



PROGRAM SUMMARY & LEARNING CONTINUUM

Engaging Muslim Students in Public Schools

What Educators Need to Understand



PREPARED FOR

School Leaders & Educators

By **Michael Abraham** · Author & Founder, Abraham Education



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

A new standard for culturally-relevant engagement.



Engaging Muslim Students in Public Schools (EMSIPS) has been taken by thousands of educators across the United States. It has been conducted in person at the **University of Washington, Ohio State University**, and **Hamline University**, and endorsed by Hamline's School of Education as part of its English Language Learners in the Mainstream project — a multi-district partnership built to strengthen educators serving immigrant, refugee, and ELL students.

The program increases teachers' background knowledge and cultural competency, and provides narratives and perspectives currently absent from curricula — narratives that engage Muslim students in academics, honor their heritage and identity, and move them toward the exemplary indicators of effective instructional practice. Over two hundred schools, across dozens of districts, have approved EMSIPS for continuing-education credit, and every participant earns a certificate of completion.

7,000+ educators trained

200 districts

University-presented

Approved for CEU credit

Six parts that build on one another.



The program moves educators from *why this matters* to *what to do Monday morning* — each part laying the groundwork for the next.

1

Need & Justification

Why cultural learning is essential, grounded in educational research and the Danielson Framework's performance indicators — which tie students' background knowledge to confidence, independence, and self-initiation in the classroom.

2

Understanding the Muslim Population in America and NYC

Unpacking background and identity — who your Muslim students and their families actually are, beyond the headlines.

3

Beliefs & Teachings of Islam

The core beliefs and daily practice, and the concrete connections educators can build with students and families.

4

Technicalities of Practice & Cultural Collision

The everyday points where following Islam meets public-school life — the quiet moments of collision, and how to navigate them well.

5

Learning & Academic Structures in Mosques

How Muslim students learn in home and cultural spaces, areas of incongruence with the classroom, and strategies for ELL and struggling learners.

6

Creating Mirrors for Muslim Students

A categorical understanding of texts that feature Muslims — so students finally see themselves in the curriculum.

Need & Justification



In part one, the results of studies on preservice teacher education on religious diversity are reviewed. Also reviewed is research on preservice teacher education and ongoing professional development efforts on diversity relating to Muslim students in particular.

Following that, the Standards of Effective Instruction rubric (Danielson, 2013) is reviewed with connections to research. This highlights performance indicators that teachers are evaluated on, which mandate specific cultural learning related to student background. It also links the principles of these performance indicators with research that shows relevance and relation to background knowledge that is essential for running themes throughout the exemplary indicators of student confidence, independence, and self-initiation in the classroom (Danielson, 2013; Howard, 2016; Marzano, 2004). This is reviewed with connection to child development studies that link the importance of home learning and nurturing to learning habits and mental frameworks in students.

Finally, attention is drawn to collective findings of research that examine the experiences of Muslim students in America and other Western countries, and that overwhelmingly suggest that the cultural background and knowledge of Muslim students has not been drawn upon in the public school setting for the betterment of educational outcomes and social-emotional relationships with teachers and staff, and is more likely to be stigmatized than utilized.

“Mr. Abraham provided deep perspectives on our students and families that are not readily available elsewhere.”

Gregory Pigeon, Principal · Amherst Central High School, New York · award-winning principal

Understanding the Muslim Population in America and NYC



Part two begins by asking the rhetorical question, “How have all these Muslims gotten to America?” The question is asked rhetorically because it draws on the fact that many current-day teachers from the mainstream and dominant culture are not likely to have grown up with the impression that America, or the current city they are teaching in, was a place populated by a significant number of Muslims. Many people are found to have not been aware of, or even heard of, Muslims and Islam prior to September 11th, 2001. The presentational material in this part both challenges such notions and provides an explanation for their apparentness. This part also offers a framework for understanding different demographics of Muslim groups in North America, immigration patterns, variations amongst socio-economic class and educational levels of families, and their implications for educators’ understanding of their students.

Specifically, this part reviews the deep history of Muslims in America. It begins with a summary of interactions with West African empires and the transatlantic slave trade (Bradley, 1992; Kambiz, 2010), and African American identitarian movements and Islam in the 20th century, and the present day’s resulting manifestation of African American Muslim communities. Keeping with historical chronology, it then reviews upper-class immigration patterns for professional and educational purposes in the era subsequent to the 1965 immigration act. Part two finishes with a review of refugee resettlement in the late 20th century until today.

Beliefs & Teachings of Islam



With the two prior parts setting the stage for identifying the diversity of Muslims in America and the need for educators to approach further understandings, both general and specific, as to how religion interacts with the daily lives of Muslims (as opposed to the political and media-driven narrative of Islam that is all too frequently given in the societal collective conscious), the seminar transitions to learning about the beliefs of Islam and how they interact with practical matters relating to students and families in a school setting. The overarching aim of Part 3 is to build empathy in educators for the struggle and capitulation that Muslim families go through in raising children in the West. At the same time, concrete knowledge is provided to guide educators towards a practical how-to in avoiding giving offense to religious sensibilities (unintentionally), while in turn leveraging knowledge of cultural background as a resource for increased academic engagement and social-emotional success.

While cultures and individuals are certainly idiosyncratic in their views of Islam, there are nevertheless basic tenets, practices, and perspectives of life that comprise the essence of Islam that are universal to virtually all Muslim cultures and serve as a great unifying force amongst them, as well as a foundation upon which more individualized understandings of Muslims can be ascertained. In this part, educators are taken through the beliefs, practices, and perspectives that are at the core of Islamic belief, life, and intellect; and given a view of both its shared and divergent features with historical and modern worldviews in Western culture, and shown how these phenomena directly relate to school settings.

Technicalities of Practice & Cultural Collision



There are many technical aspects to following Islam. There are a series of acts that are commanded and mandatory to follow, and others that are forbidden. In between, there is also another series of acts that can be deemed recommended or discouraged. This part goes over the actual details and acts of following Islam for Muslim students and families. It demonstrates what one is technically obliged to do, what one would be technically forbidden from doing, and areas where Muslim students often feel conflicted. This part offers specific recommendations for educators in accommodating the religious practices of Muslim students and families while maintaining the priorities of running an educational environment that is efficient and focused on learning. Part 4 also greatly contributes to the empathy building that takes place in Part 3. It gives concrete windows to the educator into how home culture is comprised, capitulated upon, and often times lost in the school environment; a phenomenon with great psychological implications for students, families, and communities, which is reflected upon. This part also builds specified background knowledge in teachers to be able to use the curriculum resources offered in Part 6, which are cultural exposés.

The specific recommendations for accommodations of religious practice of students and families illustrate a breadth of detail, pertaining to the public school system, that is available nowhere else. This is often found to be knowledge that entire school staffs need in order to be successful with action steps, and is especially pertinent for school leaders. Practical action steps will be found to be both short- and long-term in orientation.

“His training uniquely articulates complex cultural matters to educators while making these concepts immediately relevant to building meaningful relationships with students and increasing academic achievement.”

Ahmed Noor, Assistant Director · Office of Language Access Services, Boston Public Schools

Learning & Academic Structures in Mosques



Many Muslim students spend a large portion of their time outside of public school learning in local religious institutions (Sarroub, 2005; Bigelow, 2010; Moore, 2011; Iqbal, 2017). Mosques are themselves learning environments where habits and perceptions about learning are framed for many young students. Yet there remains a long bridge to be crossed in understanding for public school teachers as to what type of learning goes on in mosques, how it is done, how this can frame student perception of learning in public schools, and also how the familiarity of Muslim students with learning habits taught in mosques can be utilized by teachers to draw on the students' background experience.

There has been some academic analysis in the field of education of Islamic learning and learning in mosques, but precious little of it done in mosques in North America (Moore, 2016). This training further argues that much of the examination of Islamic modes of learning that does exist approaches it with a deficit mindset, and thereby fails to draw on resources that could be used to further engage students and accommodate learning style. This is an area where the experience and primary research of Michael Abraham is greatly drawn upon. Light is shed on learning that takes place in mosques with a pedagogical lens that identifies common areas of incongruency that students may experience in public schools, while also illuminating factors that can be utilized to support student learning.

Creating Mirrors for Muslim Students



Scarcity of literature with portrayals of Muslims is a rather lamented issue within educational discourses of culturally-relevant literature. Michael Abraham has spent four years researching texts that can be used for K-12 reading levels and standards with portrayals of Muslims. In this seminar, educators are introduced to a categorical understanding of the different ways Muslims are portrayed in literature, so as to have the ability to recognize books with characterizations that follow common and historically produced patterns of stereotyping and cultural appropriation. In contrast, educators are introduced to texts in which Muslims are portrayed positively, and that allow Muslim students to bring their Muslim identity into the classroom, creating a positive entry point for it in their discourse with peers and adults alike, as well as draw upon predictable background knowledge that Muslim students possess.

The presentation shows specific features in them that can be drawn upon to engage Muslim students, as well as teach cross-cultural respect and understanding. Also offered are cross-cultural lesson plan ideas and connections to reading standards, and concrete curricula material and instructional guides that have been developed by Michael Abraham for teachers. The beauty of this part of the training is that all of the cultural learning brought to educators in Parts 2 through 5 has been meticulously chosen to provide for quality teacher knowledge of content when teaching with these books. These books work in complement to the background knowledge of Muslim students rather than against it, drawing on their cultural funds; conversely, they can give non-Muslim, native-English-speaking students the experience of what it is like to lack the background knowledge to understand a book, and perhaps offer their Muslim classmates the chance to be in the empowered position of providing the class with background information.

Learning objectives.



- ✦ Become better equipped to nurture positive relationships with Muslim students and honor their cultural identity in the classroom.
- ✦ Understand the importance of emotional control and the cues of body language and facial expression as a starting point for building relationships.
- ✦ Acquire pedagogical tools, literary resources, and historical and cultural narratives that increase academic engagement through culturally relevant pedagogy.
- ✦ Bridge background-knowledge gaps between teacher and student, and be prepared to undertake further study of Islam and Muslim cultural background.
- ✦ Explore the intersections of race, identity, and religion in the personal identity of Muslim students, and their implications in 21st-century classrooms.
- ✦ Design a specific lesson or unit that practices culturally relevant pedagogy and brings absent narratives into the classroom and curriculum.

Delivery, assessment & standards

Delivered three ways: live in-person, live online, or as a self-paced online course for staff. Progress is measured with video-watching analytics and ongoing quizzes (85% proficiency to advance), and every participant submits a research-based plan to implement the strategies in their own classroom. The program maps directly to teacher and principal evaluation standards — Instructional Planning, Knowledge of Students, Learning Environment, Instructional Leadership, School Culture, and more — and is approved for continuing-education credit.

What they say afterward.



“Some staff members commented that this training helped explain matters and answer wonderings that they had had for years. I am happy to give my highest recommendation of Abraham Education.”

Ray Garcia Morales, Principal · Chief Sealth High School, Seattle

“His expertise in supporting educators to better serve Muslim students is both rare and invaluable. Michael’s work is deeply applied and directly translates into improved student experiences.”

Lesly Gámez, Assistant Director of Educational Services · South St. Paul Public Schools

“His contributions significantly increased our cultural competence and provided us with valuable perspectives that I do not believe we could have received anywhere else.”

Sara Vernig, Principal · Osseo Senior High School, Minnesota

A NOTE FROM MICHAEL

Why this program exists.



I wrote this program because I lived on both sides of it — working directly with young people in the Muslim community, teaching in the Muslim World and building a career in public schools in Minneapolis, and researching, again and again, the one thing teachers needed most that no training ever gave them.

Here in New York, that work continues alongside **MUNA**, the largest Muslim organization in the city, where I work directly with youth and train the youth workers across their network.

Your Muslim students are not a problem to manage. They are a group your staff can reach beautifully. **Once they have the knowledge to do so.** That is EMSIPS: what's going on, and what to do about it Monday morning.

Michael Abraham

Author, *Engaging Muslim Students in Public Schools* · Abraham Education

NEXT STEP

Bring EMSIPS to your school.

Tell Michael a little about your staff and what you're considering — from a single keynote to a full PD series — and he'll help you find the right starting point.



Book a 15-minute call

Scan to schedule directly with Michael.



Explore the program & free resources

School pages, signed letters, and materials for your staff.

muslimstudents.co