Role Models: A Bridge for Religious Imagining

Abstract

Through the critical pedagogical concept of hidden curriculum, this colloquium will explore the potential of role model education in helping Muslim female students imagine a future of possibilities as Muslim women. This exploration will be in the context of Islamic school development in North America. Islamic education through such schools has primarily been a means of preserving the identity of this religious minority through connection to an “Old World” past, placed in conversation with resistance and racism this group experiences in North America. Through such education, importance has been placed on the outward piety and purity of Muslim women at the expense of their autonomous roles as believers. Through the bridge of role models, the goal is to shift this focus and afford students opportunities to imagine a different future.

1. Main concepts/issues

Critical pedagogy as a critique of school and society aims to empower individuals who suffer injustice through the agendas that come through the schooling process. The social context of school and the significance of its impact are often a central part of this critique; and hidden curriculum is the concept that speaks to what a student learns through the social context of school. While the discussion of hidden curriculum often points to its negative impact on the student, it can also have a positive one. Role models also have a significant impact on students in the school environment. Teachers as role models embodying a critique of injustice can have a profound effect on student learning both within and beyond the classroom. These two previous points come together in bell hooks’ early educational experiences at Booker T. Washington School, where she thrived in the presence of black women teachers who were on a mission to support the students and help them succeed in school. While they did not define this mission theoretically, she indicates, they were “enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticlonial.” In the context of this discussion, Muslim female teachers as role models and elements of the hidden curriculum would similarly embody a critical pedagogical response to reductive stereotypes of Muslim women within the North American Muslim community, as well as greater society. Such teachers as role models would empower young Muslim female students in imagining a future beyond meek, submissive caricatures of Muslim women as shaped by misogynistic interpretations of religious texts and practices within the community and media as well as Orientalist thought outside of the Muslim community.

The importance of hidden curriculum and its impact on the student is a discussion specifically found in critical pedagogical literature. The importance of role models is specifically found in educational psychology and sociology literature. What is a role model? The role model provides a bridge between the real and the ideal. As students come to know their teachers through day-to-day interactions in the space of the school, students understand how the principles and values the teacher embodies actually manifest. According to Rose, “[t]he gap between theory and practice isbridged, as ideological concepts become realities before the eyes of the students.” This bridge of imagination, by way of the teacher, positions students to make better decisions about how and where to include such principles and values in their own

1 Eisner, Educational Imagination, 95.
2 hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 2.
3 Ibid.
4 Rose, "Role Model Education."
5 Ibid.
lives as well. What enhances the effectiveness of a role model? According to Makowski, “[t]o succeed a model must as closely as possible accord with the subject’s own historical reality.” Why? According to Zirkel, such role models “provide clear and concrete images through which young people can begin to develop a sense of having a place of value within the structure of the larger culture within which they live.” Such would be the impact and influence of Muslim female teachers embodying a critique influenced by a Muslim faith-centered feminism.

The above is a brief synopsis of the colloquium. The embodiment of a Muslim faith-centered feminist critique as well as specific stereotypes that exist about Muslim women discussed by scholars such as Jasmine Zine, Miriam Cooke, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Saba Mahmood will be presented. The impact of this critique will also be considered beyond Muslim female students to male students, the Muslim community, and greater society. The introduction for the entire discussion will include the critical role of the teacher in a student’s education as well as the development of Islamic schools in North America.

2. Description of methodology for addressing the topic

The exploration of this topic is primarily by way of the following: critical pedagogy, plantation pedagogy, educational psychology and sociology, and Muslim faith-centered feminism.

3. Sources grounding the presentation

Here is a short list of sources. A more comprehensive list is available at the end of this document.


4. Status of the research at the time of the proposal

The content of this proposal was inspired by comprehensive exams passed in the spring of 2015. Currently this work is being extended into a dissertation proposal scheduled to be submitted in September 2015.

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6 Ibid.
7 Makowski, "Women and Role Models," 60.
8 Zirkel, "Is There A Place for Me?,” 372.


Giroux, Henry A. "Using the Hidden Curriculum to Develop a Critical Pedagogy." *Education Digest* 47, no. 9 (May 1982).


