

## **AN ISLAMIC VOICE FOR OPENNESS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION: THE RELEVANCE OF IBN KHALDUN'S IDEAS TO AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS TODAY**

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**ABSTRACT** Raewyn Connell in her discussion of Southern social science theories, considers Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the understanding of civilisation and sociology as so rich and important that it is still relevant today. This paper builds on Connell's introduction to Ibn Khaldun's work by first reviewing his ideas of education in the Muqaddimah and then investigating the extent of their contemporary relevance, for example, in teacher education programs today in Australia's multicultural society. Ibn Khaldun was a Muslim scholar born in what is now called Tunisia, North Africa, in 1332. His writings, which encompassed history, philosophy of history, sociology, education and pedagogy, are best exemplified in his greatest work, the Muqaddimah, written as an introduction and commentary on his universal history. Ibn Khaldun provided a long and detailed discussion of the concept of education and pedagogy in Chapter Six of the Muqaddimah. His classification of knowledge according to classical Islamic tradition is a valuable guide to the range of sciences in existence at that time. He also provided his views on teaching and learning issues which have their counterparts in today's classrooms. The latter part of this paper looks at the nature of curriculum in current teacher education programs in Australia and considers the development of a more inclusive approach in relation to Islamic communities in Australia. Such a move could result in Ibn Khaldun's ideas on education being incorporated into teacher education programs in Australia.

**KEYWORDS** Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, Teacher Education, Civilisation and Sociology

## **Introduction**

In her book *Southern Theory* (2007) on the global dynamics of social science knowledge, Raewyn Connell included a discussion of the medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun and his early ideas on what is now regarded as the discipline of sociology. Following her definition of 'southern theory', Connell argued that Ibn Khaldun's writings could be categorised as an expression of 'alternative universalism' (Connell, 2015). By this, she meant that Ibn Khaldun's thoughts on research methods and the importance of justice and human rights in society, may be applicable to human beings and human societies everywhere, even though they had originated in the southern part of the geographical binary of knowledge development that she described.

In this paper, the focus is on investigating whether Ibn Khaldun's writings on education can also be regarded as having universal significance. This approach involves two stages: first, a review of what Ibn Khaldun had to say about education, mainly in Chapter Six of his greatest work, the *Muqaddimah* and second, an investigation to ascertain the extent of the applicability of his educational ideas to teacher education programs, specifically in Australia. The underlying question guiding this research was: What aspects of Ibn Khaldun's ideas on education, written in medieval times from the Islamic perspective, are relevant to teacher education programs in contemporary multicultural Australia?

To appreciate the full significance of this research question, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of Islamic communities and schools in Australian society today. According to the most recent census statistics, the Islamic population in Australia totals close to half a million (476,300), representing 2.2% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Almost half reside in New South Wales, with the remainder spread over other states. In the case of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, which are Australian territory, the total population is made up of Malay Muslims (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Jupp, 2001). Most significantly, almost 50% are under the age of 25 (Hassan, 2009), a great many of whom would therefore be in schools or further education institutions. Given the presence

of Islamic communities as an integral part of Australia's multicultural society, the research question has more immediate and pointed relevance. However, for Ibn Khaldun's educational writings to be of universal significance, they would need to be demonstrated as relevant to mainstream society, as well as Islamic communities, in Australia.

The approach adopted in this paper is to introduce Ibn Khaldun and his educational thoughts and then to explore the possible significance and relevance of his ideas for Australian teacher education programs today. It aims to achieve these goals through a detailed, descriptive account of this great Islamic intellectual/scholar who has been unrecognized in the mainstream English-language education scholarship. The descriptive approach adopted in this paper is intended to invite other researchers to appreciate some of his thoughts and then to utilize them for their own analyses of education. Furthermore, the approach is well suited for dealing with writings produced in a different historical, religious and cultural context and assessing the extent to which the ideas expressed have a universal human significance that transcends the particular context of their 'origin.'

### **The Life and Works of Ibn Khaldun**

Ibn Khaldun, or to give him his full name outlining his family background, Waly al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan Ibn Khaldun al-Maliki al-Hadrami, was born in 1332 to an influential Sunni Muslim Arab family in Tunis (now Tunisia), North Africa, in the time of the Hafsid Empire. Ibn Khaldun's ancestors belonged to a South Arabian clan called the Kinda, originally from Yemen, but they settled in Seville, Andalusia, at the time of the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Some detail of his family background helps to provide an understanding of the context in which he grew up. Among Ibn Khaldun's ancestors, Kurayb is well-known for revolting at the end of the ninth century against the early Islamic dynasty called the Umayyads, centred in the Spanish city of Cordoba (Robinson, 1996, pp. 26-27), and establishing an independent state in Seville. It was recorded that Banu Khaldun, Ibn Khaldun's great-grandfather, was a prominent political leader in Seville. However, Ibn Khaldun's grandfather and father withdrew from

political life and joined a mystical Sufi order. His brother, Yahya Khaldun, was a historian who wrote a book on the Abdalwadids<sup>15</sup> dynasty (Alatas, 2007; Alatas, 2006; Fromherz, 2011; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Samarah, 2011).

According to Syed Farid Alatas (2006), at an early age, Ibn Khaldun started to learn the Holy Quran<sup>16</sup>, Maliki jurisprudence<sup>17</sup>, Hadith<sup>18</sup>, poetry and the theosophy of Sufi mysticism. At this early stage, his father was the most influential among his teachers, introducing him to Sufism<sup>19</sup> and encouraging him to think independently (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b). His later education was more diverse; he did not study in one institution but did so under any teacher who was willing to take him (Alatas, 2012). His family's high social status enabled Ibn Khaldun to study with the best teachers in Maghreb. The most important of these teachers was Al-Abili, a great scholar in the areas of logic, mathematics and philosophy. Al-Abili did not believe in the idea of formalised, institutionalised education, as found in what was called the Madrasa system<sup>20</sup>, nor did he support state control of educational institutions. At a later stage, Al-Abili's ideas on education and educational institutions had a major influence on Ibn Khaldun's ideas on the subject, especially pedagogy (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

Because he had not been trained under the accepted Madrasa system of that time, Ibn Khaldun was not indoctrinated through its strict control of knowledge, teaching

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<sup>15</sup> Abdalwadids: Abd al-Wadids, or the Zayyanids, were a Berber Zenata dynasty that ruled the kingdom of Tlemcem, an area of north-western Algeria from 1235 to 1556 (Al-Azmeh, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> The Holy Quran is the central religious text of Islam that Muslims believe to be a revelation from God. Muslims believe the Quran was verbally revealed by God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel gradually over a period of approximately 23 years (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Maadad, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Maliki jurisprudence is religious law within Sunni Islam founded by Malik bin Anas (Maadad, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Hadith are the collections of the reports of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (Maadad, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Sufism is a mystical belief and practice that emerged during the Umayyad period. Sufism emerged as an important and developed practice during the subsequent Abbasid period as an approach to knowing God through intuition (Al-Azmeh, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Madrasa is a place of study like an Islamic school or college (Fealy & Hooker, 2006). Robinson (1996, p.312) defined it as a 'college whose primary purpose was to be an environment for transmitting Islamic knowledge'. Islamic Colleges in Australia are not of this type since their registration depends on them following what is now the Australian National Curriculum, but some Madrasa schools are still found in countries like Malaysia.

and learning styles. Al-Abili introduced Ibn Khaldun to mathematics, logic and philosophy, through the study of the works of Islamic scholars like Averroes, Avicenna, Razi and Tusi. Surprisingly, Ibn Khaldun also spent considerable time reading Plato, Aristotle and the works of the Stoic philosophers. This wide-ranging exposure to Islamic philosophy and classical Greek and Roman writings inspired both his academic pursuits and his penchant for critical, rationalist inquiry. It was Ibn Khaldun's career in royal politics, however, that provided him with a unique perspective and real life insights with which to critically analyse history, authority and social change (Alatas, 2007, 2012; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Pushpanathan, 2013; Samarah, 2011; Wheeler, 2011).

At the young age of 20, Ibn Khaldun received an offer from the ruler of Tunis, Abu Ishaq II, to serve in his court as an administrator. With his adventurous nature and enthusiasm to explore, Ibn Khaldun moved to the principality of Morocco named Fez. He was appointed as the secretary of the state to Sultan Abu-Inan of Fez, where he was appointed as the secretary of the state of Sultan Abu-Inan. After a brief period in Fez, Ibn Khaldun moved to the Straits of Gibraltar. Here he experienced his first major responsibility when he was elected to be the Fief-Holder of the Sultan of Granada. The Sultan of Granada also sent Ibn Khaldun on a political mission to meet Pedro (Peter), King of Castille. However, after this adventurous mission and various other political conflicts, including one with the Vizier in Granada, Ibn Khaldun lost interest in such a political role. After trying other positions, he found himself eventually expelled from Spain in 1374. It was in North Africa at the fort of Qilah-Ibne-Salamah that Ibn Khaldun completed his most famous work, the *Prolegomena-Muqaddimah*. According to Ibn Khaldun, he finished writing the *Muqaddimah* in November 1377 but kept on reworking it until shortly before his death (Alatas, 2012; Cheddadi, 1994; Fromherz, 2011; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

From 1382 (Irwin, 1996, p. 35) Ibn khaldun lived in Cairo. In the remaining twenty years of his life, he had the opportunity to put his ideas on education into practice by lecturing in the various religious colleges in that city. It seemed that his approach to teaching appealed to students. According to Mussallam (1996, p. 165) 'students flocked to his lectures'. Moreover, because of the success of his teaching,

Ibn Khaldun incurred 'the jealous hostility of local Egyptian scholars' (Irwin, 1996, p. 35). Eventually he was appointed to the post of chief justice, before he died in peace in 1406 in Cairo (Alatas, 2012).

Ibn Khaldun's scholarly works include various manuscripts and books, the most prominent of which is the *Muqaddimah*, which is known as the prolegomena, or introduction, to the *Kitab al-Ibar wa Diwan al-Mubtada wa al-Khabar fi Ayyam al-Ajam wa al-Barbar wa man Asaraham min Dhawi al-Sultan al-Akbar* (Book of Examples and Collection of Origins of the History of the Arabs and Berbers). His first book, *Lababu I-Muhassal fi usul al-din* (The Resume of the Compendium of the Science) is a commentary on the theology of ar-Razi<sup>21</sup>, which he wrote at the age of 19 under the supervision of his teacher, al-Alibi, in Tunis. A work on Sufism, *Sifa' u I-Sa'il*, was composed around 1373 in Fez. While at the court of Muhammad V, Sultan of Granada, Ibn Khaldun completed a work on logic, *allaqqa li-I-Sultan*. The autobiography he wrote was entitled, *Al-Ta'rif bi Ibn Khaldun wa Rihlatuhu Gharban wa Sharqan* (Biography of Ibn Khaldun and His Travels East and West)(Alatas, 2012; Alatas, 2006; Fromherz, 2011; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Rane, 2010; Tjandrasasmita, 2006).

This brief historical overview of Ibn Khaldun's life and writings provides a basic understanding of his personal education and scholarly work. The next section focuses on the educational ideas found in the *Muqaddimah*.

### **Basis of Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought**

In Chapter Six of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun discusses his thoughts on education under three headings: 'The various kinds of science; The methods of instruction; The conditions that obtain in these connections'. These ideas do not represent a fully developed philosophy of education, but rather can be seen as his reflections on teaching approaches which he considered were important for encouraging students to learn well. His writings were developed from two sources. The first was his own personal, diverse learning experience,

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<sup>21</sup> *Muhammad Ibn Zakaria Razi* was a Persian polymath, physician, chemist, philosopher and important figure in the history of medicine (Fealy & Hooker, 2006; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

which had proved positive, enriching and lifelong through his travels, but had never involved attendance in any of the formal Madrasa colleges. Rosenthal, in his introduction to the English edition of the *Muqaddimah*, suggested that ‘much of his material and many of his best ideas Ibn Khaldun owed to his teachers, fellow students and colleagues must have contributed greatly to his knowledge’ (Ibn Khaldun, 1958a, p. IXXXV). The second source of his ideas were his observations of teaching in the Madrasa classes which he had visited in the many places he had lived in. He had formed a very poor opinion of such teaching and of the negative experience of learning it engendered for students.

According to chapter Six of the *Muqaddimah*, the educational system of any society should be formulated according to its ideology. Ibn Khaldun strongly advocated that every Muslim man and women should know the Holy Quran and Sunnah<sup>22</sup> and follow the guidance of Allah, as taught by the Holy Prophet. ‘Instructing children in the Quran is a symbol of Islam. Muslims have, and practice, such instruction in all their cities, because it imbues hearts with a firm belief [in Islam] and its articles of faith’ (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b, p. 300). Such a fundamental religious principle makes Ibn Khaldun’s educational writings particularly appropriate in Islamic communities.

### **The Classification of Knowledge by Ibn Khaldun**

The classification of knowledge in the context of Islam, as set out by Ibn Khaldun, provides a good historical understanding of the production of knowledge and classification of science in existence at the time. In Islam, the sciences are considered as one and as belonging to a hierarchical order. Ibn Khaldun explained their classification into two groups, the first being the philosophical sciences, which were based on the human ability to think. This involves the ability to solve problems, construct and counter an argument, and develop methods of systematic observations based on human perceptions.

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<sup>22</sup> Sunnah is the way of life prescribed as normative for Muslims on the basis of the teachings and practices of the prophet Muhammad and interpretations of the Islamic holy book, the Quran (Maadad, 2009).

Examples of philosophical sciences provided by Ibn Khaldun included

Science of logic, physics, celestial and elementary bodies, zoology, botany, chemistry, minerals, atmospheric science, seismology, psychology, medicine, agriculture, metaphysics, mathematical science, geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy (Alatas, 2012, p. 83).

The second kind of knowledge, which Ibn Khaldun referred to as traditional science, is derived from the authority of religion through the process of revelation. Although the human intellect has a role in traditional science, the basic character of knowledge remains unchanged, in the form in which it had been revealed. The examples he provided were

Science of the Quran, science of the Arabic language, lexicography, grammar, syntax and style, literature, science of prophetic tradition, jurisprudence and its principles, speculative theology, Sufism and science of dream interpretation (Alatas, 2012, p. 83).

Although Ibn Khaldun recognised the existence of a third source of knowledge in magical science, which included 'sorcery, letter magic, alchemy and talismans' (Alatas, 2012) he did not include this in his discussion of education, because such knowledge was forbidden by religious law.

This explanation of education at the beginning of Chapter Six of the *Muqaddimah* provides the basis for Ibn Khaldun's perspective on various other education and teaching-related issues. His classification of knowledge, based on the Islamic education context, is particularly relevant and important (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

### **Ibn Khaldun's Views on the Wider Significance of Education**

In his discussion of the nature of education and its significance for individuals and society, Ibn Khaldun's ideas can be seen to have a wider applicability. He emphasized, for example, the importance of education in developing the individual's power of thinking and reasoning. In his view, the 'ability to think' was what distinguished 'human beings from animals' and enabled them 'to obtain their livelihood [and] cooperate to this end with their fellow' human beings. To prove an advantage to people, Ibn Khaldun believed that education should develop social and economic efficiency in individuals



so that they could be usefully absorbed into society. It should also bring happiness into the lives of people.

From personal experience, he believed travelling was an important way to keep on gaining knowledge and extending personal education through learning from various scholars around the world (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b). This openness to new ideas and the possibility of on-going interaction and discussion with teachers were important elements in his thinking about education. In his view, 'human beings obtain their virtues either through study, instruction and lectures, or through imitation of a teacher and personal contact with him. The only difference here is that habits acquired through personal contact with a teacher are more strongly and firmly rooted' (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b, p. 307).

Ibn khaldun's educational thought can thus be seen to be centred on the personal benefits which he believed a good education should provide for its students, not only in the period of schooling, but throughout their lives in their openness to new ideas and experiences. His basic argument was that education should include social and moral, as well as intellectual learning to bring out the potential within human beings through developing character and building personality, together with the capacity for reasoning. The value and importance of these educational ideas of Ibn Khaldun are not confined to medieval times or to Islamic societies (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

### **Teaching and Learning Styles**

Ibn Khaldun had a definite view on teaching and learning, especially in relation to learning capacity, memorisation, the curriculum and teacher strictness. He was a keen observer of the relationship between education and society and believed that education had multiple objectives. Based on his observations of the way students learn best, Ibn Khaldun considered the following principles important for a good education. Firstly, he believed that the order in which subjects are introduced determines success in learning outcomes. He also believed that an abundance of scholarly works constitutes an obstacle to learning. The proliferation of handbooks providing abridgements is detrimental to learning. The study of auxiliary (i.e., non-basic) science knowledge

should not be prolonged. Severe punishments should not be meted out to students (Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

Ibn Khaldun also had strong views on methods of instruction for learning. According to him, teaching only becomes effective when it proceeds slowly and in stages. The main stage in this process, according to Ibn Khaldun, is that the teacher should begin with the introduction of the basic principles of the subject. Secondly, the teacher should observe closely the student's ability to grasp what has been introduced. At the third stage, the teacher should repeat the material for a second time, instructing at a higher level. Instead of a summary at the end of the lesson, the teacher should provide full commentaries and explanations. In this way, the student's grounding in the discipline becomes deeper. The teacher may then take the student through the subject material another time, dealing with all vague, obscure or complicated matters (Alatas, 2012; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

Ibn Khaldun believed that effective instruction required this threefold repetition. From his observations, he could see that many teachers, especially in the Madrasa school context of that time, were ignorant of this method. Such teachers introduced students to complicated scientific problems for which students were not yet ready. Students, especially at a young age, were only able to gain an approximate and general understanding of complex problems (Alatas, 2012; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b).

Ibn Khaldun also advised on issues relating to severe punishment, especially as used in the Madrasa colleges, and its failure to help students in their learning process. In his view, punishment, especially harsh treatment, would encourage students to feel more oppressed, become increasingly lazy, or become dishonest and likely to break the rules more often. In the same section, he also discussed student teacher interaction and relationship, which he believed strongly was an important factor in a student's learning process. Ibn Khaldun said that the relationship between teacher and student should be based upon love and understanding. Teachers needed to understand each of their students' individual learning abilities and work with students closely, according to the stages he outlined in his method of instruction for learning (S. Alatas, F, 2012; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Tjandrasasmita, 2006).

## **The Curriculum**

Ibn Khaldun had a strongly critical view of the manuscripts and textbooks used in the Madrasa colleges and other schools in the Muslim world at that time. According to him, most of these manuscripts and textbooks were full of long explanations and complicated terminology, which made it difficult for students to understand the actual content. Furthermore, they did not provide any opportunity for students to develop their independent thinking. At the same time, he advocated religious instruction as the cornerstone of the curriculum because it helped students build good character and good habits. Another important aspect in the curriculum highlighted by Ibn Khaldun was clear thinking. He believed that logic enabled a person to think and analyse critically. Learning mathematics was important because it sharpened mental skills and increased the power of reasoning. Ibn Khaldun also emphasised learning languages because this helped students study different subjects more effectively. In addition, he considered that professional and vocational subjects needed to be included in the curriculum along with academic study (Alatas, 2012; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Samarah, 2011; Wheeler, 2011; Wolf-Gazo, 2010).

In relation to the learning of languages, Ibn Khaldun considered that any language should be learned in a natural way, recognising that competence does not come immediately but gradually. He believed that language competence could vary between speaking and writing skills and that it was not necessary to precisely apply the rules of grammar and syntax. However, he insisted that learners should gain proper competence in any language they were learning (Samarah, 2011, p. 1525). This was important so that the purity of each language could be maintained and passed onto succeeding generations without being distorted by other languages and dialects as a result of lack of knowledge and understanding. According to Versteegh (1997, pp. 332-340), Ibn Khaldun was particularly concerned to save the Arabic language from such corruption (Cooke, 1983; Ibn Khaldun, 1958b; Samarah, 2011; Smolicz & Secombe, 1989; Tjandrasasmita, 2006).

## **Ibn Khaldun's Educational Ideas in the Contemporary World**

Connell's *Southern Theory* (2007) challenges us to consider how far Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas are considered relevant and important today. To investigate this question, evidence of the inclusion of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas in contemporary documents on curricula and course outlines in social science programs, in various parts of the world, particularly those related to teacher education, were sought. Mention of Ibn Khaldun and his ideas were found in sociology, economics and philosophy courses being used in a number of universities and higher educational institutions and some Islamic Madrasas (Fealy & Hooker, 2006; Hassim & Cole-Adams, 2010; Kania, 2014; Rawat, 2014; Tjandrasasmita, 2006).

In fact, a number of contemporary scholars' works on Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas have been used as the basis of this paper. Three of these, coming from both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, are worth mentioning. In the book *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, Allan James Fromberg (2011) discusses Ibn Khaldun's personal educational background and experience from an historical point of view. An Arab scholar, Abdesselam Cheddadi, has written much on Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas, particularly in his most popular work, *Ibn Khaldun A.D. 1332 - 1406/A.H. 732 - 808* (1994). Another important and very detailed discussion of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas can be found in the book by Syed Farid Alatas (2012), entitled *The Makers of Islamic Civilization: Ibn Khaldun*. The chapter 'Ibn Khaldun on Education and Knowledge' provides an in-depth explanation of key ideas from the *Muqaddimah*. None of these works, however, has considered the inclusion of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas in teacher education programs, either in Muslim or non-Muslim societies. While consulting documents on teacher education programs, I found no evidence of Ibn Khaldun's education ideas being included in teaching or research. Although there may be some institutions in Muslim countries using his ideas in teacher education programs or in day-to-day teaching, no reference materials were found to demonstrate this.

## **Curriculum in Teacher Education Programs in Australia Today**

We can consider more closely, as examples of contemporary curriculum for teacher education trainers, two textbooks regarded as important in the Australian context. These are *Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum* (2009) by the late professor Colin March and *Curriculum Construction* by Laurie Brady and Kerry Kennedy (2014). March's first chapter explains what the curriculum is by going back to Greek ideas for the origin of the Western view of the curriculum, referring particularly to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. No attempts are made to consider Eastern ideas such as those originating with Confucius (Starr, 2012), Rabindranath Tagore (Pushpanathan, 2013), the philosophy of Ubuntu (Grange, 2011) or Buddhist scholars (Rahula, 1978). In particular, from the perspective of this paper, Ibn Khaldun's ideas from the Islamic tradition are not mentioned. Khaldun's emphasis on the importance of developing student's thinking and reasoning skills, his criticism of textbooks with long explanations and complicated terminology and his conviction that learning should be a positive and happy experience could well contribute to contemporary curriculum ideas about developing cognitive skills and critical thinking, and ensuring that learning contributes to the students' sense of well-being. The inclusion of such diverse perspectives is one way of acknowledging the cultural diversity of students in Australian schools today.

## **Inclusive Curriculum for Islamic Communities in Australia**

Some recognition of this principle is evident in Brady and Kennedy's (2014) book, particularly in their chapter on values for Australian students. After considering the Melbourne Declaration's statement (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008) on the need for students to become active and informed citizens and the subsequent 'National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools' (Department of Education & Training, 2005), they discussed at some length the need for values teaching in an Australian curriculum to take account of values shared by all Australians alongside values specific to minority groups such as the Muslim communities<sup>23</sup>. Their

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<sup>23</sup> Communities: it is important to use the word 'communities' since the Islamic faith includes among its believers people in culturally different societies, such as

discussion highlighted some of the issues faced by those who are Muslim Australians and provided strategies for teaching intercultural understanding, social cohesion and social inclusion.

It could be argued, however, that the best way of demonstrating the inclusive values of Australian society would be to include the ideas of an Islamic scholar like Ibn Khaldun in the course curriculum. His advocacy of travel as a means of gaining knowledge about other people and their cultures and extending personal education would seem to be most appropriate in this context.

Ibn Khaldun's principles of proper language learning are also relevant in the Australian context. School administrators and teachers in all systems need to be aware of the role of Arabic as the language of the Quran, the holy book of the Islamic faith. At an early age, many Islamic children learn Arabic in addition to the language at home. The modern Arabic spoken in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq today is different from the sixth century Arabic of the Quran; Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Uighur, for example, have their own particular language (or languages) for use in everyday life in the family and community (Jupp, 2001). This means that for many Islamic students in Australia, English is their third language. Teachers need to understand and take account of this in their classroom teaching.

The importance of such an inclusive approach to the teacher education curriculum in Australia has been highlighted by Bowering and Lock (2007). They claim that this is needed if Australia is to be serious about adopting a more internationally oriented, rather than Eurocentric, curriculum. This is particularly relevant to Islamic communities in Australia which have a high proportion of young students and are establishing an increasing number of their own independent Islamic schools.

Almost 90% of young Muslims attend local state schools (Welch, 2013), where they are most likely to be taught by non-Islamic teachers, very few of whom have had the chance to gain an understanding of Islamic religion, its various cultures and educational values. However, independent Islamic schools

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Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, as well as the Uighur communities of north west China (Jupp, 2001).

are also growing in number. They often employ non-Islamic teachers to cover key subjects in the Australian curriculum, but they also seek to employ imams as religious specialists who have Australian teacher education qualifications (Jones, 2012). Thus, there are two areas of need in relation to teacher education programs in Australia: Both state and Islamic schools have a need for mainstream Australian teachers who have the knowledge and understanding to be culturally responsive in teaching Islamic students in their classes. At the same time, there are teacher education students of Islamic background who have indicated that they would like more of their own cultural knowledge incorporated into the context of their courses (Bowering & Lock, 2007).

Such an approach to curriculum has the potential to see Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas incorporated into teacher education programs in Australia. This would be in line with the 2011 statement of Malcolm Turnbull, now prime minister of Australia. In his comments on Islamic schools in Australia, Turnbull pointed out that Islam was an ancient religion with a tradition of great scholarship. In his view the contribution of Islamic scholars to contemporary maths, science and medicine needs to be acknowledged and celebrated in Australian schools, the education system as a whole and society at large (Turnbull, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The discussion of Ibn Khaldun's educational philosophy and classification of knowledge, as well as his ideas about teaching and learning and the curriculum, has revealed that the issues he was discussing in terms of the Islamic world of the 14th century are remarkably similar to that of present times, which are still critical in the very different, globally oriented educational environment of the 21st century. In this sense, his writings on education can be seen to have a universal significance – across centuries and across cultures.

Yet this paper shows that the name of Ibn Khaldun and an awareness of his contribution to the philosophy and practice of education are to be found only among isolated pockets of scholars. These are either specialists in the medieval Arab world of learning or scholars in Islamic universities, who have been reinterpreting the significance of

Ibn Khaldun's educational writings in relation to their contemporary world. By contrast, in countries of the Western world such as Australia, there is no evidence of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas being included in teacher education programs. Is this comparative neglect of Ibn Khaldun in the current educational theorising of the Western world the result of the geographic binary described by Connell, where Ibn Khaldun is regarded as a scholar from the South, largely ignored by Orthodox academic communities of the North? Or is it pertinent to also take account of the cultural and linguistic differences which have contributed to Ibn Khaldun's exclusion in the contemporary world? Today, the conceptualization of learning is centred predominantly in the nominally Christian, mainly English speaking Western world rather than the Islamic Arabic speaking world of the South, as it was during the Middle Ages (Wolf-Gafo, 2010).

A consideration of some aspects of curriculum to be found in two textbooks commonly used in teacher education programs in Australia pointed to the possibilities of developing an inclusive approach to curriculum. This approach would seem to be particularly appropriate in plural societies like Australia where a growing number of immigrants are swelling the Islamic communities. Within an inclusive curriculum, knowledge of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas would be seen as important for two groups of students. Those of Islamic background would have part of their cultural heritage recognised in the curriculum of Australian schools, in a way which could positively affirm their identity and place in Australia. Equally, all other Australians, regardless of cultural background, would be able to understand the important contribution of knowledge which the Islamic communities bring to Australian society as a whole and be more inclined to adopt positive attitudes toward them (Smolicz, 1999).

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