away in my understanding of Islamic Pedagogy emerged at this time, as I moved away from merely appending Islam to a subject when redesigning programs as I did early in my career. I had been guided my assumption that Islamic Pedagogy was synonymous with embedding an Ayat or hadith within a lesson. This was an assumption that I would gradually dispel as I progressed through the Grad Cert and I slowly realised that Islamic Pedagogy was something not necessarily defined by its reference to Islamic ideals and principles, but nonetheless enhanced by them—which the course would refer to as the centrality of an Islamic worldview within Islamic Pedagogy. Most of my time as an educator in Islamic schools was spent at IC, amongst youngest and smallest in size of Islamic schools in Sydney. IC has pursued Islamic Pedagogy with enthusiasm and rigour since 2017, having signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate with CITE in 2023. It is here that I developed a deep appreciation for my respected colleagues who were heavily involved with spearheading Islamic Pedagogy at IC, an appreciation that was nurtured through the brotherhood so powerfully represented through my attendance to my first CITE annual conference at Mt. Lofty in 2017. Sharing a Turkish breakfast in our heritage cottages in the mornings before grappling with the formative concepts of Islamic Pedagogy during the day continued to speak to the close bond and camaraderie I shared with dear colleagues from IC.

From IC, I transitioned to pursue a middle leadership opportunity at School X (I have chosen to anonymise its name in a manner not too dissimilar to Malcolm X’s decision to change his surname). School X does not embrace Islamic Pedagogy and is amongst the largest and best academically performing Islamic schools in the state. My tenure of two weeks at School X was marked by a swift decision to cut my losses and transition to MFIS largely because there was no intention at School X to pursue Islamic Pedagogy in the slightest. My very brief time there confirmed their choice not to pursue Islamic Pedagogy as a reflection of a neoliberal, market-driven view of education that saw the choice to adopt Islamic Pedagogy as a mutually exclusive with attaining academic excellence. For School X, pursuing Islamic Pedagogy was incongruous with the pursuit of academic excellence. Reflecting a neoliberal view of education that emphasises the economics and technicisation of teaching, School X continues to accommodate for a market-oriented view of education, privileging academic performance for university entry, reflecting how the ‘interplay between pressures of performativity while nurturing faith is an on-going struggle in faith-based schools’ (Memon et al., 2024b, p. 2). I completed part of EDUC 5263 ‘Quality Teaching and Learning’ whilst at School X, redesigning a Year 10 English boys class, where classes are academically streamed to prioritise academic achievement, with this being the ‘lowest’ academic class. The lesson focused on making the study of *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini more engaging by shifting away from the traditional teacher-centred reading approach to a more student-centred, inquiry-based learning model. The redesign aimed to foster critical reflection and active learning through minimal formal instruction, encouraging students to explore perspectives and analyse the text. It incorporated Islamic pedagogical principles, including relational pedagogy and mutual engagement, while allowing students to collaborate, reflect, and critically examine Islamic representations in the text. The lesson’s success was measured by the extent to which it nurtured reflection and evoked awe and wonder. The process led to a deeper understanding of Islamic Pedagogy, distinguishing it from Islamic integration and emphasising its critical, dialogical, and

transformative nature. Whilst this experience reinforced the significance of an Islamic worldview in guiding pedagogy regardless of academic ability, it also crucially showed that Islamic Pedagogy can have a positive impact whether the school executive back it or not.

4.5. The 'Turn Back'

My turn 'back' towards an Islamic worldview was fully realised by the time I joined my current school, the largest and oldest Islamic school in Sydney, Malek Fahd Islamic School (MFIS). MFIS has been systematically pursuing Islamic Pedagogy in partnership with the Niyyah project since November 2020 in the pursuit of a process of renewal at MFIS in partnership with CITE. My turn 'back' culminated during my initial time at MFIS from September 2024, and was reflected in the opportunity to contribute to a debrief session that embodied my epistemic reflexivity. At this point of my faithful praxis journey, I had become more cognisant of the difference between Islamic Integration and Islamic Pedagogy. The conflation between Islamic Integration and Islamic Pedagogy was perhaps the largest hurdle for me to fully realising the value of the latter. My reflexive realisation was recognised in CITE's MFIS School Review Report Year 3,

Educators in the debrief session revealed a greater understanding of the distinction between Islamic integration and Islamic Pedagogy. One educator explained his initial assumption that, 'Islamic pedagogy was potentially just like Islamic integration whereby, you sprinkle some terms or concepts and voila, you have an engaging lesson. But going through the course [Graduate Certificate], I found that by implementing relational pedagogies or the [Islamic pedagogical] principles of practice, you can see that it actually has a lot of value and that sets it apart from [other pedagogy].' He was able to discern a key point which it would seem thus far only the Graduate Certificate educators on this campus have gleaned, that engaging and enacting Islamic Pedagogy (as philosophy for *practice*) and experimenting with principled *practice* (Islamic pedagogical principles) for redesign of instruction, not only holds tremendous value, but more impactfully engages Islamic integration, as well as being 'enhanced by'. ([Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, 2023](#), p. 39)

Just as it was for me, recognising the complementary nature of Islamic integration and Islamic Pedagogy perhaps represents a key hurdle for many if not most people initially encountering Islamic Pedagogy. The report extract above recognises that only Grad Cert educators made the same realisation, and these were the minority of MFIS educators at the time the report was written. This point is gradually being realised by a greater number of educators as school-wide professional development at MFIS seeks to clarify their complementary nature. The report extract above also serves as a critical manifestation of my faithful praxis. Unlike my initial attempts at Islamic Pedagogy in English all those years ago, in presenting a lesson sprinkling an exegesis of Surah Fil within a standalone textual analysis lesson within English, I had come to realise that Islamic Pedagogy was so much more. My capstone project for the final Grad Cert subject 'Critical Perspectives on Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment' critically reflected on the misunderstanding that Islamic Pedagogy was simply integrating Islamic teachings (like Qur'an verses and hadith) into education, which characterised much of my early efforts to implementing Islamic Pedagogy. After experiencing Islamic Pedagogy in practice, I realised that it goes beyond just integration, fostering critical, dialogical, and transformative learning that addresses both spiritual and academic development in a balanced approach. By addressing both academic and spiritual development, even within subjects like HSC English, the Grad Cert challenges the misconception that academic rigour undermines spiritual growth, which is reiterated in the discussion of my pedagogical turn.

4.6. The 'Pedagogical Turn'

The capstone subject for the Grad Cert, EDUC 5279 Critical Perspectives on Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment, is pivotal in enabling the 'pedagogical turn' that 're-establishes educators over top-down policy as the drivers of pedagogical-driven school renewal' (Memon et al., 2024a, p. 16). This involved a collaborative effort on the redesign of a Year 10 English unit on Macbeth with teachers who are accustomed to implementing Western and secular teaching and learning activities. This was a collaborative process seeking to not only acclimatise English educators unfamiliar with Islamic Pedagogy, but also to build awareness of and advocacy for Islamic Pedagogy and teacher confidence in the implementation of an Islamic worldview within teaching. The unit redesign process helped to develop broader awareness about Islamic Pedagogy within the faculty by advocating for its benefits within a Macbeth programme for Islamic Pedagogy.

My faithful praxis portfolio represented my pedagogical turn, explicating my understanding of Islamic Pedagogy as critical, dialogical, and transformative learning that engages Muslim learners in ways that Western pedagogies might never be able to. As a clear manifestation of this pedagogical turn, I had the opportunity to present with the Head of English, Fatima Jalloul, at the 2024 CITE conference on a similar project entitled 'Transformation and Redesign: Teaching English through an Islamic Worldview'. Whilst Fatima Jalloul presented on the development of the English Framework in a way that sought to implement an Islamic worldview at MFIS, my presentation explored the practical application of this framework through a redesign of a Year 11 English unit on Othello to interrogate the othering of Islam within Othello through an Orientalist lens. I feel as though the following spoken word poem delivered, during the presentation, succinctly embodies my pedagogical turn:

Rocks

Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wah lul uqdatan min lisaani, yaf kahu kauli

This is a brief poem about Islamic Pedagogy

Now, I don't want this to be some long vociferation

But a rumination on a simple question:

What is Islamic Pedagogy?

Is it an effort to break the mould?

Like tawaf not everything's clockwise

Or the Qur'an and Hadith worldview as centrefold?

To have all of the above, in our lessons, crystallise?

For me, it is the foundation,

for students of this generation

to see that English is more than memorisation

of quotes, 'show don't tell' and equivocation

It's like a rock

Rocks have many uses.

They grind flour

Purify water

Mixed them together you get the bread

That Palestinians long for

Ping

Did you hear that?

That's the sound of a scrap of rubble

Hurled against IDF oppression

Ricocheting off Merkava Main Battle Tank Armour

Rocks broken off from walls of dispossession

In a world of suppression and obfuscation

Remnants of concrete apartments

Pulverised like ground flour

Pink in colour

So next time we read or write a text in English

I would like Islamic Pedagogy to show students that

Our words can be rocks

that make fortresses

from the river to the sea

The first line of the poem was a supplication by the Prophet Moses regarding his speaking ability, seeking confidence and success. This was intentionally included within the poem's rhyme scheme to immediately ground it within an Islamic worldview. It forms the first rhyming couplet, which involves another focus of the poem and indeed this paper, Islamic Pedagogy. What follows is a poem that performatively and dialogically represents the essence of both epistemic reflexivity and faithful praxis. The poem draws on the Muslim collective consciousness of the Ummah, grounding the dialogical and performative opportunity of spoken word poetry to critique the injustices of the genocide in Gaza in order to reflect on the importance of sacred activism, engaging 'Young Muslims [who] need educational experiences where Islam is presented in a manner that is critical, dialogical, and transformative. . .to foster a mature sense of belonging in the modern world' (Memon, 2021, p. 9). For Muslims guided by the metaphor that the Ummah is one body, wherein an injury to one limb impacts the whole body, why can a study of poetry not both consider its rhythm and metre, whilst also empowering a Muslim voice the defends the honour of Palestinians?

5. Discussion

The key focus of the paper was to trace the development of faithful praxis to evaluate how the Grad Cert is delivered, manifesting through the key 'turns' upon which the Grad Cert is structured with the aim to encourage epistemic reflexivity within the educator. As such, a key benchmark of *how* well the Grad Cert encouraged my faithful praxis is reflected within the Grad Cert's ability to encourage epistemic reflexivity with respect to my educational beliefs and practice.

My faithful praxis journey represents a profound pedagogical transformation, shaped by a deep engagement with both Western and Islamic epistemologies. From my early experiences of grappling with religious insults in the classroom to the realisation of how deeply rooted these issues are in societal structures, my journey has been defined by a desire to empower Muslim voices through education. My experiences as a learner in English grappling with Orientalist marginalisation, whitewashed as throwaway comments like 'turbaned Turk' and 'circumcised dog', highlights how my marginalised Muslim identity

was shaped within a subaltern context that was counterbalanced by the empowerment I felt at Granville Boys High Schools, where Muslim identity was not as easily othered as it was within Othello. In one respect, the epistemic reflexivity that the Grad Cert encouraged was already sparked within me from these high school experiences that emphasised the power of language in shaping perceptions of Islam, underscoring my commitment to developing and amplifying a strong Muslim voice as a high school English teacher. The challenges of reconciling Islamic and Western knowledge within the classroom, especially in a context where Muslim epistemologies are marginalised, shaped my teaching philosophy and are evident within the Grad Cert deliverables, whether it is the reconceptualised approach to *The Kite Runner* or taking a new approach to the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) 'Last Sermon'. In this regard, autoethnography was selected as a research method with which to effectively explore epistemic reflexivity's highly personal and critical nature, aided by the Grad Cert's sequential structure, with an aim to foster dialogical inquiry and develop epistemic reflexivity. Adopting an autoethnography thus allowed me to trace the origins of my decision to pursue the Grad Cert as a manifestation of epistemic reflexivity, driven by a long-standing desire as a Muslim learner to empower Muslim voices and challenge the marginalisation of Muslims.

Autoethnography also captured my important realisation that Islamic Pedagogy should not be conflated with Islamic integration. Whilst understanding the distinction between them is a challenge for many educators, my journey of understanding their complementarity may hopefully provide greater clarity to enable the development of a more profound approach that balances academic and spiritual growth, moving from the mere integration of Islamic values into lessons to a more holistic, critical, and transformative approach that engages students in a meaningful dialogue with the content, allowing them to, for example, explore texts like *Othello* through the lens of Orientalism and Islamophobia.

The autoethnography also clarified my nuanced journey of coming to the understanding that Islamic Pedagogy is not about simply embedding Qur'anic verses or hadiths into lessons; rather, it is about fostering a learning environment that respects and nurtures the spiritual and intellectual growth of Muslim students, guiding them to critically examine the world around them. This is performatively evident through my poem *Rocks*, that seeks to integrate Islamic notions, like a supplication of the Prophet Moses at the beginning, but does so to ground the poem in an emancipatory opening that encourages the criticality and performativity demanded by Islamic Pedagogy. There is an added performative layer of an English teacher enacting Islamic Pedagogy through one of the very text types we are mandated to teach throughout secondary English.

While an autoethnography offers valuable personal insights, it has limited impact for course-wide strategies. Quantitative methods, such as longitudinal studies, are better suited for exploring individual views across a large cohort. Nevertheless, the autoethnography provided in this paper is a strong starting point for empirical exploration, as it serves as a "dialogic quest to understand the world". My experiences across various Islamic schools reinforce the significance of epistemic reflexivity and the necessity of a pedagogy that balances academic excellence with spiritual development. At the Malek Fahd Islamic School, where Islamic Pedagogy is a core focus, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of this approach in fostering critical reflection and social justice among students. Through the redesign of lessons, collaboration with colleagues, and participation in professional development, I developed a deeper understanding of the value of integrating an Islamic worldview into teaching practice.

This article thus makes a significant contribution to the emerging scholarship on Islamic teacher education programmes by offering an autoethnographic perspective on my journey through the Grad Cert. Through the lens of faithful praxis, this paper illuminates

the complexities and nuances of integrating Islamic Pedagogy into the professional development of educators within Western educational contexts. By foregrounding the importance of epistemic reflexivity and the progressive, dialogical structure of the Grad Cert, this article highlights how this programme nurtures a deeper understanding of an Islamic worldview and shapes educators' pedagogical practices. Although autoethnography offers valuable insight into individual experiences, the limitations of this method, particularly in a growing online education landscape, point to the need for further research, particularly longitudinal studies, to assess the broader efficacy of these programs. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the importance of embedding faithful praxis within teacher education and point to the transformative potential of Islamic Pedagogy for Muslim learners in Western education.

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