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CONCEPTUALIZING AN ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education
in Education Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational
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Louisville, Kentucky

May 2024

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By

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A Dissertation Approved on

March 28, 2024

by the following Dissertation Committee:

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

Allah SWT

and my husband and children

Michael Estes

Nusaybah Estes

Mansur Estes

Mahmud Estes

Khawlah Estes

And to the administration, teachers, parents, and students at HIRA Institute.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah SWT for granting me the opportunity to further Islamic education. I would like to thank my loving family, my husband and my children, without their patience and love I would not have been able to complete this doctoral journey. I would also like to thank the three Imams, Mufti Asif Iqbal, Mufti Atif Iqbal, and Imam Wasif Iqbal, the administration, teachers, parents, and students of HIRA Institute, without their leadership and support, I would not have been able to complete this research. I would like to thank Dr. Brydon Miller who has inspired me to embark in participatory action research, Dr. Doug Stevens who helped guide me in research the process, and Dr. Regina Umpstead who helped refine and improve my thoughts and ideas. I would like to thank Dr. Leila Shatara who I hope I will continue to have a lasting friendship to research and promote Islamic education in North America.

ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZING AN ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Norma Nangju

March 28, 2024

Character education, specifically faith-based character education, can provide a social, emotional, and academic benefit for students. Through this study, I wanted to take the first step: to design an Islamic character education program collaboratively with all stakeholders of the school. This study used participatory action research as a methodology. The first purpose was for administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY to collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute using the Nominal Group Technique. The second purpose was, based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character education program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute using the Future Creating Workshop. The goals and strategies provided a framework of a character education program at HIRA Institute.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Research Question	3
Purpose	3
Local Context	3
Conceptual Framework	4
Overview of the Research Design	5
Definition of Relevant Terms	5
Organization of the Study	7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Introduction	8
Social Emotional Learning	9
History	10
Character Education	12
Non-Faith-Based Character Education Program	14
Faith-Based Character Education Programs	19
Character Development in Islam	21
Character of Muhammad (peace be upon him)	24

Islamic Character Development Programs in the US	25
Identity	26
Stages of Identity Development.....	26
Faith and Identity	28
Islamic Identity	30
Educational Outcomes	32
Literature Review Summary	35
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	38
Methodology	39
The Researcher.....	39
Participants.....	43
Participatory Action Research Methodology	44
Data Collection	48
Nominal Group Technique	48
Critical Utopian Action Research and Future Creating Workshop	51
Procedures Followed.....	56
Data Analysis	58
Limitations of Study	60
Ethical Considerations	61
Summary	63
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	64
Research Questions.....	64
Nominal Group Technique	65
<i>Leadership Team Nominal Group Technique Session.....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Parents, Teachers and Community Members Nominal Group Technique Session</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Teacher Nominal Group Technique Session.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>High School Girls Nominal Group Technique Session</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>High School Boys Nominal Group Technique Session</i>	<i>74</i>
Description of Nominal Group Technique Sessions.....	75
Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate	76
Reflections on Nominal Group Technique	78
Future Creating Workshop.....	79

Reflections on Future Creating Workshop	85
Conclusion	87
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	88
Research Questions	88
Connection the Literature Review	89
Themes from the Nominal Group Technique Sessions	89
Reflections on the Methodology	95
Participatory Action Research for Education	95
Nominal Group Technique as an Effective Method	97
Study Design Adjusted for Disadvantages of the Nominal Group Technique	100
Future Creating Workshop as an Effective Method	101
Implications for Future Research	101
Conclusion	103
REFERENCES	106
APPENDIX A: EMAIL & WHATSAPP TO PARENTS/COMMUNITY MEMBERS	115
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT	117
APPENDIX C: CHILD ASSENT	121
APPENDIX D: PROFILE OF A GRADUATE OF JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL	123
APPENDIX E: AGENDA FOR NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE	124
APPENDIX F: AGENDA FOR FUTURE CREATING WORKSHOP	126
APPENDIX G: STRUCTURED ETHICAL REFLECTION	129
APPENDIX H: ADMINISTRATION NGT	131
APPENDIX I: PARENT, TEACHER, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS NGT	133
APPENDIX J: TEACHER NGT	135
APPENDIX K: HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS NGT	138
APPENDIX L. HIGH SCHOOL BOYS NGT	139
APPENDIX M: PHOTO OF NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE SESSION	140
APPENDIX N: PROFILE OF A HIRA INSTITUTE GRADUATE	141
APPENDIX O: CRITIQUE PHASE GROUP 1	142
APPENDIX P: CRITIQUE PHASE GROUP 2	143
APPENDIX Q: UTOPIAN PHASE GROUP 1	144

APPENDIX R: UTOPIAN PHASE GROUP 2	145
APPENDIX S: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	146
APPENDIX T. NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE RESPONSES	156
APPENDIX U. FUTURE CREATING WORKSHOP RESPONSES	157
CURRICULUM VITA	158

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
Figure 1. CASEL Core Social and Emotional Competence Clusters	22
Figure 2. Positive Action Concepts	29
Figure 3. Stages of Identity Development	38

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Character education, specifically faith-based character education, can provide a social, emotional, and academic benefit for students. Character education is part of social-emotional learning. By integrating social-emotional learning curriculum in schools, students can improve their academic performance, attendance, and behavior (Elias et al., 2010). Character education is a component of social and emotional learning that promotes core virtues, moral sensitivity, moral commitment, ethical reasoning, and personal growth aspirations (Kidron, 2018).

There are many examples of non-faith-based character education programs such as Facing History & Ourselves (Schultz et al., 2001), Knowledge is Power Program (Coen, Nichols-Barrer, & Gleason, 2019), and Positive Action (Snyder et al., 2010). There are many faith-based character education programs from Christian (Potter, 2007) and Jewish (Roso, 2013) schools. Many Islamic schools have character education programs as part of faith education (Saleh, Abdullah, & El-Deeb, 2018).

Character development is connected to faith identity development. Erikson has described the Stages of Psychosocial Development (Orenstein, 2020) and faith identity development mirrors Erikson's stages of identity development (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Islamic identity development has three themes. First is the source of Islamic faith identity, the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. Second, when one has an Islamic identity, one

believes that human beings were sent down by God to take care of all the people, animals, and the environment. Third, is the importance of seeking knowledge to develop Islamic identity (Ahmad, 2013).

Having measurable goals is necessary when designing a character education program. Using measurable goals, a character education program can be evaluated for its effectiveness. Academic outcomes include grades and standardized testing. Non-academic outcomes include attendance and suspensions. Islamic-based outcomes could include prayer or participation in community service.

Statement of the Problem

As a practitioner in an Islamic school, I believe that Islamic character education provides a social, emotional, and academic benefit to students. Every Islamic school has a character education program. However, the programs are a conglomeration of policies and procedures, not systematically developed with all the stakeholders, the policies are not necessarily based on research, or the strategies are not proven to be effective (Muslim Educational Trust, 2022). Salahuddin (2011) published a dissertation describing the character education program in a U. S. Islamic school. There are articles from Islamic countries providing a qualitative description of Islamic character education (Ismail, 2016). However, as of 2024, there is scant systematic, rigorous program evaluations on character education for Islamic schools. My long-term goal became to develop, implement, and track Islamic character education programs. Through this study, I wanted to take the first step: to design an Islamic character education program collaboratively with all stakeholders of the school.

Research Question

There were two research questions guiding this study.

RQ 1: How can administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute?

RQ 2: Based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character education program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute?

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to use participatory action research to work collaboratively with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY, HIRA Institute, to develop an Islamic character education program.

Local Context

HIRA Institute was incorporated in 2018. The mission of the school is to recite, explain, and teach the verses of the Holy Qur'an. As such, the Institute offers the full-time memorizing Qur'an (Tahfeedh) and Islamic Studies Program, the After School Tahfeedh and Islamic Studies Program, and Weekend Lecture Program. For the full-time program, the students memorize and recite the Qur'an in the morning. In the afternoon, the students learn Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, and other electives required for graduation. The program includes 3rd to 12th Grade.

There are 66 students in the full-time program: 14 elementary, 23 middle school, 27 high school, and two college students. There are 30 girls and 36 boys. The students are very diverse: 47% Black, 25% White (of Middle Eastern descent), 22% Asian, and 6% Mixed. The primary languages of the students at home are 34% Somali, 22% Arabic, 22% Urdu, 13% English, 6% Wolof, and 3% Bosnian. 100% of families have an immigrant background in one or both parents. Born in other countries such as Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, South Africa, Somalia, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. 27% of students are first-generation immigrants. The rest of the students are second generation and were born in the United States after their parents immigrated to the United States. The students live all over Louisville and southern Indiana reflected by various zip codes: 30% 40218, 15% 40214, 11% 40220, 8% 40291, 7% 40216, 5% 40210, 4% 40219, 3% 40223, 3% 40241, 3% 40272, 3% 47130, 1% 40229, 1% 40243, 1% 40258, 1% 42701. Around 93% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school serves a diverse student population. Due to the large number of immigrant families, there are many ESL students at the school. This diversity also lends to a diversity of values and ideas represented in the school. Anyone interested in participating in the study was welcome.

Conceptual Framework

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emphasizes the collaborative participation of trained researchers as well as local communities in producing knowledge directly relevant to the stakeholder community (Pant, 2014). Preferring practical over empirical forms of knowledge, PAR attempts to correct power imbalances in knowledge and information flows. PAR mobilizes local communities to have a concrete role in solving

their problems effectively and systematically. PAR advocates for the inclusion of local stakeholders in developing socio-economic theory and policy. PAR engages participants in all aspects of the research process: from design to dissemination. PAR involves visits, workshops, seminars, and multi-stakeholder meetings to get feedback and involvement from all stakeholders.

Overview of the Research Design

One Participatory Action Research method is the Nominal Group Technique. I planned to use the Nominal Group Technique to gain input from students, parents, teachers, administration, and community members on what should be the characteristics of a graduate from HIRA Institute. Nominal Group Technique is defined as “a structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone and facilitates quick agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems, or solutions” (Tague, 2005, para. 1). From their input, we drafted the Profile of a Graduate for HIRA Institute. This profile guided our future strategic plan to try to work towards achieving this vision.

I planned to use the Future Creating Workshop to develop an Islamic character development program. Future Creating Workshops utilize small-group dialogue to imagine creative solutions to problems usually in three stages: critique (determination of the current problem), utopian (solutions to the problem), and implementation stages (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007).

Definition of Relevant Terms

Social Emotional Learning: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good

decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors (Elias et al., 2010).

Character Development: Character development is an effort to connect students with values such as persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence. Character development refers to non-cognitive skills or character traits (Kidron, 2018).

Faith-Based Programs: Faith-based programs refer to programs based on a religion or religious group (Potter, 2007).

Non-Faith-Based Programs: Non-faith-based refers to secular character programs (Lickona, 1999).

Measurable Outcomes: Measurable outcomes for students could include academic achievement, attendance, behavior, participation in extracurricular activities, social behaviors, and other measurable metrics (Snyder et al., 2010).

Participatory Action Research: Participatory Action Research emphasizes the collaborative participation of trained researchers as well as local communities in producing knowledge directly relevant to the stakeholder community (Pant, 2014)

Nominal Group Technique: Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is defined as “a structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone and facilitates quick agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems, or solutions” (Tague, 2005, para. 1)

Future Creating Workshop: Future Creating Workshop is a process for participants to reform the present by creating an action plan for a utopian future (Guy & Feldman, 2021).

Organization of the Study

The research questions for this study were to develop goals and strategies for an Islamic character education program at HIRA Institute using participatory action research.

Four more chapters follow. Chapter II is a comprehensive review of the literature. The literature review will cover social-emotional learning and character development as a subset of social-emotional learning, identity and faith development, and the importance of measurable goals in a character education program.

Chapter III will include the research design and how the study will be conducted.

Chapter IV will include the results of the research study.

Chapter V will discuss the conclusions of the research study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this study, I planned to use the Nominal Group Technique to gain input from students, parents, teachers, administration, and community members on what should be the characteristics of a graduate from Hira Institute. Nominal Group Technique is defined as “a structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone and facilitates quick agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems, or solutions” (Tague, 2005, para. 1). From their input, we drafted the profile of a Graduate for Hira Institute. This profile guided our future strategic plan to try to work towards achieving this vision. I planned to use the Future Creating Workshop to develop an Islamic character development program. Future Creating Workshops utilize small-group dialogue to imagine creative solutions to problems usually in three stages: critique (determination of the current problem), utopian (solutions to the problem), and implementation stages (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). There are two research questions guiding this study.

RQ 1: How can administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute?

RQ 2: Based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character development program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute?

In the first part of this literature review, I provide an overview of social-emotional learning and how existing character development programs are a part of social-emotional learning. I provide a brief history of character development programs in the United States and then a look at non-faith-based and faith-based character development programs. I end this section with a summary of character education programs in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic Schools. There is limited research describing character education programs in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic schools. As of 2024, there is scant systematic, rigorous program evaluations on character education for Islamic schools. In the next part of the literature review, I give an overview of concepts of identity and how faith is an aspect of identity. The specific faith identity explored is Islamic. In the last section, I discuss outcomes that can be used to measure the effectiveness of a character development program. I provide some examples of academic and non-academic outcomes that can be used to measure the effectiveness of an Islamic character development program.

Social Emotional Learning

Character development programs fall under social-emotional learning programs. To develop an effective character development program, one has to understand the history of social-emotional learning programs and character development programs in America. Non-faith-based character development programs are an important resource for faith-based character development programs as they are normally researched and evaluated in large districts to determine their efficacy. Faith-based character development

programs from Christian and Jewish schools can also be an important resource for Islamic character development programs as the vision and mission of faith-based character development programs are very similar.

History

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors. By integrating the SEL curriculum in schools, students can improve their academic performance, attendance, and behavior (Elias et al., 2010).

In the 1960s, at Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center, James Comer began a program called the Comer School Development Program (Elias et al., 2010). The school program focused on two African American elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut that had poor attendance and low academic achievement. The school created a team of teachers, parents, the principal, and a mental health worker to make academic and social changes to the school. By the early 1980s, student academic performance in the school was higher than the national average, attendance increased, and behavior problems decreased (Elias et al., 2010). This study was significant as it demonstrated that social-emotional learning programs could improve outcomes for low-income, low-achieving schools.

In 1994, the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was created (Elias et al., 2010). The Fetzer Institute hosted the first CASEL conference. CASEL collaborators co-authored *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. CASEL's mission was "to establish social and emotional learning as an

essential part of education" (Elias et al., 2010, section CASEL Drives the Movement). CASEL's Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning is an integrated framework that highlights five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Borowski, 2019).

Figure 1. CASEL Core Social and Emotional Competence Clusters (Borowski, 2019)

Cluster	Description
<i>Self-Awareness</i>	The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.
<i>Social Awareness</i>	The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. This includes the capacity to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and support.
<i>Self-Management</i>	The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation & agency to accomplish personal/collective goals.
<i>Relationship Skills</i>	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed.
<i>Responsible Decision Making</i>	The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacity to consider ethical standards and safety concerns and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.

The CASEL framework is the basis of many current non-faith-based character education programs in use today. Implementing the CASEL framework in an Islamic character development program may significantly strengthen the effectiveness of the program.

Character Education

Character education is a subsection of social-emotional learning. Character education is the component of social and emotional learning that promotes core virtues, moral sensitivity, moral commitment, ethical reasoning, and personal growth aspirations (Kidron, 2018). Based on Kidron's definition, a character education program needs to help students identify moral problems, implement virtues such as fairness, compassion, and responsibility, and be willing to stand up for our values even if we may face consequences. Students need to be able to analyze a complex problem and see the consequences of various actions.

Since the early years of the United States, character education has been important in public schools. In the colonies, the purpose of schooling was to educate students on values and morals. Religion played a major role and the Bible was the main text used for lessons (Salahuddin, 2011). In 1836, the McGuffey Readers, a more secular text, replaced the Bible but the stories continued to contain moral lessons (Salahuddin, 2011). However, the importance of character education declined with the rise of industrialization and scientific advancement. Also, with a more diverse, multicultural society, the question arose whose values should we teach? As a result, character education was dropped from public schools (Salahuddin, 2011). It is interesting to note that character education began

as a faith-based initiative. However, the conflict between science and religion caused character education to be dropped from the curriculum.

In the late 1960s, teachers were asked to guide students to find their values. In the 1970s, Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussions used rational decision-making to help students develop more systematic and principled moral reasoning (Salahuddin, 2011). However, teachers did not see it as their role to model, teach, or encourage particular moral behaviors. Character education may have been difficult to teach in the 1960s as teachers could only guide students to values without explicitly teaching them.

The current character education reform movement began with the launching of the Character Education Partnership (CEP) in 1993 (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). CEP was a national coalition committed to putting character development at the top of the nation's educational agenda. A new periodical, the Journal of Character Education, was devoted entirely to covering the field. Funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, CEP commissioned the What Works in Character Education Projects to identify research-based character education programs that were evaluated to be effective (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022). It is from the What Works in Character Education Projects that national character education programs emerged which can be adapted for faith-based settings.

Many challenges have appeared in designing and implementing effective character development programs. Should values be taught explicitly or not? Megan M. Farnsworth, a Bradley Fellow at The Heritage Foundation and a former curriculum specialist and teacher in Burbank, California, notes that "We taught our youngsters to

reason, but we didn't teach them that there are absolute truths” (Farnsworth, 2001, para. 5). She supports schools teaching a common set of values.

Another concern is whether character education works for or against the cause of social justice for traditionally marginalized groups. Alfie Kohn at his session "How Not to Teach Values” expressed concern that some character education programs aim to maintain the status quo and establish social stability (Kohn, 1996). But he said that character education programs can include other possible goals: “to promote social justice, to meet children's needs, to develop active participants in democracy, and to make students part of a caring community” (Kohn, 1996, para. 4). Those designing or adopting programs should evaluate a character development program using the lens of social justice.

Non-Faith-Based Character Education Program

There are several non-faith-based character education programs such as Facing History & Ourselves (Schultz et al., 2001), Knowledge is Power Program (Coen, Nichols-Barrer, & Gleason, 2019), and Positive Action (Snyder et al., 2010). These non-faith-based character education programs provide an example of systematically designed character education programs that have been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness. Lickona (1999) outlines many school-wide strategies that are present in non-faith-based character development programs. These strategies can be used in Islamic character education programs.

Non-faith-based character education programs are a conscious attempt to help students acquire universally accepted values. Schools promote values such as respect, honesty, and kindness explicitly. Values are not just explained but discussed and

observed through behavior. It “is a whole-school effort to create a community of virtue, where behaviors such as responsibility, diligence, and self-control are modeled, taught, expected, celebrated, and continuously practiced in everyday interactions” (Lickona, 1999, p. 4). The teacher needs to be a caregiver, moral model, and moral mentor. Teachers need to create a caring classroom community. Discipline must help students develop moral reasoning, self-discipline, and respect for others. Students must be involved in shared decision-making that increases their responsibility for making the class a good place to be and to learn. Teachers must teach virtues through the curriculum. Teachers should utilize cooperative learning to help students develop important social and moral competencies—such as the habit of considering the perspectives of others, the ability to work as part of a team, and the capacity to appreciate others. Students need to do their best in everything they do. Students need to be given many opportunities to reflect to see how they can improve themselves. Students need to know how to resolve conflicts without force or intimidation. Character education must extend students' caring beyond the classroom into larger and larger spheres. Leaders need to create a positive moral culture in the school. Parents and community members need to be recruited as partners in character education. These are some strategies that need to be a part of a school character education program. These strategies are common in current non-faith-based character education programs. These strategies are common in current non-faith-based character education programs and can be integrated into faith-based character education programs.

Researchers and publishers have developed various character development programs. The US Department of Education, Institute of Educational Sciences, and What

Works Clearinghouse evaluated these character-education programs for their effectiveness (What Works Clearinghouse, 2022). Some of these comprehensive school reform programs included Facing History and Ourselves, and Positive Action. These character education programs have been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness.

Facing History & Ourselves (FHAO) offers a History and Literature curriculum for secondary-level students that incorporates ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and social-emotional learning to understand current events (Schultz et al., 2001).

Literature on the civil rights movement, immigration, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Armenia, democracy, racism, and antisemitism fosters equity, perspective-taking, and moral decision-making. In one study with 212 subjects in 14 FHAO classes and 134 students in eight comparison classes, a 10-week Facing History and Ourselves curriculum was taught in the FHAO classrooms either in late winter or spring (Schultz et al., 2001). The study demonstrated that eighth-grade students in Facing History classrooms showed increases across the school year in relationship maturity and decreases in racist attitudes and self-reported fighting behavior relative to comparison students.

One example of character education in US schools is the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). KIPP is a network of 270 free open-enrollment college-preparatory schools in low-income communities throughout the United States (KIPP, 2022). The KIPP approach is rooted in the research of Dr. Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania) and Dr. Chris Peterson (University of Michigan) which identifies 24 character strengths as leading to engaged, meaningful, and purposeful lives. One study followed 1,177 students who applied to enter one of 13 KIPP middle schools through a 5th or 6th-grade admission lottery in 2008 and 2009 (Coen, Nichols-Barrer, & Gleason,

2019). The study tracked these students through their middle school experiences in Los Angeles, San Lorenzo, California, San Antonio, Houston, Austin, Dallas, Washington D. C., New York City, Atlanta, East Point, Georgia, and Lynn, Massachusetts. Overall, 52 percent of students who attended KIPP enrolled in a four-year college within two years after high school graduation, compared to 39 percent who did not attend KIPP (Coen, Nichols-Barrer, & Gleason, 2019). The character education program at KIPP was able to help with high school graduation rates.

Positive Action is a comprehensive social-emotional learning program centered on the Thoughts-Actions-Feelings Circle (Positive Action, 2022). The Thoughts-Actions-Feelings Circle is centered around the idea that our thoughts lead to actions and those actions lead to feelings about ourselves which in turn lead to more thoughts. When this cycle is positive, students want to learn. The program emphasizes actions that promote a healthy and positive cycle. Positive Action is organized into seven units by grade level (Lewis et al., 2016). Every grade level features the same seven units from KG to Grade 12. Each kit is unique in its purpose and contains 132 scripted, 15 to 20-minute lessons. This sequence allows educators to align an entire school behind Positive Action lessons and concepts. In a matched-pair, cluster-randomized, controlled trial from 2003 to 2004, intervention schools that implemented Positive Action scored higher in standardized testing scores in reading and math, lower absenteeism, and fewer suspensions (Snyder et al., 2010).

Figure 2. Positive Action Concepts (Positive Action, 2022)

Concept	Explanation
---------	-------------

Self-Concept	Students learn that self-concept means the way they think and feel about themselves and that families and friends influence their self-concepts.
Physical and Intellectual Aspects of Self Concept	Students learn that positive people take good care of their bodies and minds. Lessons focus on physical health (nutrition, hygiene, avoiding harmful substances, exercise, sleep, and avoiding illness) and positive actions for intellectual health (learning, problem-solving, creative thinking, memory, and curiosity).
Manage their Resources	Students discover that managing their resources (Time, Energy, Possessions, Money, Talents, Thoughts, Actions, and Feelings) is an important positive action. Lessons focus on love, anger, worry, jealousy, pride, fear, loneliness, thankfulness, and discouragement.
Social Interactions	Students also learn and practice respect, empathy, friendliness, kindness, cooperation, and positiveness as positive ways of dealing with others.
Self-Honesty	Self-honesty means dealing with realities and seeing yourself as you are. Students practice telling themselves the truth, knowing themselves, not blaming others, admitting mistakes, not making excuses, and keeping their word.
Self-Improvement	Students learn how to set short-term and long-term goals, and how to make goal-setting work.

These research studies provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of non-faith-based character education programs. When conducting program evaluations, researchers are not sure if the effect they are measuring is due to the treatment the participants experienced or other factors. In the Positive Action research study, the participants were matched by gender, socio-economic status, and race. Through this methodology, they provided greater evidence that the effects measured were from the character education program and not from other factors (Snyder et al., 2010). Future research on faith-based character development programs could provide similar insight into the effectiveness of a faith-based character development program.

Faith-Based Character Education Programs

Strategies in faith-based character development programs can provide valuable insights when designing an Islamic character development program. I limited my examination of faith-based character education programs to Christian and Jewish character education programs due to the similarity of Islam to Christianity and Judaism. Several articles and studies provided a qualitative description of faith-based character education programs. However, I did not find any studies where participants collaboratively designed a faith-based character education program. Furthermore, I did not find program evaluations examining the effectiveness of Christian and Jewish character development programs.

In Christian or Catholic schools, the first step is to teach values based on the Bible and the life of Christ. The Bible is viewed as the final authority for all matters of faith and practice (Potter, 2007). The character standard is based on the teachings and life of Christ. Christian educators are called to make disciples and to lead students to think about all of life with Jesus' thoughts (Potter, 2007, p. 11). An Islamic character development program can similarly be based on the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Faith-based schools argue that non-faith-based character development programs identify traits such as responsibility, perseverance, caring, self-discipline, citizenship, honesty, courage, fairness, respect, integrity, and patriotism as traits schools should teach children (Character Education Network, 2007). However, important Christlike qualities such as humility and a lifestyle of prayer are missing from these lists. Potter (2007) advocates that Christian schools should identify their own goals that reflect their

teachings. Such an understanding is important for Islamic character education programs. It is important to identify character goals that reflect Islamic principles.

Christian schools emphasize the training of teachers to become models for the students to emulate and learn from. They must practice the qualities they are teaching students. "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23: 2, 28). Teachers must be open and honest about their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers must share with their students their constant struggles to implement good character and how they may have made progress over time (Potter, 2007). Teacher training for character education must also be important in Islamic schools.

Christian character curriculum is holistic. Traits are introduced and defined. Individuals from the past who exemplified these character traits are discussed. Advertisements, TV, and movies are examined as to how these traits are exemplified. Role-playing and journal writing are used to reflect on these traits (Ryan & Bohlin, 2007). Similar strategies should be implemented in an Islamic character development program.

In Jewish character development programs, the goal is to promote Tikkun Olam. Tikkun Olam means "repairing the world" that "they are partners with God and that (their) responsibility is to leave the world a better place than it was when... (they) came into it (Roso, 2013, p. 4). Jewish schools teach the students how to focus on community, take care of the environment, and care for the elderly. In Heritage Academy, teachers and administrators promote the Jewish concept of caring for the world. Students study the

Torah and learn about mitzvot which means “community, responsibility, service, peace, justice, mercy, and humility” (Roso, 2013, p. 34). Students have character lessons in tefillah prayer services or Jewish studies classes. Students engage in community service projects throughout the year. Having a structured way for students to engage in community service is important for an Islamic character development program.

In another Jewish school, GANN Academy, outside of Boston, students identify a character skill each month and design projects to implement this character trait (Harris, 2018). Students meet to discuss the traits they were working on. Every student has a partner to discuss their progress, and students write in a journal to reflect on their progress (Harris, 2018). An Islamic character development program could include these strategies of collaborative self-reflection.

At the Hebrew Academy in Miami Beach, the school counselors visit the classrooms to teach character traits. The school teaches a social-emotional program called Cloud 9 with a Jewish perspective. Lessons will refer to the character traits by their Hebrew names and include the study of relevant Jewish sources and texts (Harris, 2018). Many of the strengths of Christian and Jewish character development programs can be used in an Islamic character program.

Character Development in Islam

How is character development viewed in Islam? Hogan and Smither (2008) have argued that a meaningful personality theory must address at least five topics: human motivation, personality development, the self, psychological adjustment, and the relationship of the individual to society.

Motivation: In Islam, God is believed to know what will happen in a person's life from birth to death (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 3, verse 145). However, at the same time, a Muslim believes one always has a choice about one's actions. Although God may know the outcome of that choice, the individual is no less responsible for his or her decision (Hogan & Smither, 2008). The main motivation in Islam is worshiping God (Ansari, 2002). Explaining to students their ability to choose the right actions will help strengthen their character.

Personality Development: The Qur'an explains a person goes through three stages (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 30, verse 54). During childhood, the time of weakness, parents are charged with ensuring the physical care of their children and modeling spiritual practice to promote moral development. In the Islamic view, children under age seven do not understand the consequences of their actions and much of their behavior results from simply imitating their parents (Yildirim, 2006). However, age seven is the point at which children are encouraged to participate in more of the important aspects of Islam such as fasting (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). At puberty, the child becomes legally responsible for his or her acts (Ansari, 2002). According to the Qur'an, individuals achieve their fullest physical and mental capacities around the age of forty (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 46, verse 15), referred to as the time of strength. Old age, on the other hand, is characterized as the time of infirmity, when individuals "forget what they knew, having known it once" (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 22, verse 5). Understanding the stages of character development of Islam will allow educators to encourage students to participate more in Islamic actions in the elementary level and explain to students by the middle school level that they are now responsible for their actions.

Self: In Islam, the self has three parts: the spiritual heart (Qalb), the soul (Ruh), and desires (Nafs) (Inayat, 2005). The spiritual heart (Qalb) helps a person distinguish right from wrong. The soul (Ruh) is what gives life to a person. A person's desires (Nafs) includes one's physical appetites and any inclination toward undesirable behavior. Being able to overcome one's desires and be in tune with one's spiritual heart leads to tranquility for the individual. Helping students understand that every individual has desires, but our goal is to fight against our desires in order to reach a higher level of faith.

Psychological Adjustment: In Islam, the well-adjusted person believes in Tawhid (belief in the oneness of God), obeys God's commands, and fulfills his or her responsibilities to family and society. Mental health is not the absence of psychological abnormalities but the successful blending of the issues of everyday life with the requirements of Islam (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). Incorporating this idea that by fulfilling the requirements of Islam an individual will attain peace can help encourage students to make better decisions.

Individual and Society: In the Islamic view, both individuals and society strive toward the goal of worshipping God and living peacefully (Ansari, 2002). In Islam, the community of believers are known as the umma. The foundation of the umma is the family. The requirements for being part of the umma—including communal prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, and so forth—create a common identity (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). The idea of an umma is similar to the concept of a global citizen. Understanding that students need to see examples of good character in the adults in school and the wider community is important when developing a character education plan.

Ideas of free will, stages of development, striving against one's desires, that practicing of faith leads to peace, and the importance of practicing Islam as a community are important to incorporate into an Islamic character development program.

Character of Muhammad (peace be upon him)

The behavior and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) form the basis of character development in Islam. "Surely there is in the person of Allah's (God's) messenger an excellent example for you-for every person who has hope in Allah and the Hereafter and remember, Allah, reciting His name many times." (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 33, verse 21) One companion stated, "The Messenger of God (Muhammad peace be upon him) was neither ill-mannered nor rude. He used to say that the best people among you are those who are best in their moral character" (Bukhari, Book 61, Hadith 68). Some character traits exhibited by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are being truthful, trustworthy, sincere, tolerant, generous, and patient (Elshinawy, 2022).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified the teachings of the Qur'an through his actions. It is reported Sa'd ibn Hisham said that he asked 'A'ishah, Prophet's wife (peace be upon her). "Tell me about the character of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)." She said, "His character was the Qur'an." (Ahmad, 2013).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was known as a very trustworthy individual. He always fulfilled his promises and kept his trust. He was given the name in Mecca as s-Sadiq Al-Amin, the most honest and trustworthy person (Ahmad, 2013).

He was a very humble person. Though he was the leader of the Muslim community, he lived a simple life with few personal belongings. He cooked food only a few times a month and lived on dates and water. He was humble at home and helped with

chores cleaning in the household. He visited the sick and the poor regularly. Any gift that was given to him, he immediately gave it away to those in need (Elshinawy, 2022).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a very forgiving and merciful person. God in the Qur'an called him as "a mercy to the worlds" (Al-Anbiya 21:107). In the early days of Islam, for thirteen years, the Muslims were killed and persecuted. At the end, when the Muslim army entered Mecca, he ordered the army not to cause harm except to someone who prevented the army from entering Mecca. The conquest of Mecca was peaceful and bloodless. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not take revenge on any who had killed and hurt himself and his followers. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) forgave all the people of Mecca (Elshinawy, 2022).

Islamic Character Development Programs in the US

Over the years, many Islamic schools have been established that emphasize character development. For example, in Bayaan Academy in Florida, character-building based on the foundation of Qur'an and Sunnah is just as important as preparing the students for excellence in any educational or career field. Bayaan Academy offers both an academic and Hifz (memorizing the Qur'an) program. Bayaan Academy strives to give students the knowledge, the tools, and the life experiences to be successful Muslims and citizens of the world (Saleh, Abdullah, & El-Deeb, 2018).

The Muslim Educational Trust (MET) manages the Islamic School of MET for PreK to 5th Grade and the Oregon Islamic School for 6th to 12th Grade. MET manages the Tarbiyah & Character Building Program which offers grants for Islamic Schools to develop effective programs to build character in Islamic Schools. Since 1996, the goal of the Tarbiyah Project is to expand knowledge of successful practices in character

development and to encourage and disseminate the most effective Tarbiyah or character development projects for others to learn from and implement (Muslim Educational Trust, 2022).

There are qualitative descriptions in the research of Islamic character education programs (Salahuddin, 2011). However, as of 2024 the University of Louisville Library database does not return search results for any Islamic character education programs that have been systematically developed, tested, and evaluated for program effectiveness. In this study, I hope to take the first step to systematically develop an Islamic character education program.

Identity

At its core, faith character development programs endeavor to develop the particular faith identity in a child. How does identity develop in children in general? How does faith identity develop? How does Islamic identity in specific develop in children?

Stages of Identity Development

One of the main theories of identity development is Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development (Orenstein, 2020). Erikson’s theory posits eight stages of human development. As individuals grow, the conflicts they face either allow them to develop positive or negative characteristics that lead to stable relationships with self and others (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020).

Figure 3. Stages of Identity Development (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020, Stages of Childhood section)

	Stages of Identity Development	Example

Stage 1	Infancy period: Trust vs. Mistrust Virtue: Hope Maldevelopment: Withdrawal	Secure environment provided by the caregiver, with regular access to affection and food
Stage 2	Early Childhood period: Autonomy vs. Shame, doubt Virtue: Will Maldevelopment: Compulsion	Caregiver promotes self-sufficiency while maintaining a secure environment
Stage 3	Play Age period: Initiative vs. Guilt Virtue: Purpose Maldevelopment: Inhibition	Caregiver encourages, supports, and guides the child's own initiatives
Stage 4	School Age period: Industry vs. Inferiority Virtue: Competence Maldevelopment: Inertia (passivity)	Reasonable expectations set in school and at home, with praise for their accomplishments
Stage 5	Adolescence period: Identity vs. Identity confusion Virtue: Fidelity Maldevelopment: Repudiation	Individuals weigh out their previous experiences, societal expectations, and their aspirations in establishing values and 'finding themselves'
Stage 6	Young Adulthood period: Intimacy vs. Isolation Virtue: Love Maldevelopment: Distantiation	Individual forms close friendships or long-term partnership
Stage 7	Adulthood period: Generativity vs. Stagnation/Self-absorption Virtue: Care Maldevelopment: Rejection	Engagement with the next generation through parenting, coaching, or teaching
Stage 8	Old Age period: Integrity vs. Despair Virtue: Wisdom Maldevelopment: Disdain	Contemplation and acknowledgment of personal life accomplishments

Erikson's stages give us a framework for how children develop. Each stage flows into the next. The outcome of the previous stage has an impact on whether a child can solve

the crisis in the next stage. For example, if a child does not develop trust in the beginning, the child may not develop autonomy, initiative, or industry in the future. The school should consider Erikson's stages and how the character development program will help students progress from stage to stage.

Faith and Identity

One aspect of identity is faith. Faith development theory has focused on how faith relates to identity and community relations. Fowler & Dell (2004) stated:

Faith may be characterized as an integral, centering process underlying the formation of the beliefs, values, and meanings that (1) gives coherence and direction to persons' lives; (2) links them in shared trusts and loyalties with others; (3) grounds their personal stances and communal loyalties in a sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference; and (4) enables them to face and deal with the challenges of human life and death, relying on that which has the quality of ultimacy in their lives. (para. 1)

Building from the theory of identity development established by Erik Erikson, as the child develops physically and emotionally, his or her faith grows as well, developing a relationship to a higher power.

Primal faith (infancy to 2 years): It is important for the child to form healthy attachments in the first few years. As the caregivers take care of the child, feed, play, and interact with the child, the child will find comfort in his/herself and others. This attachment allows the child to trust and gives the child the ability to trust in the larger context of faith (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Intuitive–projective faith (toddlerhood and early childhood): Children begin to use language to explain feelings and experiences that happen. At this stage, they cannot distinguish between their thoughts and others. Children begin to learn about faith through symbols (Fowler & Dell, 2004). For example, a green forest could represent paradise or a scale could represent being judged on the Day of Judgment.

Mythic–literal faith (middle childhood and beyond): In this stage, children begin to understand different perspectives of other people. They begin to manage their emotions. Rather than taking beliefs given by others, they begin to construct their own beliefs. Children in this stage view God in a wider perspective, as One who controls the universe and judges in a just and caring way. Children believe good actions are rewarded and wrong actions are punished (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Synthetic–conventional faith (adolescence and beyond): During this stage, a young person begins to have their own personal thoughts and reasoning. A young adult begins to reflect on their own and make their own meanings of abstract concepts. However, they are still dependent on others for their self-identity. God begins to have personal qualities of “accepting love, understanding, loyalty, and support during times of crisis” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 22).

Individuative–reflective faith: In this stage, a person develops the ability to critically reflect and evaluate all the beliefs he or she previously held. Through this process, a person forms self-identity and self-worth independent of other individuals. In the end, a person knowingly keeps or rejects different values and beliefs making the beliefs that are remaining stronger and more intentional (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Conjunctive faith: In this stage, a person begins to understand that faith can be approached by multiple perspectives. There is truth in a variety of sources. Being open to different perspectives allows a person to deepen his or her faith (Fowler & Dell, 2004). For example, in Islam, there is the tension between different schools of thought or between understandings of complex ideas such as fate.

Universalizing faith: At this stage, a person becomes concerned about all people, regardless of nationality, economic status, gender, age, race, and religious tradition. A person recognizes that all people of faith are serving their Creator. There is a strong level of common purpose and fellowship (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Understanding the stages of faith development is critical in a character development program. The strategies need to appropriately transition children from one stage to another. In the beginning, teachers need to understand that a student's understanding of God is simplistic, right and wrong, reward and punishment. However, as students move through the stages, they develop a more personal understanding of God. However, their self-identity is still greatly influenced by others. As a result, having positive role models around them and guiding them to choose good friends is important in the middle stage. Towards a more mature faith identity, students learn to understand perspectives, develop empathy for others despite their differences, and develop their own faith identity.

Islamic Identity

There are three main concepts in Islamic faith identity. The first is the source of Islamic faith identity, the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. The second is the concept of Istikhlaf. The third is the importance of seeking knowledge.

The Holy Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be a revelation sent by God to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through Angel Gabriel. The Sunnah or Hadith are the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (Ali, 2006). During the lifetime of the Prophet, his companions recorded Prophet Muhammad's words and actions. These companions taught the succeeding generations of Muslims. Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasa'I, and ibn Majah are authors who traveled the world visiting the Muslims and collected, verified, and compiled the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (Islamqa, 2002).

An important concept in Islam is Istikhlaf. Istikhlaf means human beings were sent down by God in order to take care of all the people, animals, and the environment on Earth (Ahmad, 2013). People have to make a choice to use the resources God has given them to serve and benefit others. In the Holy Qur'an, God commands humankind to look at creation, seek knowledge, and find ways to use the resources on Earth to help others." "Do they not look at the camels—how they are created? And at the sky—how it is raised? And at the mountains—how they are installed? And at the earth—how it is spread out? So remind. You are only a reminder." (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 88, verse 17-21).

The last is the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam. In the first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 96, verse 1-5), the word 'Read' (Iqra), refers to the knowledge in the dimension of the physical world but with the reference to the 'Creator'. The reference to 'Blood' (al-Alaq) in the second verse refers to the biological realm... (The) 'Pen' in the fourth verse symbolizes the knowledge of technology and the fifth verse reiterates the centrality of God in all the realms of

knowledge” (Ahmad, 2013, p. 55). According to the Islamic view, the physical world, knowledge, and guidance from God are integrated.

An Islamic character development program needs to be grounded in the Holy Qur’an and the character of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The program needs to emphasize community service so that students can fulfill the commandment of Istikhlaf and serve others. And last, the program must inspire students to continuously seek knowledge.

Educational Outcomes

A successful character development program must have outcomes to measure the effectiveness of the program. An overview of various outcomes that can be included in Islamic character development programs should be explored. Academic outcomes include performance in standardized testing and grades. Non-academic outcomes include behavior and attendance. Currently, there is limited research on program evaluations of Islamic character education programs that include Islamic-based outcomes. Some suggested Islamic outcomes can be based on the principles of Islam such as reflecting the prophetic character, attending to prayer, reading the Qur’an, and participating in community service (Elshinawy, 2022).

Academic outcomes include performance in standardized testing. The Positive Action Hawaii trial involved 20 racially and ethnically diverse schools from 2003 to 2005 (Snyder et al., 2010). The study was a matched-pair, cluster-randomized, controlled trial from 2003 to 2004. Intervention schools scored 9.8% better on the TerraNova (2nd ed.) test for reading and 8.8% on math; 20.7% better in Hawai’i Content and Performance Standards scores for reading and 51.4% better in math (Snyder et al., 2010). The initial

study included a follow-up analysis of the performance of students in middle schools and high schools with different proportions of Positive Action graduates from elementary schools (Snyder et al., 2010). Middle schools with higher proportions of Positive Action graduates reported a 21% increase in standardized reading scores and a 16% increase in standardized math scores. High schools with higher proportions of Positive Action graduates also reported improved scores on standardized tests: 11% for reading and 10% for math (Snyder et al., 2010). These studies are examples of the academic outcomes that can be measured in character education programs.

Non-academic outcomes include tracking behavior. One example is the study in Chicago where researchers used a matched-pair, cluster-randomized controlled design in 14 disadvantaged inner-city schools, primarily African-American, Hispanic, and White students (Lewis et. al, 2016). This study evaluated the effects of Positive Action on indicators of positive youth development (PYD) as measured by a self-reported behavior protocol. In another example, in the Positive Action Hawaii trial, they measured behavior by tracking suspensions and retentions (Snyder et al., 2010).

Another non-academic outcome is attendance. The Positive Action Hawaii trial reported 15.2% lower absenteeism (Snyder et al., 2010).

One Islamic-based character outcome would be to evaluate a student's behavior based on the character of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Elshinawy, 2022). A teacher, parent, or student self-evaluation could include examples of how students are trustworthy, humble, or merciful.

Attendance to prayer could be another Islamic-based outcome that can be tracked in an Islamic character education program. Muslims must pray five times a day. There are

also recommended prayers throughout the day and night. Prayers protect a Muslim from wrongdoing and build good character. Hadith Qudsi are statements that God said reported by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In one Hadith Qudsi, God says, “I accept the prayers of the person who adopts the policy of humility with it on account of My greatness, obliges My creatures, does not insist on sinning against Me, spends his day in remembering Me, and is kind to the poor, travelers, weak and the suffering people” (El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994) A teacher, parent, or student self-evaluation could include how often a student prays five times a day or prays extra prayers.

Another Islamic-based outcome that can be tracked in an Islamic character education would be the connection to the Qur’an. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “The best among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it.” (Bukhari, 1956, Book 66, Hadith 49) There is a high reward in Islam for memorizing the Qur’an. Memorizing the Qur’an protects the faith and brings the believer even closer to God. The teacher or the student could track how many chapters the student has memorized from the Qur’an.

An additional Islamic-based outcome that can be measured is participation in community service. Muslims are seen as the caretakers of the Earth. As such community service is so important in Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “On every person’s joints, there is sadaqah (charity) due every day the sun rises. Doing justice between two people is charity; assisting a man to mount his animal, or lifting up his belongings onto it is charity; a good word is charity; every step you take towards prayer is charity; and removing harmful things from pathways is charity.” (Bukhari, 1956, Book 56, Hadith 198) The program director could track how many hours the student

participates in community service activities and the student could reflect how these activities have impacted them.

Literature Review Summary

The first section of this chapter focused on how character education is a part of social-emotional learning. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors (Elias et al., 2010). Character education is a component of social and emotional learning that promotes core virtues, moral sensitivity, moral commitment, ethical reasoning, and personal growth aspirations (Kidron, 2018). Character education is part of social-emotional learning. By integrating social-emotional learning curriculum in schools, students can improve their academic performance, attendance, and behavior (Elias et al., 2010).

There are many examples of non-faith-based character education programs such as Facing History & Ourselves (Schultz et al., 2001), Knowledge is Power Program (Coen, Nichols-Barrer, & Gleason, 2019), and Positive Action (Snyder et al., 2010). These research studies provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of non-faith-based character education programs.

There are many faith-based character education programs from Christian (Potter, 2007) and Jewish (Roso, 2013) schools. Strategies in faith-based character development programs can provide valuable insights when designing an Islamic character development program. Several articles and studies provided a qualitative description of faith-based character education programs. However, I did not find any studies where participants

collaboratively designed a faith-based character education program. Furthermore, I did not find program evaluations examining the effectiveness of Christian and Jewish character development programs.

Many Islamic schools have character education programs as part of faith education (Saleh, Abdullah, & El-Deeb, 2018). The character education programs are based on the character of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Ahmad, 2013).

The second section dealt with identity development, especially faith identity development. The concepts underlying Islamic identity development were explored. Erikson has described the Stages of Psychosocial Development (Orenstein, 2020) and faith identity development mirrors Erikson's stages of identity development (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Islamic identity development has three themes. First is the source of Islamic faith identity, the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. Second, when one has an Islamic identity, one believes that human beings were sent down by God to take care of all the people, animals, and the environment. Third, is the importance of seeking knowledge to develop Islamic identity (Ahmad, 2013).

The third section provided an overview of measurable outcomes of character development programs. Having measurable goals is necessary when designing a character education program. Using measurable goals, a character education program can be evaluated for its effectiveness. Academic outcomes include performance in standardized testing and grades. Non-academic outcomes include behavior and attendance. Currently, there is limited research on program evaluations of Islamic character education programs that include Islamic-based outcomes. Some suggested Islamic outcomes can be based on the principles of Islam such as reflecting the prophetic

character, attending to prayer, reading the Qur'an, and participating in community service (Elshinawy, 2022).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the methodology for this study to explore developing a Character Development Program with an Islamic perspective using Participatory Action Research Methods such as Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshop. This study developed a Character Development Program that can be used in parochial schools such as Islamic schools. The research plan, including the methodology, study participants, procedures, analysis method, and ethical concerns were primary components of this chapter.

There were two research questions guiding this study.

- RQ 1: How can administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute?
- RQ 2: Based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character development program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute?

Methodology

The Researcher

My experiences have been filled with themes of faith, social justice, health, and the environment. My mother, who was Catholic from the Philippines, converted to Islam after meeting my father who was a Muslim from Indonesia. I grew up in Manila, Philippines experiencing both faiths and converted to Islam in high school.

While I was in Middle School at the International School Manila, I was able to engage in participatory action research for the first time. Smokey Mountain was a term coined to describe a large landfill that was located in Tondo, Manila that operated for over 40 years. The 50-meter-high mountain of garbage held two million tons of waste. The heap was so named because flammable materials in the waste would spontaneously catch fire, producing plumes of smoke. It was the largest dumpsite in Manila and was home to 25,000 people. The residents at Smokey Mountain eked out a precarious living sifting through the garbage, collecting recyclable materials such as iron scraps and plastics and selling them to junk dealers. Some even fed themselves on the scraps of food they found (Endo, 2017).

I first connected with the residents of Smokey Mountain in Middle School. To educate and inform students about the plight of slum dwellers at Smokey Mountain, we received permission from our school to present the videos to the various elementary classes about the issue. We started an Environmental Club to organize recycling in the school and to regularly bring speakers to educate students about the environment.

In high school, I engaged in a participatory action research project for my International Baccalaureate Personal Project. I interviewed residents and wrote a paper

about the possibility of using biogas to address the garbage at Smokey Mountain. Biogas is the mixture of gasses produced by the breakdown of organic matter in the absence of oxygen, primarily consisting of methane and carbon dioxide. We proposed to sort the waste then digest the organic waste into biogas thus generating a gas that stoves could be retrofitted to use. Though a labor intensive process, the residents would benefit from the reclaimed materials and minimal air pollution would be generated. In the end, the Philippine government decided to incinerate all the garbage and build low cost housing for the residents at the reclaimed site (Endo, 2017).

I decided to study Environmental Engineering at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. There, I met Zulene Mayfield, a resident of Chester City. Chester City is a densely populated city of mostly low income, African American, Hispanic, and Eastern European families located 15 miles southwest of Philadelphia along the Delaware River. Though only 4.8 square miles, the majority of industries in Delaware County were located in Chester City. Initiating civil lawsuits against some of the facilities, Zulene Mayfield formed the Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL) (CRCQL, 2022). CRCQL turned to the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources (PADER), the Chester City Council, and the Chester City Bureau of Health to investigate if there was a correlation between the disproportionately high number of illnesses in Chester and the proximity of this residential area to the industries.

In my sophomore year in college, I worked with CRCQL to receive a grant from Swarthmore College to go door to door in Chester to interview the residents about their health. We found that the residents suffered from both cancer and non-cancer illnesses

such as kidney and liver diseases and respiratory problems at a higher rate than neighboring boroughs. Many of the pollutants emitted by the industries could cause the illnesses present in Chester. A USEPA/PADER study agreed with our findings. However, despite the conclusions, PADER approved another industry called Soil Remediation Systems to burn contaminated soils in Chester.

Upon request of CRCQL, in my senior engineering design project, I modeled sulfur dioxide and particulates from PECO Electric Generating Plant, the Delaware County Regional Water Quality Control Authority Sewage Treatment Plant, and the Delaware County Resource Recovery Facility using USEPA software and meteorological data from that year. I found that the maximum concentration of sulfur dioxide and particulates were modeled to occur in Chester City and was not disbursed to other areas. I also evaluated the collection of volatile organic compounds and metals in the atmosphere and the analysis of these samples using gas chromatography/flame ionization detection and atomic absorption spectroscopy.

My presentation of my senior project was attended by Chester residents and members of USEPA, PADER, the Chester City Council, and the Chester City Bureau of Health. After I left Swarthmore, I was grateful to note USEPA established permanent air quality monitoring stations in Chester that are regularly evaluated to make sure the industries are in compliance with air quality standards. Swarthmore made Chester a focus issue for students to apply for research grants through the Lang Center. Swarthmore College also established a fellowship program for students to work in Chester over the summer in areas as diverse as government, health, education, and science. These efforts made it possible to see positive change in Chester through participatory action research.

In 1995, I met my husband, an American, who had also converted to Islam. In 1999, the Muslim community in Louisville asked for my help to start the first Islamic school in Kentucky. Starting Nur Islamic School of Louisville involved participatory action research as we worked for one year consulting all Muslim communities in the various mosques to seek their input in the future structure and curriculum of the school.

After a few years, I was asked to establish a second Islamic school in Louisville. I was asked to take over the kindergarten position at the school and I fell in love with teaching. I was a teacher then Assistant Principal at Islamic School of Louisville for eleven years. Later, I became Assistant Principal at Nur Islamic School of Louisville for six years. After helping Nur Islamic School of Louisville achieve accreditation, I embarked on a process to obtain my Ed. S in Educational Administration degree to help improve myself as an administrator.

In 2018, a third Islamic school opened in Louisville, HIRA Institute. HIRA hired me to develop a unique curriculum for the students enrolled in the program. The goal of HIRA Institute is to facilitate the memorization (Tahfeeth) of the Qur'an. The students study the Qur'an from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon Monday to Friday. After lunch, they have an individualized, condensed curriculum of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies from 12:30 to 4:00 p. m. The long-term goal of HIRA Institute is to establish a seminary where students can obtain a Bachelors (Alimiyyah Program) or PhD (Mufti Program) in Islamic Sciences and Jurisprudence. The Mission is to develop future scholars and Imams that will be able to lead the Muslim community and contribute to the wider society.

I am inspired by how Swarthmore College developed a long-term partnership with Chester City to help the residents of Chester. My long-term goal is to facilitate a similar partnership in Louisville with the area universities, city council, and government agencies to provide better housing, education, health care, and civil rights for Muslims in Louisville, Kentucky. From advocating for residents of Smokey Mountain in Manila, Philippines to fighting for environmental justice in Chester, Pennsylvania, my journey of partnering with the local community to empower and advocate for people of color has continued. Though I have helped communities through many different lenses: environmental science, education, and faith, these facets are all bound together in my desire to serve and benefit the community at large.

Participants

The Islamic Leadership Team of HIRA Institute comprises four members: three men and one woman. Three of the members of the Leadership Team have a PhD in Islamic Jurisprudence and one has an Ed. S. in Educational Administration. One is an Imam, or religious leader, at a local mosque in the Louisville community. Three have memorized the Qur'an.

The Islamic Studies/Arabic Department of HIRA Institute has eleven members. Nine members have a Bachelors in Islamic Studies. Three are currently Imams. Four have memorized the Qur'an.

The academic teaching staff consists of eleven teachers: four male teachers and seven female teachers. The teachers have degrees in Education, Engineering, Biology, Dentistry, Political Science, Communications, Finance, and Fine Arts.

There are around 50 families at HIRA Institute representing 15 different countries: United States, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Syria, India, Yemen, Palestine, Senegal, Somalia, Mauritania, Kenya, Gambia, and Bosnia. Most of the parents are first generation immigrants or refugees.

There are roughly 5,000 Muslims in Louisville and around 20 mosques. The main mosques are: The Islamic Center of Compassion, the Muslim Community Center, Al Nur Masjid, and Guiding Light Islamic Center. There are many Muslim owned businesses as well and Muslim physicians and engineers in the area.

The participants were from my existing networks, individuals who were directly related to HIRA Institute as administrators, teachers, and parents as well as community members who were interested in developing the graduates of HIRA Institute.

Participatory Action Research Methodology

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emphasizes collaborative participation of trained researchers as well as local communities in producing knowledge directly relevant to the stakeholder community. Preferring practical over empirical forms of knowledge, PAR attempts to correct power imbalances in knowledge and information flows. PAR mobilizes local communities to have a concrete role in solving their own problems in an effective and systematic manner. PAR advocates for the inclusion of local stakeholders in developing socio-economic theory and policy. PAR engages participants in all aspects of the research process from design to dissemination. PAR involves visits, workshops, seminars, and multi-stakeholder meetings to get feedback and involvement from all stakeholders (Pant, 2014).

The history of Participatory Action Research began with Kurt Lewin. Kurt Lewin was a German social psychologist (Brydon-Miller et. al, 2020). As a Jewish refugee fleeing Nazi Germany, Lewin sought to understand antisemitism and take action against it (Torre, 2014). He rejected research that studied the ‘objective’ world separate from ‘subjective’ meaning. Lewin’s writing into field theory provided the basis for the self-in-action model of participatory research. He coined the term ‘Action Research’ where social scientists worked collaboratively with the community to address a practical situation. Emphasizing problem solving aided by an external facilitator, Action Research had less emphasis on active community participation (Elliott, 1991). The work of Kurt Lewin was the first step towards Participatory Action Research.

The writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire greatly influenced Participatory Action Research (Pant, 2014). Freire worked to improve adult literacy. He believed education could inspire oppressed people to help themselves. Education could allow socially marginalized people to analyze their own situation and organize action to improve it. Freire “advocated for a democratic education and research system, in which people and communities were involved in the production of knowledge about themselves, and a social system in which this community knowledge was valued as an equal to university-based knowledge” (Participatory Action Research, 2020, para. 11).

Participatory Action Research was further developed by Marja Liisa Swantz. Swantz was a social scientist who worked in Tanzania in the 1960s and 1970s. She found students and village workers were more effective than trained adults in educating and connecting with the local population. The term ‘Participatory Research’ was used in 1975 in the journal *Convergence*. Pioneered by Swantz, Participant Research became

known as partnering with community members and tapping into community knowledge to solve local problems (Pant, 2014).

In 1977, at the Cartagena Conference on Action Research, Orlando Fals Borda coined the word 'Participatory Action Research'. A sociologist from Columbia, he believed that it was the duty of a sociologist not just to examine the social reality of the country, but to try to remedy the grave injustices that research uncovered. As a professor at the National University of Bogotá, he utilized Participatory Action Research by combining research with political participation (Pant, 2014).

Sherry Arnstein was one of the earliest researchers who applied Participatory Action Research methods to help solve complex problems in desegregation, homelessness, and juvenile justice in the United States. Arnstein was the director of community relations at the Alexandria Hospital in Virginia from 1955 to 1957. She focused on working on community members to desegregate health care facilities with the Department of Housing, Education and Welfare in the 1960s. Later she worked with the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency to help provide federal resources to promote welfare for young children. She utilized PAR to develop 14 experimental community action programs. She wrote a landmark paper that described degrees of citizen participation. The lowest level of non-participation involved therapy and manipulation. The middle level of tokenism involved placation, consultation, and informing. What she advocated was the highest level of citizen power than involved citizen control, delegated power, and partnership (Arnstein, 1969).

In the 1930s, Myles Horton used Participatory Action Research to find a solution to allow timber workers to continue logging but still protect forests. Horton founded the

Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. He also used research skills and community involvement to understand what were the root causes of poverty in the region. This led to the update of local tax codes that had previously benefited absentee coal mining landowners (Bacon, 2003).

Participatory Action Research is different from the traditional research paradigm. In the traditional research paradigm, the emphasis is on learning about the research participants. Objectivity is valued. Research is best conducted by outsiders. The participants are passive objects of study and do not contribute to the research process. The study is controlled and experimental. The participant's involvement ends when data is complete (Rogers & Palmer-Erbs, 1994).

In the Participatory Action Research paradigm, the emphasis is on learning from and about research participants. The subjective experience of participants is valued. The researcher is a consultant. The participants have dual roles as participants and researchers. The participants are actively involved in the conceptualization, design, implementation, and interpretation of research studies. The participants are change agents converting results into new policy, programs, or research initiatives (Rogers & Palmer-Erbs, 1994).

Participatory Action Research "is not a method but rather an attitude" (Brydon-Miller et. al, 2020, para. 13). PAR respects people's knowledge and promotes social-justice and the democratization of knowledge. Individuals have the right to construct their own narratives, produce their own knowledge, and make sense of their own experiences. The researcher and participants cooperate as equal partners in the research process. They are both committed to taking action leading to positive social change. PAR is intended to

study and change a particular community, school, or organization (Organizing Engagement, 2022).

Data Collection

Nominal Group Technique

Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is defined as “a structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone and facilitates quick agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems, or solutions” (Tague, 2005, para. 1). Developed in 1968 by Andre Delbecq and Andrew Van de Ven, NGT was first used in the area of organizational planning research (Clark & Stein, 2004). Delbecq was a Professor at the University of Wisconsin and Van de Ven was his research assistant. NGT was developed as part of a larger project called the Program Planning Model (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971). The Program Planning Model was a structured process for decision making to identify strategic problems and find solutions to these problems.

NGT has been used in marketing, management, education, health, and religious organizations (Olsen, 2019). Designed to generate alternatives for a stated issue from a small group of participants, NGT is often used in the exploratory stage of research.

In Nominal Group Technique, first the problem is stated. Each participant silently thinks of solutions or ideas that come to mind and writes down as many as possible in a set period of time (5 to 10 minutes). Then the participants go around (round robin) and state one idea. The facilitator records it on the flipchart. No discussion is allowed, not even questions for clarification. A member may "pass" his or her turn and may then add an idea on a subsequent turn. The process continues until all members pass or until an agreed-upon length of time (Tague, 2005).

In the second part, the group discusses each idea in turn. Wording may be changed only when the idea's originator agrees. Ideas may be stricken from the list only by unanimous agreement or when there are duplicates. Discussion may clarify meaning, explain logic or analysis, raise and answer questions, or state agreement or disagreement. The group may also combine ideas into categories (Tague, 2005).

In the last part, the recorded ideas are prioritized. Each member selects ten items he or she thinks are most important. Then each member ranks the choices in order of priority, with the first choice ranking highest. Each choice is written on a separate paper, with the ranking underlined in the lower right corner. After votes are tallied, participants discuss the results and look for dramatic voting differences (Tague, 2005). Votes that are consistent reflect consensus. Items that received very low and very high votes might be beneficial to discuss as maybe participants have different definitions of key terms and the discussion of the controversial ideas may lead to consensus.

Nominal Group Technique has many advantages. One advantage everyone is given is the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. NGT allows participants who are normally not as vocal or who prefer to work in silence to be able to participate. Providing time to think of responses before answering, NGT allows individuals to share ideas that may not be fully developed. Round robin allows a person who is more confident to engage in self-disclosure early on. It also allows individuals who are not familiar with each other to participate in a non-judgmental fashion. NGT is designed so that one person cannot dominate the discussion. The process does not focus on one group which may cause conflict. The technique allows participants not to conform to group pressure. A large number of quality ideas in more dimensions is generated in a short

amount of time. This technique is useful if the issue is controversial to allow all ideas to be heard. The process allows for these ideas to be prioritized through group discussion (Keller, 2020).

Nominal Group Technique has many disadvantages. NGT cannot easily be done with large groups. Needing advanced preparation, NGT can only be done with one topic at a time. As discussion is not allowed, NGT does not allow the full development of ideas. Good ideas could be voted out (Keller, 2020).

Bartunek and Murnighan (1984) used Nominal Group Technique to generate goals for a new religious organization. Five separate religious organizations merged into one new entity. In order to create a strategic plan for the new organization, fifty-five delegates participated in NGT. NGT was conducted twice. In the first round, a large number of issues were generated. Through a grouping of non-overlapping issues and two rounds of voting, two issues were selected. In the second round of NGT, for each issue, a large number of solutions to address the issue were brainstormed. After discussion and combining solutions, a single list of action steps for each issue was agreed upon. Voting was done openly instead of in secret to increase buy in. A recorder listed people who wanted to comment. As one speaker held the floor, other group members could raise their hands. The recorder added their names to the list of interested participants. The chairperson acknowledged each in turn. NGT was an effective technique to bring consensus and solutions to organizational problems.

Critical Utopian Action Research and Future Creating Workshop

Critical Utopian Action Research (CUAR) is based on Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015). Adorno was from Frankfurt, Germany. Due to his Jewish background, he was expelled by the Nazis in 1931 as a university instructor. After residing in Oxford, New York and California, he returned to Frankfurt in 1949. He became the director of the Institute of Social Research founded by Max Horkheimer. Adorno questioned why hunger, poverty, and human suffering still existed despite society's scientific and technological ability to end these social ills. He posited that production in capitalism dominated society leading to the concentration of wealth and power among a few. This power imbalance resulted in the exploitation of people. Capitalism also led people to believe in social views that reinforced the power structure such as racist and antisemitic ideas.

CUAR is based on the work of Robert Jungk (Tofteng & Husted, 2014). He believed it was important to focus on a utopian ideal to reform the present. He believed the future was colonized by a small group of people. In CUAR both managers and workers, researchers, and community members equally give ideas to find creative ways to solve a problem.

Future Creating Workshops are one aspect of CUAR (Tofteng & Husted, 2014). Future Creating Workshops was invented by Jungk. Jungk was inspired by "socialist principles related to democratic, participative, and collective decision making by critical citizens that will become emancipated individuals, becoming their own attorneys before the state" (Vidal, 2005, p. 3). Most planning is done by experts or what Jungk termed the

expert culture. Future Creating Workshops was an attempt to break with this culture and to show there was value in ideas from people's every day, ordinary, personal lives.

The purpose of Future Creating Workshops is for participants to have a space to envision a utopian future (Guy & Feldman, 2021). Participants work together to create an action plan that is meant to be implemented to work toward their ideal future. Through this process, participants bring about social change.

In the socio-technical tradition, workers and researchers co-operate in practical ways to improve the workplace and businesses. Most companies operate top-down where management informs the workers what policies will be followed. There is a strong emphasis on experts. Management and experts have the power to define the corporate agenda. Normally workers have ambivalence in the workplace. On one hand they know they go to work to earn a wage. On the other hand, they wish to make their work meaningful. The tension between these two thoughts cause ambivalence. Future Creating Workshop attempts to change this ambivalence.

There are many advantages and disadvantages Future Creating Workshops (Guy & Feldman, 2021). FCW encourages participants to come up with creative solutions to current problems. Participants work together in a collaborative manner allowing everyone's voice to be heard. FCW is a flexible method that can be used in combination with arts-based methods such as drawing and theater. A disadvantage is that FCW is time consuming and often requires several days to properly implement. One solution is to offer a modified version of FCW that can be completed in a day.

Future Creating Workshops utilizes small-group dialogue usually in three stages: critique (determination of the current problem), utopian (solutions to the problem), and implementation (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007).

In the Critique Phase, within small groups, participants discuss their concerns about the current situation and write them on paper (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). The problems listed are clustered into groups according to similarity. Participants select clusters that they deem most important. When they return to the main group, participants are invited to tell their own stories explaining why they selected these problems.

In the Utopian Phase, participants work in pairs and describe in one sentence a positive situation that describes their ideal situation (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). In small groups, participants choose one of the positive sentences (solutions) and create a visual representation of the solution. In the whole group, participants share ideas and stories that relate to the imagery created. Returning to small groups, participants select one idea from the visualization and create a play or poster to describe a utopian society or setting in more detail. One variation is for groups to present their utopias and the other participants try to identify what novelties and inventions these utopias contain.

In the Implementation Phase, participants form pairs, review all the ideas generated in the utopian phase, and agree on one single idea they like most (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). Every pair reports the idea they have selected. The whole group attempts to cluster the ideas. Participants try to think of examples and analogies where an idea has already been realized in a different context. Small groups form according to interest in ideas. Their task is to formulate what is required for the idea to become reality as concrete demands. Ideally, these demands cover short-, medium- and long-term aspects

of the idea. The groups rotate and vote on the demands established by the other groups. At the end, a set of recommendations are agreed upon and each group selects one of the demands to develop into a project. Participants formulate a project by answering the questions: What do we want to do? Why do we want to do it? How are we going to do it? Who is going to do it? Who do we need to inform, to consult, to get support from? When and where do we start? They set measurable goals and create an implementation plan. They set future meeting times to involve more stakeholders. They decide how and when the project will be evaluated. In the end, each group presents their project. The other groups critically assess the proposal, ask questions, and evaluates the commitment of the group's members to actually take action.

From 1989 to 1996, one application of Future Creating Workshops was a project called 'Industry and Happiness' was conducted by Kurt Aagaard Nielsen, Birger Steen Nielsen, and Peter Olsen (Tofteng & Husted, 2014). The purpose of this project was to use the Future Creating Workshop to develop creative ideas for the fishing industry to be more humane and democratic. One idea from the project created the fishing factory in Esbjerg, Denmark. During the one year the factory was in operation, the workers and researchers innovated and experimented with new organizational forms, new technologies for fileting fish, and new products. This project resulted in fresh fish being returned to supermarkets.

Another application of Future Creating Workshops was an action research project called Ways Out of Marginalization from 2001 to 2005 (Tofteng & Husted, 2011). The group conducted Future Creating Workshops with fifteen people to explore issues of living on the edge of the labor market. They worked together to find solutions to the

dilemma marginalized workers feel after suffering a major life changing illness that renders them unable to return to their original job. In the critique phase, participants used plays to express their criticisms. In the utopian phase, participants created short plays to show their ideal situation which reflected their dreams and wishes about the workplace. In the realization phase, they added more detail to their utopias. Ways Out of Marginalization resulted in a solution called Small Margins. Small Margins was a play that depicted a protagonist that lost his job as the Head of Human Resources. It showed him interacting with his case worker in his attempt to find a ‘real job’ or a job that he feels valued. After showing the play, researchers or the producers would lead a discussion with the audience to raise awareness about this issue.

A third application of Future Creating Workshop was a project to find a solution to sustainability in the bread industry in Denmark (Nielsen, 2005). The project brought together managers from diverse backgrounds such as a firm producing bread from organic sources, a co-operative of bakeries, an industrial bread factory, researchers, managers, and workers. Some of the results of the FCW was to create time for participation in innovation so that workers can regularly contribute ideas to management. The second was to allow workers to develop skills in sourcing and utilizing more organic ingredients. The third was to involve workers in tasting and developing new products. The last was for workers to become more familiar with the products offered to customers and to be proud of the products. This project allowed workers to contribute their experiences from everyday life. The employees were able to contribute ideas to the organization. This allowed the workers to have ownership of how environmental problems can be addressed within the food production industry.

Procedures Followed

I applied for and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of Louisville. I scheduled meetings to discuss with administration, teachers, parents, community members, and students about the main issue of character development in Islamic Schools and the selection of the research questions. I explained the theory about Participatory Action Research, Nominal Group Technique, and Future Creating Workshop and gave the stakeholders an opportunity to decide if these techniques should be used and how these techniques should be implemented. There were separate meetings in the spring of 2023 with:

- Administration during our weekly meeting
- Teachers during our weekly staff meetings
- Parents and community members during our Parent Teacher Association meetings
- Students during our weekly advisory meetings

In the fall of 2023, I sent invitations for the NGT and FCW sessions for the administration, teachers, parents, community members, and students by email and WhatsApp (see Appendix A). I sent the informed consent forms for the Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshops to administration, teachers, parents, community members, and students. Participants between 14 to 17 years of age (9th to 12th grade) received parental consent (see Appendix B) and child assent forms (see Appendix C).

Each participant was given the informed consent form. The letter of Informed Consent followed U. S. federal guidelines. This included an explanation of procedures, description of risks reasonably to be expected, a description of benefits reasonably to be

expected, guidelines to request more information, and an instruction that the person is free to withdraw (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2008). The risks to human participants associated with this study were minimal. All participants were over 14 years of age (9th to 12th grade) and did not demonstrate any impaired mental capacity. Meeting these criteria qualified them as participants in this study.

I used the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to brainstorm with faculty, administration, parents, and community members what they envision as the Characteristics of a HIRA Institute Graduate. I conducted the NGT separately with the various stakeholders. There were around four administrations, ten Islamic Studies Qur'an teachers, ten academic teachers, twenty high school female students, and twenty high school male students. Based on past events, five to ten parents and community members may attend. The NGT for administration was held during an administration meeting. The NGT for parents, and community members was held on Saturday afternoons. The NGT for Islamic Studies/Qur'an and academic teachers was held during staff meetings. The NGT for high school students was held during the school day.

I invited all interested stakeholders to look at the results of NGT and to compile them into a draft of a Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate. Included is a sample Profile of a Graduate of Jefferson County Public School (see Appendix D). After input, we presented the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate at the Future Creating Workshop session. The Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate was used to define the goals of a character development program during Future Creating Workshop.

The Future Creating Workshop was held in one session with a sample group of all the stakeholders. The spreadsheets for NGT and FCW events were kept and video/audio

for the Future Creating Workshop were recorded. All recorded materials will be erased after 5 years, following final approval by the research committee.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the Participatory Action Research techniques was a group-level analysis of data that allowed stakeholders to help interpret and provide context to the findings rather than an evaluator or internal staff analyzing and interpreting results by themselves. During the Nominal Group Technique (Tague, 2005) and Future Creating Workshop (Vidal, 2005), participants analyzed, voted, and selected the most important ideas together as a group. By making space for participants to provide their interpretations of the results, this allowed for alternate and even outside-the-box explanations and meaning. It also served as an occasion to pause and ask whose voices or perspectives were being overlooked and still needed to be included.

There were five Nominal Group Technique sessions: administrators, teachers/parents/community members, teachers, high school female students, and high school male students. During the Nominal Group Technique sessions, first participants spent ten minutes writing down as many ideas as they could as to what the characteristics of a Graduate of HIRA Institute should be. Then they went around (round robin) and each participant said an idea. A record keeper recorded the ideas in a shared google document. The Google document was shared with the participants so that they could look at the results on their phones or computers. They continued around the group until all members passed or everyone was able to share all their ideas (15 minutes). The groups returned together and looked at all the ideas generated. As a whole group, the ideas were categorized and grouped (10 minutes). Then, each participant selected five items he or

she thought were most important (15 minutes). The votes were tallied and the results were discussed (see Appendix E). The results of each NGT session served as the first round of data.

I invited representatives of each NGT session to come together, to look through the ideas generated in the NGT sessions, and to decide on five core characteristics. These five traits were used to draft Characteristics of a HIRA Institute Graduate.

Thereafter, there was one Future Creating Workshop made up of administrators, community members, parents, teachers, high school female students, and high school male students. The Future Creating Workshop started with the Critique Phase. For 20 minutes, participants worked in small groups and brainstormed areas of concern that may be preventing or hindering students exemplifying the character traits identified in the NGT sessions. Then for 30 minutes, as a whole group, participants shared ideas generated in small groups. Ideas were clustered into groups according to similarity. Participants shared their own stories relating to these problems that have been described. Facilitators took notes so they were visible to everybody.

In the Utopian Phase, participants spent 30 minutes in small groups brainstorming ideal situations that could establish or nurture the characteristics identified in the NGT. For 60 minutes, they returned to the whole group and expanded on ideas based on their experiences. Participants clustered ideas.

In the Implementation Phase, for the first 30 minutes, participants worked in small groups to review all the ideas generated in the Utopian Phase and to agree on one single idea they liked most. Participants formulated what was required for their idea to become reality. These recommendations covered short- medium- and long-term aspects of the

idea that could develop a character trait in the students. They answered the questions: What do we want to do? Why do we want to do it? How are we going to do it? Who is going to do it? Who do we need to inform, to consult, to get support from? When and where do we start? Can we set measurable goals? Can we set future meeting times to involve more stakeholders? How and when will the project be evaluated to see how effective the strategy is to develop the character trait. In the next 30 minutes, each group presented their project. The other groups critically assessed the proposal, asked questions and critically evaluated the commitment of the group's members to actually take action. In the last 10 minutes, each participant voted on three proposals that had the most promise to change student behavior (see Appendix F). The challenges, ideas, and projects developed in the Future Creating Workshop were the second round of data.

The data collected from NGT (Profile of a Graduate of HIRA Institute) and FCW (Strategic Plan to nurture and implement these characteristics at HIRA Institute) were presented to stakeholders in the Annual Meeting.

Limitations of Study

There were several limitations of the study. HIRA Institute is a small school for students specializing in the memorization of the Qur'an. A character development program for a small school may or may not be easily scalable to a larger student population. Traditional Islamic schools provide one hour of Islamic Studies daily whereas HIRA Institute provides four hours of Qur'an and Islamic Studies classes daily. This difference in structure may or may not allow the character development program to be applicable in other situations.

Another limitation was the difficulty of designing a character development program that could be effectively evaluated. What metrics and tools could be used to measure student outcomes in both the short term and the long term? Is there evidence of growth or development as a result of the character education program? I hoped to share research with the group on how non-faith-based character development programs have been evaluated by various academic and non-academic outcomes. Through the NGT and FCW process, the stakeholders can adopt academic and non-academic outcomes that can be used to evaluate the HIRA character development program. Academic outcomes that the school currently measures include grades and MAP scores. Non-academic outcomes that the school tracks include attendance and suspension/detention rates. Other suggested outcomes include self-evaluations, teacher, peer or parent evaluations, and journals. Islamic outcomes that could be tracked include participation in prayer, community service, reading Qur'an, and adherence to Islamic principles.

Ethical Considerations

The Islamic faith and principles were the first critical value that helped guide my research. I hoped to develop relationships, construct research questions, design methods, collect data, analyze data, and present the results all with the main purpose of developing a character development program that will instill Qur'anic values, so the students aspire to lead with integrity, confidence, compassion, and knowledge, lead future generations to be God-conscious and mindful-Muslims, and maintain well-rounded students who take pride in both their Muslim and global identity.

In order to develop a comprehensive character education program, I enlisted the help from all stakeholders: parents, students, faculty, administration, and community

members. Arnstein (1969) advocated that the highest level of citizen power involved citizen control, delegated power, and partnership. I needed to seek the input and advice of all stakeholders at all levels of the research process. By getting diverse viewpoints from a rich cross section of the organization, I hoped to be able to develop a robust character development program.

As I interacted with all the stakeholders, I endeavored to treat all the participants with respect and empathy to build trust and openness with all the stakeholders. This allowed them to be honest with their opinions, share criticism and advice, be creative, and think outside the box. I wanted to be respectful in representing their ideas in the data.

I aimed to act with integrity in all levels of the research. This included sharing their experiences accurately, being transparent, offering the participants access to the data, working together with participants to analyze the data, and presenting the research findings with them as equal partners.

Through these actions, I strove to protect the validity of the research. Protecting the validity included allowing participants to explore their experiences instead of my personal interests. I hoped to apply several strategies to help all stakeholders feel free to express ideas. One strategy was to make sure the process is transformative rather than informative. A process that was informative would be top down where I informed the stakeholders what is the character development program the school will implement without soliciting input from stakeholders. A transformative process was one where all stakeholders were engaged to transform or improve the character of the students.

Finally, promoting equity was a very critical value in the research process. Milner (2007) provides a framework to guide researchers into a process of racial and cultural

awareness, consciousness, and positionality as they conduct education research. The stakeholders represented a diverse group from many regions of the world, with various socio-economic backgrounds, and with powerful lived experiences. Though we share a common faith, our expression of our faith changes based on our experiences and cultures. I wanted to be able to accept and celebrate the various ways we can approach the central idea of excellence in character.

I hoped the values of faith, respect, integrity, validity, and equity would help guide me on this journey of implementing my research topic (see Appendix G).

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method used to answer the research questions. A discussion of the procedure, study participants, data collection, limitations, and ethical considerations outlined the specifics of how the study will be conducted and who will participate in the study. Participatory Action Research Methodology was used to design the study that would use collaboration and community participation to develop a Character Development Program appropriate for HIRA Institute.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to relay the results of the study. In this research study, I wanted to work together with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to develop an Islamic character education program for HIRA Institute. The first step was to collectively define the goals of a character education program. In this step, we utilized the Nominal Group Technique sessions with various stakeholders to get their input on the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. From stakeholder input, we drafted the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate. In the second step, using these character traits as goals for a character development program. I used the Future Creating Workshop Technique to develop a framework for a Character Development Plan for HIRA Institute.

Research Questions

The two research questions were:

- RQ 1: How can administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute?
- RQ 2: Based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character development program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute?

Nominal Group Technique

There were five Nominal Group Technique sessions to brainstorm the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. The input gained from these sessions was used to draft a Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate.

Leadership Team Nominal Group Technique Session

The first session was with the administration of HIRA Institute on September 19, 2023 at the school. There were nine members: three women and six men. Two of the members had a PhD in Islamic Studies, 3 had a Masters in Islamic Studies, one is working on a Bachelors in Islamic Studies. One member had a Bachelors in Elementary Education, one is working on a Bachelors in Business and the other is a high school student. Their roles in the administration include: Executive Director, Director of Tahfeeth (Qur'an Studies), Director of Operations, Director of Girls Tahfeeth (Qur'an Studies), Marketing Director, Director of Finance, Technology Manager, Administrative Assistant, Islamic Studies Curriculum Developer. Five were from India, one from Bosnia, one from Libya, one from Pakistan, and one from the United States. The leadership team creates many of the policies in the school. Out of the leadership team, the Executive Director, Director of Tahfeeth (Qur'an Studies), and Director of Operations have the most influence as they are both administrators and Imams in the community.

The session occurred at the mosque. The participants sat on the carpet with small benches in a semi-circle facing the TV. On the small desks, I placed a copy of the Nominal Group Technique procedures. Projected on the screen was an Excel spreadsheet where I would record their responses. I shared with the participants a link to the Excel spreadsheet so that they could look at the responses on their phones or computers. After

explaining the Nominal Group Technique procedures, I invited the participants to go around the circle and say an idea. I wrote their name and idea on the Excel spreadsheet. I tried to use their exact words. After a number of rounds, we would stop if all the participants passed or 40 minutes had elapsed.

After the initial brainstorming, I invited the participants to explain any ideas they shared. The Executive Director, Director of Tahfeeth (Qur'an Studies), and Director of Operations began to dominate the discussion and immediately suggested the character traits the school should adopt. I gently steered the conversation to allow all members of the group to speak. I mentioned that everyone's viewpoints were important and valid.

Thereafter, I passed participants pens and five sticky notes. I explained that the participants would select five character traits that they felt were the most important character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. The participants looked at the Excel spreadsheet with all the suggested character traits through their phones or computers. I solicited each participant to share the character traits they chose. As the group ran out of time, I tallied and added the voting results to the shared spreadsheet and shared the results later during the Future Creating Workshop.

The Nominal Group Technique allowed each member to express ideas. The voting allowed each member to express their opinions which character traits were most important. By the end of the session, participants had a better understanding of how to regulate discussion and allow all members to give input. They went through six rounds (see Appendix H). When they voted, they agreed that the most important character traits for the students were the following listed in order of importance given by the participants:

1. Giving back to the Community

2. God Consciousness (Taqwa)
3. Good Character
4. Lifelong Learning
5. Worship

Giving back to the community involved ideas such as: being “socially connected,” creating “relationships with the community,” “community engagement,” “benefiting others,” being “globally connected,” “respecting the rights of others,” and “protecting the community” (see Appendix H).

Taqwa is an Arabic word that can be translated to God Consciousness. Ideas around Taqwa involved always being “God conscious” and being “aware of God” (see Appendix H).

This group mentioned Prophetic Character as a generally important characteristic of a HIRA Institute graduate. Some character traits mentioned by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) included “honesty,” “trustworthiness,” “respectfulness,” “humility,” “optimism,” “attachment to the mosque,” and “self-confidence” (see Appendix H).

As an institute of higher knowledge, having students graduate with the mindset that they have to continue to be lifelong learners is very important. Participants expressed the importance that students should have a “thirst for knowledge” and should want to continuously seek knowledge for their “continued betterment,” and “self-improvement” (see Appendix H).

The last important character trait this group identified was worship. The participants felt worship and prayer (Salah) would help the participants develop good character and strengthen their Islamic faith (see Appendix H).

Parents, Teachers and Community Members Nominal Group Technique Session

The second session I had was with a mixed group of parents, teachers, and community members on October 7, 2023. HIRA Institute had an educational intensive workshop in the morning. Afterwards, many of the participants stayed for the Nominal Group Technique session. There were 11 participants: seven women and four men. Three were teachers, seven were parents, and one was a community member. The teachers were a mix of Islamic and academic teachers. One was pursuing her Bachelors in Business, one had a Bachelors in Business, and another has a PhD in Physics. The seven parents had children from 4th to 11th grade and they had 15 children among them who attended the school. Two sets of parents were husband and wife. One parent had been a parent at the school since the founding of the school. Two of his sons had already completed the memorization of the Qur'an at HIRA Institute when they were 6th and 8th grade. One parent joined last year. The rest of the parents joined this year. Five participants were from Somalia, three from India, two from Jordan, and one from Iraq.

The Nominal Group Technique session for this group of teachers, parents, and community members were conducted similarly to the leadership team. The responses of this group of parents and teachers really reflected how much they cared about the students. Their responses showed how much experience they had with the students and how high their expectations of the students were. They had 17 rounds (see Appendix I). They would have continued to give their opinions on what character traits they would like to see in the students but the allotted time ran out. After a great deal of suggestions, when this group voted, they identified the following as the most important characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate listed in order of importance given by the participants:

1. Good Moral Character
2. Leadership
3. Self-Confidence
4. To Complete the Memorization of the Qur'an
5. Self-Discipline

Good moral character was surrounded by ideas of prophetic character similar to the previous group. These ideas included being “charitable,” “cooperative,” “loving for others what we love for ourselves,” “awareness that God is always watching us,” “respectfulness,” “trustworthiness,” “commitment,” “patience,” “self-awareness,” and “empathy” (see Appendix I).

Leadership skills were very important to this group. This included being a leader in one's future career, being a leader in the community, establishing Islamic organizations that will help the community, and representing the Muslim community in the wider Louisville community (see Appendix I).

In order to be an effective leader, this group emphasized the importance of having self-confidence. This self-confidence included having a strong Islamic identity so that they could speak in public about Islam to others (see Appendix I).

Many of the parents had children in the Qur'an Memorization Program at HIRA Institute. The parents had a strong desire to have their child finish the memorization of the Qur'an as the first step then enter the Alimiyyah Program to complete a Masters of Islamic Studies as the next step (see Appendix I).

The last character trait that they valued the most was self-discipline. In order to complete the memorization of the Qur'an, complete the Alimiyyah Program, or pursue a

degree in the secular fields, the students would have to have a strong sense of self-discipline to set goals, manage their time, and be persistent in reaching their goals (see Appendix I).

Teacher Nominal Group Technique Session

The third session I had was with teachers on October 10, 2023. There were six teachers attending, all female. Four of the teachers were academic teachers and had Bachelors in Nursing, Commerce, English, and Computer Science. One of the Islamic Studies teachers has a Bachelors in Islamic Studies and has also memorized the Holy Qur'an. The other Islamic Studies teacher is pursuing their Bachelors in Islamic Studies. Two teachers were from India, one from Pakistan, one from Jordan, one from Syria, and one from Saudi Arabia.

The focus of the teachers was sincerity. They wanted the students to continue to seek academic and spiritual knowledge. However, whatever knowledge the students learned, the teachers wanted students to practice and apply the knowledge. They had seven rounds of brainstorming (see Appendix J). Their top five character traits were the following listed in order of importance given by the participants:

1. Understanding of Right and Wrong (Akhlq) and Good Manners (Adab)
2. Strong Ability to Speak about Islam (Dawah)
3. To be Lifelong Learners
4. To Follow the Qur'an and Sunnah in Every Aspect of their Life
5. To Act on what they have Learned about Islam

The first strength the teachers valued was understanding the difference between right and wrong (Akhlaq) and good manners (Adab). This phrase “Akhlaq and Adab” is often mentioned when describing the prophetic character (see Appendix J).

The second trait the teachers felt was important was good communication skills. They wanted the students to have self-confidence and a strong ability to speak in public about Islam (Dawah). They wanted the students’ good behavior to reflect positively with non-Muslims (see Appendix J).

Similar to previous groups, they also wanted the students to have a strong desire to continue to seek knowledge throughout their life. By continuing to seek Islamic knowledge, the students would keep their faith and actions strong (see Appendix J).

The fourth character trait was to always follow the Qur’an and Sunnah (see Appendix J). Muslims believe the Qur’an is the words of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It contains evidence on the existence of God, reasons why we should believe and worship God, prohibitions and recommendations, descriptions of heaven and hell, and stories of the Prophets. What is mentioned in the Qur’an is further expanded in the Sunnah. The Sunnah are the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The last character trait that was important to the teachers if for the students not just to learn knowledge but apply and act on the knowledge. They would like the students to always “self-reflect,” be “honest about the practice of their religion,” and constantly try to improve their “practice of the faith through their actions” (see Appendix J).

High School Girls Nominal Group Technique Session

The fourth and fifth sessions were with the high school girls and the high school boys on October 23, 2023. In the fourth session, there were 13 high school girls. Participation among the girls was high as 76% of the high school girls at school participated. Two of the girls were in the Alimiyyah Program. The Alimiyyah Program is a six-year program equivalent to a Masters in Islamic Studies. Eleven of the girls were in the Tahfeedh Program to memorize the Holy Qur'an. Some students have memorized up to half of the Holy Qur'an. Three students were in 9th grade, three students were in 10th grade, six students were in 11th grade, and one student was in 12th grade. Six students were from Somalia, two students from Jordan, one student from Mauritania, one student from India, one student from Sri Lanka, and one student was Indonesian/American.

The female high school students in Islamic Studies have been learning in detail about the diseases of the heart. In Islam, the self has three parts: the spiritual heart (Qalb), the soul (Ruh), and desires (Nafs). The spiritual heart (Qalb) helps a person distinguish right from wrong. The soul (Ruh) is what gives life to a person (Inayat, 2005). As a result, their concerns were inward character traits needed to purify the heart. What was unique about their session is whereas the other groups were general in their selection of character traits, the high school girls were more specific on which character traits they thought were important. They had so many beautiful ideas such as being "supportive," "understanding," "kind," "self-aware," "social," a "team player," "modest," "wise," "studious," "humble," "optimistic," "influential," "athletic," and "grateful" (see Appendix K). They had 13 rounds. Their top five character traits were the following listed in order of importance given by the participants:

1. God Consciousness
2. Trustworthiness
3. Respectfulness
4. Responsibility
5. Determination

Similar to the Administration, the first character trait the high school girls felt was important was God Consciousness (Taqwa). Taqwa or faith is the cornerstone of good character.

The second character trait that was important to girls was trustworthiness. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was known as the trustworthy one (Sadiq) and the honest one (Al Amin) (Yusuf, 2012).

The third character trait that was important was being respectful. They reflected that a graduating student should show respect to their parents, teacher, elders as well as to their peers and younger students or siblings (see Appendix K).

The fourth characteristic that they thought was critical was being responsible. Their parents, teachers, peers, and community needed to be able to rely and trust them. While at school, this means completing their assignments and completing a task they volunteered for (see Appendix K).

The last characteristic that they thought was important was being determined. There will always be challenges to reach a goal. However, the students need to have grit and perseverance to achieve their goals (see Appendix K).

High School Boys Nominal Group Technique Session

In the fifth session, there were six high school boys. Participation among the boys was lower as 35% of the high school boys at school participated. Some boys felt if the session was not required, they did not want to participate. Some were shy to speak in public even though they would be sharing their ideas with peers and some did not see the importance of helping to improve character in the student body.

Out of the participants, three of the boys were in the Alimiyyah Program. Three of the boys were in the Tahfeedh Program and have memorized up to a third of the Holy Qur'an. One student was in 9th grade, three students were in 10th grade, one student was in 11th grade, and one student was in 12th grade. Two students were from Somalia, one student from Ethiopia, one student from Syria, one student from India, and one student was Indonesian/American.

They had 16 rounds (see Appendix L). The focus of the boys in Islamic Studies has been outward: developing leadership, serving the community, and speaking out to people to teach them about Islam. As a result, the top five characteristics identified by the boys were the following listed in order of importance given by the participants:

1. Demonstrating Good Character
2. Being a Good leader
3. Following the Sunnah (example of Prophet Muhammad)
4. Having Strong Faith
5. Being Trustworthy

In general, having good character was an important quality reflected by all the groups.

Similar to the third group, his group also mentioned having the ability to distinguish right from wrong (Akhlaq) and good manners (Adab) (see Appendix L).

Similar to the second group, the high school boys valued leadership. Many of the boys were in the Alimiyyah Program endeavoring to become future Imams (religious leaders) of the community. Many of the boys were also memorizing the Qur'an and have already led the prayers during the holy month of fasting (Ramadan) during the night prayers (Tarawih).

The third value for the high school boys was following the Sunnah (words and actions of Prophet Muhammad). Whether it was as future Imams or leaders in their own fields, it was important to know the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and to follow and implement the Sunnah in their own actions (see Appendix L).

The fourth character trait repeated in many of the sessions was having strong faith (Eman), God Consciousness (Taqwa), and having trust in God (see Appendix L).

The last character trait that resonated with the high school boys was being trustworthy. Trustworthiness and honesty were character traits that were also echoed by the high school girls.

Description of Nominal Group Technique Sessions

For all the Nominal Group Technique sessions, we all sat on the ground on the carpet in the mosque in a circle with little desks in front of us. I took notes on a shared Excel spreadsheet that was projected on a TV. I shared with the participants the spreadsheet so that they could see the responses being generated on their computers or phones. Some men wore thawbs which are traditional Muslim clothing for men. Other

men had shirts and pants or suits. Many of the men wore round hats (kufis) and wore beards. The women wore head scarves (hijabs) and dresses (abayas). Some women had a face veil (niqab). Some women wore bright, colorful, traditional clothing from their country. Men sat on one side and women sat on the other (see Appendix M).

Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate

From November 13 to 17, I met with the administration to analyze the data and discuss a draft for the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate. The attendees of this meeting included the Executive Director, the Director of Tahfeedh, the Director of Operations, and the Marketing Director.

First, we completed a master list of all the responses and identified the top seven character traits across all the sessions. The top seven character traits chosen from order of importance identified by the participants were:

1. Having good moral character
2. Being God Conscious
3. Following the Qur'an and Sunnah
4. Leadership
5. Trustworthiness
6. Continuing to Seek Knowledge
7. Serving the Community

After further discussion, we decided to list God Consciousness as the first character trait as God Consciousness is the cornerstone of Islam (Ali, 2006).

The character traits of having good moral character and following the sunnah (example of the Prophet) were combined to be the second character trait of Prophetic Character.

The character traits of continuing to seek knowledge were reworded to having a Passion to Continuously Seek Knowledge.

The character trait of Leadership was kept as the fourth character trait.

The character trait of having a Desire to Serve the community became the fifth character trait.

These set of character traits became the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate (see Appendix N).

1. God Consciousness (Taqwa)
2. Prophetic Character (Akhalaq and Adab)
3. Passion to Continuously Seek Knowledge (Ilm)
4. Leadership Skills (Khaleefa)
5. Desire to Serve the Community (Khidmah)

Revising the mission and vision statements based on the character traits from the Nominal Group Technique was not part of the research questions. However, after arriving at these character traits, the administration felt it was natural to revise the mission and vision to reflect the traits the group had arrived with from consensus. We discussed that the vision statement is normally an organization's long-term goals and the mission statement is how the organization hopes to reach these goals.

We decided to edit the vision statement to include the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate (see Appendix N). We provided several versions of this statement and agreed on this statement.

Vision Statement: We are dedicated to guiding individuals on a journey of personal and academic excellence through Taqwa, Exemplary Akhlaq, Passion for Ilm, Leadership Development, and Service to the Community.

We decided to edit the mission statement to include the four techniques that the organization currently uses to reach the vision. These techniques are currently listed on the school website (HIRA Institute, 2024).

Mission Statement: Our mission is to instill God Consciousness and Prophetic Character through having the students memorize and recite the Qur'an, teaching the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, teaching about the wisdom of the religion of Islam, and teaching spirituality.

Reflections on Nominal Group Technique

Every time I did a Nominal Group Technique session, I became more and more comfortable with facilitating and guiding discussions. I did my best to make sure every participant was able to share his or her thoughts. I recorded their thoughts on the spreadsheet which was projected so they could see what was written. I used their words when recording their response so I was true to their thoughts. During the session, I also shared the spreadsheet with the participants through WhatsApp or email. This way they could see and consider all the responses when they were voting. In the last five minutes, every participant would share their top five choices and explain why they made their choices. I received a lot of verbal feedback that the participants felt appreciated that their

thoughts and input were being solicited. Parents felt involved in the decision making for their children. Teachers were able to share their observations of students in the classroom. Students were empowered to share their personal goals and views about the direction the school should go.

Future Creating Workshop

After the Nominal Group Technique sessions were completed, we set the date for the Future Creating Workshop to Tuesday, November 22, 2023. This was a date when the Executive Director would be in Louisville. Most of the time, the Executive Director was traveling across the United States to raise funds for the school. This was also a date that we could make the school half day as it was before Thanksgiving Break. We planned to release the students at 12 noon. The participating high school students stayed for the meeting. I invited all the participants in the previous Nominal Group Technique meeting to the Future Creating Workshop. There were some new members who had not participated in the Nominal Group Technique sessions but expressed interest in the Future Creating Workshop. I explained to parents, teachers, and students that the meeting was optional. However, we really welcomed them to come because we valued their input. I explained to the students that this would be a great opportunity to collaborate with adults and have their ideas heard as equal members.

Through email, WhatsApp and personal conversations, I explained that the purpose of the Future Creating Workshop was to present the results of the Nominal Group Technique sessions, introduce the Profile of the HIRA Institute Graduate and to get preliminary ideas on how to develop the character traits identified in the Profile. I explained the Future Creating Workshop has three parts. In the first part, the participants

will brainstorm what is the current status of the character of the students. What is preventing the students from achieving the ideal character traits? In the second part, the participants will brainstorm any ideas that they would like to suggest to build the ideal character traits. They will be encouraged to think out of the box and be as creative as possible. In the last part, the participants will select one idea and develop the idea into a more detailed plan that can be implemented.

There were 24 participants in the Future Creating Workshop: eight administrators, nine teachers, three parents, and four students. Out of nine administrators that participated in the NGT earlier, seven administrators participated in the FCW in addition to one extra who joined. Out of the seven parents who participated in the NGT, three parents participated in the FCW. Out of nine teachers who participated in the NGT, five teachers participated in the FCW in addition to four new teachers. Out of 13 female high school students that participated in the NGT, three female students participated in the FCW. Out of six male high school students who participated in the NGT, one male student participated in the FCW. Altogether, the number of attendees for the Future Creating Workshop was very positive reflecting the participants had a positive experience in the NGT and were willing to dedicate more time to assisting the school in drafting a framework for a character development plan.

After summarizing the results of the Nominal Group Technique Sessions, we asked their feedback on the character traits that were chosen based on the overall results. The participants gave support for the character traits that were chosen.

In the first part, the Critical Appraisal Phase, participants were asked to reflect on the current state of the students and what were the barriers preventing the students from

adopting the five ideal character traits. I asked the participants to choose a pen. Those who had a red pen moved to a separate circle and those with a blue pen stayed with me (see Appendix O). Another administrator recorded the responses of the second group (see Appendix P).

The administrator, parents, teachers, and students spoke frankly about the state of the students' character traits (see Appendix O, see Appendix P). Participants observed "students are shy to speak in public or take leadership roles." When thinking about serving the community, some participants remarked "some students don't help at home much less at school." Students only would "do what was required of them not do what is above and beyond." Oftentimes the students "practiced certain etiquettes at school but did not extend these practices at home." Students observed that "there aren't a lot of opportunities for students to practice public speaking or to participate in service projects." Some of the hindrances to practicing the ideal character traits included "screen time", the "home environment" and "peer pressure". Participants noted "having only 30 minutes of Islamic Studies daily contributed to lack of knowledge and practice of Islam". Students in the Qur'an memorization program spend four hours daily memorizing the Qur'an. The idea is that when they complete the memorization of the Qur'an, they will study the meaning of the Qur'an in depth in the Alimiyyah Program (Bachelors/Masters of Islamic Studies). However, while they are memorizing the Qur'an, the students only have 30 minutes of Islamic Studies.

In the second part, Utopian Phase, I asked participants to brainstorm all strategies that could be used to help students realize the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. I asked participants to look under their desks. There was a chocolate bar taped

to the desk. Those who had white chocolates were asked to move to the other circle and those with hazelnut chocolates stayed with me (see Appendix Q). Another administrator recorded the responses of the second group (see Appendix R).

The participants had many creative ideas on how to develop the ideal character traits in the students. This is a summary of their ideas from both groups.

Taqwa (God Consciousness)

1. Sharing stories about how God is always watching
2. Teaching Duas (supplications) to students and parents

Prophetic Character (Akhalaq and Adab)

1. Rewarding or honoring students who display positive character traits
2. Positive reinforcement
3. Mention three hadiths daily and practice them
4. Parent teacher association
5. Jamaat (visiting other mosques) and Taleem (educational activities)
6. School wide Wird (chart of good deeds)

Passion to Continuously Seek Knowledge (Ilm)

1. Not to have grades to improve passion for learning
2. Teaching the meaning of the verses to increase motivation to learn
3. Short activities to nourish soul and re-motivate

Leadership Skills (Khaleefa)

1. Leadership training
2. Schedule for students to speak in morning assembly, Itikafs and events
3. Go to other communities to impact other children
4. Big brother/big sister program
5. Student council part of administration
6. Create small activities to develop leadership skills

Desire to Serve the Community (Khidmah)

1. Arrange more community service opportunities for the students
2. College counseling how to dedicate future career to serve the community
3. Have set goals/hours for community service for high school

In the third part, the Implementation Phase, I asked each participant to choose a partner. They were to look over all the ideas given in the Utopian Phase and choose one idea that resonated with them. They were given markers and a poster to write details

about the idea to implement the idea at the school (see Appendix S). After they discussed the idea, they presented their idea to the whole group.

The ideas that were selected included:

1. Classes about the Prophet from Elementary to High School to Develop Character: in this idea, the parent and student suggested having specific classes to instill the Prophetic Character (Adab and Akhlaq) to students. They suggested having classes twice a week. They suggested having meetings with parents to explain what is being taught in class and to encourage parents to revive the Sunnah (prophetic way) at home so that the students follow the Sunnah at school and at home.
2. College Counseling How to Dedicate Future Career to Serve the Community: The parent and administrator suggested providing career guidance for students. By finding Muslim professionals to help guide students, they can create opportunities for students to volunteer in the profession and to guide students how to serve the community through their profession.
3. Jamaat (visiting other mosques) and Taleem (educational activities) to Develop God Consciousnesses: the parent, teacher, and administrator group suggested taking the students on trips to mosques in other cities once every semester. During the mosque visit, they would be away from distractions and able to engage in personal worship and group study. The students would connect with the local community and lead lectures and talks for the community.
4. System of Rewards and Punishment to Develop Good Character (three groups chose this topic): The teacher and student groups discussed providing sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadiths) daily about behavior. They discussed advising students about

behavior expectations before enforcing consequences. They discussed deciding on rules and behavior expectations together with the students. They brainstormed actions that reflect good character. These actions included being respectful, kind, punctual, positive, and honest. One suggestion was to reward positive behavior through HIRA Bucks. For a certain number of times the good behavior is noticed, they would get a positive reward. They suggested having a behavior chart for each classroom. They also suggested having a student of the month for each HIRA character trait. The students could share in assembly examples they've seen of the character trait being displayed by the students.

5. School Wide Wird (Chart of Good Deeds): The two teachers and administrator suggested the school wide Chart of Good Deeds is to reward students for certain good deeds that build good character. This included various supplications students could say throughout the day, reading Qur'an, and writing a daily self-reflection. As the year progressed, they would add more items to the chart.
6. Leadership Training (two groups chose this topic): The teacher groups suggested having more presentations in class to have students improve their speaking skills such as voice, eye contact, and body language. They suggested school team building events to build leadership skills in students. They also suggested adding students to the administration team as a student council member to build organizational leadership skills. They also suggested volunteering in small, manageable projects to build self-confidence. And they suggested for the students to lead assembly and give presentations during community events to build speaking skills as well as self-confidence.

7. **New Grading System to Develop Love of Learning:** In this student and teacher idea, this group suggested a new grading system for the Qur'an memorization program. They noticed students were memorizing not for the sake of God but in order to have a particular grade. As a result, they sometimes rushed when reciting, recited without sincerity, or even cheated in order to get a particular grade. This group suggested continuing to track and communicate progress with parents through the online portal. However, the Qur'an grade would not be averaged to the GPA.

After presenting their ideas, each participant was able to vote for three ideas they liked the most. These were the results of the vote by poster.

Topic	Votes
New Grading System to Develop Love of Learning	14
College Counseling How to Dedicate Future Career to Serve the Community	10
System of Rewards and Punishment to Develop Good Character (Group 3)	10
Jamaat (visiting other mosques) and Taleem (educational activities) to Develop God Consciousnesses	9
System of Rewards and Punishment to Develop Good Character (Group 2)	9
Leadership Training (Group 1)	7
Leadership Training (Group 2)	4
System of Rewards and Punishment to Develop Good Character (Group 1)	3
School Wide Wird (Chart of Good Deeds)	3
Classes about the Prophet from Elementary to High School to Develop Character	3

Reflections on Future Creating Workshop

The administrator who helped record the responses of the second group said it was challenging to record the responses in the first session. Participants were speaking

quickly and it was difficult to record all the ideas in the Excel spreadsheet. However, the administrator noted that it was easier to record the second session because they gained a little experience from the first session.

I personally learned a great deal from facilitating these sessions. I had worked with the Muslim community through the years to develop Islamic institutions. When we were establishing the first Islamic school, there were divisions in the community about the goals of the school revolving around location and socio economic levels of the various families. After many attempts we could not resolve the issues. As a result, a group of families broke off and established a second Islamic school. Due to this incident, it took many years to overcome my disappointment and return to helping the schools develop. After experiencing the benefit of the nominal group technique and future creating workshop, I hope I can implement these techniques to resolve future disagreements that may arise. I think Participatory Action Research methods are an important methodology for Islamic schools to utilize to continue to grow and cater to a diverse group of stakeholders.

The participants showed their dedication, spending three hours for the Future Creating Workshop discussions. During the workshop, the participants were very energetic and positive. As the participants were leaving the Future Creating Workshop, they looked animated and excited. Though the time was very long, many thanked HIRA Institute for organizing this opportunity to give their ideas and opinions. They expressed interest in developing the strategies further. The students felt included and heard. Their ideas were valued equally alongside the adults. The teachers, parents, and students seemed dedicated and willing to implement the strategies discussed to improve student

character. They were invested in the process and would serve as ambassadors to explain the strategies to the wider teachers, parents, and students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this section included a summary of the results of the Nominal Group Technique sessions and how the data from the Nominal Group Technique sessions were combined to create the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate. This section also included the results from the Future Creating Workshop session and the reflections I gained from participating in both participatory action research techniques. In the final chapter, I will present the conclusions gained

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to relay the conclusion of the study: the connection of the study to the literature, the reflection on the methodology, and the implications for future study. In this research study, I wanted to work together with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to develop an Islamic character education program for HIRA Institute. The first step was to collectively define the goals of a character education program. In this step, we utilized the Nominal Group Technique sessions with various stakeholders to get their input on the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. From stakeholder input, we drafted the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate. In the second step, using these character traits as goals for a character development program, we used the Future Creating Workshop Technique to develop a framework for a Character Development Plan for HIRA Institute.

Research Questions

As a practitioner in an Islamic school, I believe that faith-based character education and specifically Islamic character education provide a social, emotional, and academic benefit to students. However, as a researcher, I did not find program evaluations on character education for Islamic schools. My long-term goal became to develop, implement, and track Islamic character development programs to evaluate the

effectiveness of Islamic school programs. Through this study, I wanted to take the first step: to design an Islamic character education program collaboratively with all stakeholders of the school (administrators, parents, teachers, and students). The two research questions were:

RQ 1: How can administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute?

RQ 2: Based on these goals, how can the strategies of a character development program be creatively developed by administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute?

Connection the Literature Review

There were many themes that emerged from this study that were consistent with the literature. First, the character traits that were selected from the Nominal Group Technique sessions supported concepts of identity development, prophetic character, Istikhlaf (leadership), seeking knowledge, and service to the community that were present in the literature. Second, the strategies brainstormed during the Future Creating Workshop supported views such as that character education is part of social emotional learning, the value of direct instruction, and the benefit of having measurable goals.

Themes from the Nominal Group Technique Sessions

The Nominal Group Technique sessions arrived at five character traits that were most important for HIRA Institute graduates to have. These attributes included God Consciousness (Taqwa), Prophetic character (Akhlaaq and Aadaab), leadership (Amaarah), the desire to seek knowledge (Ilm), and the desire to serve the community

(Khidmah). Each of these character traits were connected to concepts of identity development, prophetic character, Istikhlaf (leadership), seeking knowledge, and service to the community that were present in the literature.

God Consciousness (Taqwa)

The first character trait of a HIRA Institute Graduate that all participants agreed on was that students need to be God Conscious. Under the concept of God Consciousness (Taqwa) participants mentioned ideas such as the students "being self-aware of their actions," "having sincerity," "having the right intentions," and "self-reflection" (see Appendix T). God Consciousness is connected to faith identity. Identifying as a Muslim encourages one to achieve a strong level of God Consciousness.

Looking at Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (Orenstein, 2020), identity develops in gradual stages. It starts with infants feeling cared for and secured. Toddlers given opportunities to explore and make mistakes. Students are given reasonable expectations with praise for their accomplishments. Adolescence is where young people weigh the values they see in society and their experiences and "find themselves".

The stages of faith identity development follow Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Having a safe environment at home allows children to develop a trust in a higher power. Toddlers learn about faith through symbols. As students in Elementary, they take their beliefs from others. As students in middle and high school, they begin to construct their beliefs. As a young adult, they understand that God is loving and supportive in times of crisis. Later they develop self-identity and self-worth independent of others. They begin to have a more complex understanding of faith,

that faith has many perspectives. One of the last stages to develop is once an individual has deep faith, they begin to care about all people, regardless of their nationality, economic status, gender, age, race, and religious tradition.

In this study, the most important character trait that resonated through all of the groups was having a strong Islamic identity. Achieving God Consciousness or Taqwa means that the student has developed a strong Islamic identity. When students reach the highest level of faith identity development, they begin to have good character, seek knowledge, assume leadership roles to help others, and develop the desire to serve others irrespective of their background. God Consciousness was the cornerstone of developing the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate.

Prophetic Character (Akhalaq and Adab)

The second character trait that all the participants agreed on was for the students to adopt the character of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Some character traits that are part of Prophetic character that the participants mentioned included "honesty", "trustworthiness," "respectfulness," "humility," "optimism," "attachment to the masjid," "being charitable," "cooperative," "loving for others what we love for ourselves," "awareness that God is always watching us," "respectfulness," "commitment," "patience," "self-awareness," "self-rectification," and "empathy" (see Appendix T).

In Christian character development programs, the standard of character is based on the teachings and life of Christ. Christian educators are called to make disciples and to lead students to think about all of life with Jesus' thoughts (Potter, 2007). Participants also believed the teachings and life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) could guide and inspire students to adopt good morals and character.

Passion to Continuously Seek Knowledge (Ilm)

The third character trait that many participants agreed on was the importance of having the desire to always seek knowledge, self-reflect, and improve oneself. The participants mentioned that students should be "lifelong learners", to have a "thirst for knowledge", "self-improvement", and "betterment" (see Appendix T). In the first verses revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 96, verse 1-5), God said,

“Read, ‘O Prophet,’ in the Name of your Lord Who created—
created humans from a clinging clot.
Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous,
Who taught by the pen—
taught humanity what they knew not.”

In these verses, God commands the believers to continuously learn, seek knowledge, and reflect. By continuing to seek Islamic knowledge, the students would keep their faith, God Consciousness, and identity strong. This character trait is one of the important concepts in Islamic identity development (Ahmad, 2013).

Leadership Skills (Amaarah)

The fourth character trait that participants agreed was an important characteristic of a HIRA Institute Graduate was to have strong leadership skills. Leadership skills that participants mentioned included "a strong ability to speak," "to share information about Islam," "to lead by example," and "be a good role model" (see Appendix T). Leadership included leading the community as religious leaders, leading prayers, giving lectures, and providing advice and support for the community. Leadership for participants also included establishing organizations that will help the wider community.

Leadership, or Istikhlaf, is an important concept in Islamic identity development (Ahmad, 2013). Istikhlaf means human beings were sent down as Khaleefa (successors, rulers, or leaders) by God in order to take care of all the people, animals, and the environment on Earth (Ahmad, 2013). In the Holy Qur'an, God commands humankind to look at creation, seek knowledge, and find ways to use the resources on Earth to help others. Having leadership skills is an important character trait of a HIRA Institute graduate.

Desire to Serve the Community (Khidmah)

During the Implementation Phase, participants took into consideration measurable outcomes when developing a more detailed plan for a strategy. Participants were asked to discuss what were the short, medium, and long-term aspects of the idea. What did they want to do? Why did they want to do it? How were they going to do it? Who was going to do it? In addition, they were asked to discuss how the strategy was going to be evaluated.

The research of non-faith-based character development programs indicated that program evaluations could be implemented more effectively if there were measurable goals. For example, the Positive Action program was evaluated based on student academic performance, attendance, and behavior (Snyder et al., 2010). Facing History and Ourselves was measured by student self-evaluations (Schultz et al., 2001). Participants were asked to discuss a strategy with an idea of outcomes in their minds. These outcomes could be academic, non-academic, as well as Islamic.

The participants began to discuss the strategies in a meaningful and tangible way because they were considering how they could demonstrate program effectiveness

through outcomes. The group who discussed the school wide behavior chart and the classes about the Prophet's character suggested students, teachers, and parents brainstorm what were the actions that we could see that could reflect a student's God consciousness, character, desire to Seek Knowledge, willingness to lead, and desire to serve the community. With this list of actions, they suggested making a survey that parents, teachers, and students could fill out to assess a student's practice of these five character traits (see Appendix S).

The group who suggested career counseling to guide the students to fields where they could serve the community said that the students' participation, number of hours volunteering, employer observation, and student participation in an internship or community service activity could be a way to evaluate a student's desire to serve the community (see Appendix S).

One group suggested a strategy where students travel to other cities and prepare and present Islamic and educational programs for the local residents of the city. While visiting the mosques in other cities, students would be able to engage in self-reflection and worship away from the hustle of their daily routine. This group suggested that student attendance for the program, preparation of lectures for the community, feedback from local community attendees, and self-reflections could be used to evaluate how well this strategy builds God consciousness in the student (see Appendix S).

These discussions were able to lay a framework for a future character development program. Participants were able to really communicate and visualize the ideas because of the concrete, measurable objectives that were included in the idea presentation.

Reflections on the Methodology

This study employed Participatory Action Research as a methodology. Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshops are Participatory Action Research techniques. This study demonstrated that Participatory Action Research is an effective tool for schools and organizations to solve complex problems. Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshop are effective Participatory Action Research techniques to brainstorm the goals and strategies to solve community problems.

Participatory Action Research for Education

Participatory Action Research was an effective tool to brainstorm the goals and strategies of a character education program. PAR has been used in many fields. It was used by Freire to promote adult literacy in Brazil (Pant, 2014). It was used by Borda to promote political participation in Colombia (Pant, 2014). This research study showed that Participatory Action Research is valuable for schools to shape and implement policy more effectively.

In this study, the participants were actively involved in the conceptualization, design, implementation, and interpretation of research studies. The participants were the ones that suggested character education to be the focus of the study. The participants designed the study, deciding how many Nominal Group Technique sessions there would be, when the sessions would be, and how long the Future Creating Workshop would be. The participants implemented the sessions together. Then, the participants worked together to interpret the results and combine the Nominal Group Technique session data to draft the Profile of HIRA Institute.

In this study, the ideas from the participants were valued. In the Participatory Action Research paradigm, the emphasis is on learning from and about research participants (Rogers & Palmer-Erbs, 1994). The ideas for the goals and strategies all came from the participants. The ideas from the participants were used to draft the Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate and the framework for the character education program for the school.

The process changed the culture of the school. Participatory Action Research “is not a method but rather an attitude” (Brydon-Miller et. al, 2020, para. 13). PAR helped the school respect the knowledge from all stakeholders and promote social-justice and the democratization of knowledge. During the process to design the character education program, input from parents, students, teachers, and community members were solicited. The parents, students, teachers, and community members began to work together with the administration to implement the plan.

This experience has motivated members of the school to bring the highest level of stakeholder involvement to the school. Sherry Arnstein wrote that the lowest level of non-participation involved therapy and manipulation. The middle level of tokenism involved placation, consultation, and informing. What she advocated was the highest level of citizen power than involved citizen control, delegated power, and partnership (Arnstein, 1969). This practice of partnering with stakeholders on issues has transferred to other aspects of the school. The administration is working together to create a structure where parents, students, teachers, and community members can regularly give input and help implement future school policies and programs. This study provided evidence on the importance of implementing Participatory Action Research in the school setting. One

Participatory Action Research technique that was used in this study was the Nominal Group Technique

Nominal Group Technique as an Effective Method

The Nominal Group Technique was an effective technique that allowed administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at an Islamic school in Louisville, KY to collaborate and brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute.

Nominal Group Technique allowed all participants to be given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on what should be the ideal character traits of a HIRA Institute graduate. We set up the Nominal Group Technique sessions with each group sharing ideas within a group they were comfortable with. The teachers met together. The female high school students shared ideas together. The male high school students brainstormed together. This way they felt comfortable to share ideas with peers. This process strengthened their leadership and speaking skills. When they transitioned to the Future Creating Workshop together with teachers, parents, administrators, and students, the participants seemed to have more self-confidence to speak to other members they were not as familiar with.

It also allowed individuals who are not familiar with each other to participate in a non-judgmental fashion. Some of the participants of the Nominal Group Technique sessions were not familiar with each other. For example, in the parent, teacher, and community member NGT session, the participants interacted with each other for the first time. The Nominal Group Technique did not allow discussion during the first part where

ideas were shared. As a result, participants were able to share their thoughts without worrying about how others thought about their ideas.

Nominal Group Technique allowed participants who were normally not as vocal or who prefer to work in silence to be able to participate. Nominal Group Technique allowed participants to first think of ideas in silence in the first few minutes. As the participants shared ideas, participants could pass if they were not yet ready to share an idea.

Nominal Group Technique was designed so that one person cannot dominate the discussion. In the administration Nominal Group Technique session, the concern was the opinions of the Imams would dominate the discussion over the other administrators. However, during the voting process, everyone's vote counts equally. All the administrators were able to express their opinion without pressure about what should be the ideal characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate. The technique was an effective way to level the playing field with individuals who have different levels of power.

A large number of quality ideas in more dimensions was generated in a short amount of time. Through the five different sessions, many ideas and suggestions were generated. The rounds continued until the participants had no more ideas.

After the Nominal Group Technique session, the participants expressed appreciation that their thoughts and input were being solicited. The administration could have developed the goals of the character development program and told the teachers what the goals would be. However, for the program to be effective in the long term, the goals needed to have buy-in from all the stakeholders of the school. If participants felt they had a say in the goals, they would be more eager to implement the new programs.

Parents felt involved in the decision making for their children. Teachers were able to share their observations of students in the classroom. Students were empowered to share their personal goals and views about the direction the school should go.

The administrators have knowledge in education and the Imams on the Board have a great deal of knowledge about Islam. Board members and administrators could have developed a character development plan and implemented the plan in the school. However, such a top-down measure would also not recognize the rich amount of experience and insight the parents, teachers, and students have.

The Nominal Group Technique was ideal in allowing ideas from a diverse group to be communicated, recorded, and equally valued. The school needed to agree on the goals of the character education program. Similar to many Islamic schools across the nation, HIRA Institute is very diverse. The school is diverse in the nationalities represented, the various educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. As children of immigrant and non-immigrant families, each family has different ideas of success. The administration has a set of ideas, the parents have a set of goals for their children, and the students themselves have goals. Furthermore, as Muslims representing so many cultures and nationalities, each family and individual had a different concept of Islam and the ideal way to demonstrate and practice Islam. Through the voting process, the ideas that were most consistent among the various groups could rise to the surface.

The Nominal Group Technique was an effective technique that allowed stakeholders to collaborate to brainstorm the goals of a character education program at HIRA Institute. Through the Nominal Group Technique, five character traits specific to an Islamic character development program were able to be formulated from a group of

Muslim administrators, parents, teachers, community members, and students. In addition to strengths, the study was designed to minimize the weaknesses of Nominal Group Technique.

Study Design Adjusted for Disadvantages of the Nominal Group Technique

Normally, Nominal Group Technique cannot easily be done with large groups. However, in this process, we did five Nominal Group Technique sessions with small groups then combined all the session data into one data set.

One disadvantage of Nominal Group Technique is that it does not allow the full development of ideas. However, in this research study, the goals of a character development program were brainstormed in the Nominal Group Technique sessions. The strategies on how to implement these character traits were developed in more detail in the Future Creating Workshop session. The utilization of the Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshop was an effective pairing of techniques that allowed the full development of ideas.

Another disadvantage of the Nominal Group Technique is that good ideas could be voted out. As a result, at the end of the Nominal Group Technique sessions, when the members of the administrators looked at all the data generated, the administrators tried to cluster the ideas to include as many of the ideas generated by the stakeholders. For example, by choosing the character of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as the second character trait, character traits such as Trustworthiness, Respectfulness, Responsibility, and Determination could be included in this category. Through this method of clustering ideas, the possibility of discounting ideas was minimized. Besides the Nominal Group Technique, the Future Creating Workshop was another Participatory Action Research

method that was utilized effectively to develop the strategies of a character education program.

Future Creating Workshop as an Effective Method

The Future Creation Workshop technique was effective to develop the strategies of the character development program. Future Creating Workshops utilizes small-group dialogue usually in three stages: critique (determination of the current problem), utopian (solutions to the problem), and implementation (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). Using these three stages, with a diverse group of participants, the school was able to come to consensus on the most important strategies to begin to implement at the school.

For this study, Future Creating Workshop was adapted to occur in one afternoon rather than three days. A typical Future Creating Workshop often is planned over three days. However, bringing the same participants for three sessions is challenging. Many of the participants are leaders in other organizations or mosques and are extremely busy. Furthermore, having a gap in between each phase may cause participants to lose their ideas or momentum. In this study, all three phases were conducted in one afternoon in an adapted implementation of Future Creating Workshop. The intent of each phase was still achieved in this shorter time. This adapted method of Future Creating Workshop may be valuable for other organizations that also have many participants whose time is limited.

Implications for Future Research

This study has several implications for future research. First, future research can be used to test Participatory Action Research as an effective method for solving complex problems in a collaborative manner. Second, future studies can be conducted to provide a qualitative program analysis of the character education program. Third, quantitative

program analysis can be conducted on the effectiveness of character education programs in different settings. Last, long-term studies can be done on the effectiveness of faith-based character education.

Future research can be used to test Participatory Action Research as an effective method for solving complex problems in a collaborative manner. PAR can be used in the wider Louisville community to solve challenges such as racism, poverty, homelessness, crime, and economic development. PAR can also be used by the Muslim community to solve complex issues such as immigration and refugee resettlement. PAR can be used for faith and non-faith-based schools to address problems in schools such as how to address the needs of struggling students, bullying, violence, or teacher retention. PAR can include all the stakeholders to brainstorm the goals and then the strategies to achieve the goals. Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshops can be modeled with other schools and communities in order to facilitate dialogue on different issues.

In this study, Participatory Action Research was used to develop the goals and strategies of a character education program. Future studies can be conducted to provide a qualitative program analysis of the character education program by interviewing parents, teachers, students, administration, and community members.

Quantitative program analysis can be conducted on the effectiveness of character education programs in different settings. The effectiveness of character education programs across different Islamic schools can be conducted through matched-pair, cluster-randomized controlled studies. Character education programs can be compared between traditional Islamic schools and Hifdh (memorizing the Qur'an) based Islamic schools. Quantitative program analysis of faith-based character education programs can

be conducted between Christian, Jewish, and Islamic schools. In addition, quantitative program analysis can be done comparing character education programs in faith-based versus non-faith-based schools. Through these various lenses, character education programs can learn from each other and continuously improve.

Long term studies can be done on the effectiveness of faith-based character education. In the Perry Preschool study, forty years after low income African American students were enrolled in Perry Preschool, the treatment group had better relationships with their teachers, were more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be employed at age twenty-seven, more likely to be earning more than twenty-five thousand dollars a year at age forty, less likely to have been arrested, and less likely to have spent time on welfare (Heckman et. al, 2010). Similar long term studies on the effectiveness of faith-based character education programs could be used to measure long term outcomes such as graduation rates, drug/alcohol use, physical health, mental health, marriage/divorce rates, employment, salary, incarceration rates, and welfare rates in addition to rates of attendance to religious centers, prayer, and community service. Specifically, the value of Islamic character education programs can be assessed through long term studies.

Conclusion

There were many themes that emerged from this study that were consistent in the literature. First, the character traits that were selected from the Nominal Group Technique sessions supported concepts of identity development, prophetic character, Istikhlaf (leadership), seeking knowledge, and service to the community that were present in the literature. Second, the strategies brainstormed during the Future Creating Workshop

supported ideas found in the literature, such as that character education is part of social emotional learning, the value of direct instruction, and the benefit of having measurable goals.

This study employed Participatory Action Research as a methodology. Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshops are Participatory Action Research techniques. This study demonstrated that Participatory Action Research is an effective tool for schools and organizations to solve complex problems. Nominal Group Technique and Future Creating Workshop are effective Participatory Action Research techniques to brainstorm the goals and strategies to solve community problems.

This study has several implications for future research. First, future research can be used to further investigate if Participatory Action Research is an effective method for solving complex problems in a collaborative manner. Second, future studies can be conducted to provide a qualitative program analysis of Islamic character education programs. Third, quantitative program analysis can be conducted on the effectiveness of character education programs in different settings. Last, long-term studies can be done on the effectiveness of faith-based character education.

This study provided a basis for future efforts at HIRA Institute. The strategies brainstormed in the Future Creating Workshop were included in the HIRA Five Year Strategic Plan (HIRA Institute, 2023). We have scheduled meetings with stakeholders to develop the details of these strategies so implementation can begin in August 2024 for some strategies. We are planning to do a program evaluation every May of each year to evaluate the progress of the strategies in developing these character traits in the students. The experience of the stakeholders during the development of the HIRA Institute

character development program will hopefully lead the stakeholders to organize future participatory experiences, advocate for change, and work together for social change at the school.

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APPENDIX A: EMAIL & WHATSAPP TO PARENTS/COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Email & Whatsapp to Parents/Community Members

Assalamu 'Alaikum Wr. Wb.

Dear Parents and Community Members,

I am involved in a research study under the direction of Dr. Brydon-Miller at the University of Louisville. This study is my dissertation project for my Education Doctorate (EdD) at University of Louisville.

The purpose of this study is to work collaboratively with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members to develop a Profile of a HIRA Institute graduate. What characteristics would we like to see in our future HIRA graduates? The second goal of the study is to develop a framework of a character education program at HIRA to develop these character traits in our HIRA students.

For the first meeting to brainstorm what are the ideal character traits we would like to see in our HIRA Institute graduates, please join us on Saturday, October 7 at 3:00 p. m. at the school, 4711 Progress Blvd.

The second meeting to develop a strategic plan to implement these character traits at HIRA Institute, please join us on Tuesday, November 22 from 1:00 - 4:00 p. m. at the school.

We appreciate your time to help HIRA Institute grow and improve and look forward to seeing you soon.

Yours,

Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller
Professor

[Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development](#)

Sr. Norma Nangju
Principal
HIRA Institute

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

CONCEPTUALIZING AN ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Informed Consent

Introduction and Background Information

You are either invited to take part in a research study because you are an administrator, teacher, parent, student aged 18 or older, or community member related to HIRA Institute; or you are asked to provide permission for your child aged 17 or younger to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Brydon-Miller at the University of Louisville. This is a dissertation project for Norma Nangju.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate. Take your time to decide.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of the study is to work collaboratively with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at HIRA Institute to brainstorm the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate and ways to build these characteristics in students.

What will happen if I take part in the study?

If you consent to participate, you will participate in a one-hour session to brainstorm the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate (Nominal Group Technique). In addition, you may be asked to participate in a full day session to brainstorm ways to develop these characteristics in the students (Future Creating Workshop). You may decline to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. The sessions will be video recorded. The video recording is to help evaluate the process, if participants felt the process was productive and beneficial to sharing ideas.

You will be invited to review the results of the first session to combine the ideas from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members to create a draft of the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate. You will also be invited to share the strategies to build these characteristics in students with the wider community when both sessions are completed.

What are the possible risks or discomforts from being in this research study?

There are minimal risks for your participation in this research study. Participants are requested not to share what was discussed outside the session. However, due to the participatory nature of the sessions, information shared during the sessions cannot be completely confidential and could be known by others.

What are the benefits of taking part in the study?

The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others. In the first session, you will be able to participate with peers to contribute your thoughts and ideas about what should be the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate. In the second session, you will be able to interact with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members as equal participants to share your experiences and recommendations.

Will I be paid?

You will not be paid for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

How will my information be protected?

The data collected about you will be kept private and secure online on “Cardbox” that will be password protected. All files will be locked and secured in the office.

Who will see, use or share the information?

The people who may request, receive, or use your private information include the researchers. Composite information already collected by the school such as zip code, languages spoken, and gender may be used to describe administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members. Information to be accessed from school records are needed to address study objectives.

If applicable, your information may also be shared as required by law (for example, to collect or receive information for reporting child abuse or neglect, preventing or controlling disease, injury, or disability, and conducting public health surveillance, investigations or interventions.)

We try to make sure that everyone who sees your information keeps it confidential, but we cannot guarantee this.

Will my information be used for future research?

Your data will not be stored or shared for future research.

Can I stop participating in the study at any time?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may change your mind and stop taking part at any time. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify.

Who can I contact for questions, concerns and complaints?

If you have any questions about the study or any problems to do with the study you can contact

Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller
Professor

mary.brydon-miller@louisville.edu

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: 4711 Progress Blvd, Louisville, KY 40218

APPENDIX C: CHILD ASSENT

CONCEPTUALIZING AN ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Child Assent

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Norma Nangju. When a person is in a research study, they are called a “participant”. Research studies are done when people want to find new ways to do things. You are invited because we would like to work together to brainstorm the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate and ways to build these characteristics in students.

What will happen to me in this study?

If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour session during the school day to brainstorm the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate. In addition, you may be asked to participate in a full day session to brainstorm ways to develop these characteristics in the students.

Can anything bad happen to me?

There are minimal risks to participating in the study. Information that you shared could be known by others.

Can anything good happen to me?

You may or may not benefit personally by participating in this study. The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others. In the first session, you will be able to participate with peers to contribute your thoughts and ideas about what should be the desired characteristics of a HIRA Institute graduate. In the second session, you will be able to interact with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members as equal participants to share your experiences and recommendations.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

Your family, the researcher and research team will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number will be used instead of your name.

Who can I talk to about the study?

If you have any questions about the study or any problems to do with the study you can contact

Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller
Professor
Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development
Room 335 - College of Education
(502) 852-6887
mary.brydon-miller@louisville.edu

or
Norma Nangju
Principal
HIRA Institute
4711 Progress Blvd.
(502) 804-7352
norma@hirainstitute.org

What if I do not want to do this?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. It is up to you. You can choose to participate now and change your mind later if you want, or you can say no right now. You can also ask all the questions you want before you decide. If you want to quit after you are already in this study, you can tell the study investigator and they will discuss it with your parents.

You have been told about this study and know why it is being done and what you have to do. Your parent(s) have agreed to let you be in the study. If you have any questions, you can ask the research investigator at any time.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date Signed
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Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

APPENDIX D: PROFILE OF A GRADUATE OF JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC
SCHOOL

Profile of a Graduate of Jefferson County Public School

1. Prepared and Resilient Learner
 - Demonstrates knowledge of content skills and standards
 - Applies content knowledge to real world contexts and in interdisciplinary ways
 - Reflects on successes and challenges, and makes appropriate adjustments in order to meet academic, personal and professional goals
 - Employs organizational and project management skills to achieve academic, personal and professional growth
 - Sets personal goals for transition readiness, explores post-secondary options and takes actionable steps towards realizing both
2. Globally and Culturally Competent Citizen
 - Explores community and global issues from the perspectives of those most impacted and creates actionable solutions
 - Employs democratic processes to come to decisions and solutions
 - Compassionate and empathetic toward others
 - Promotes a sense of belonging for others
 - Respects different cultures, perspectives and beliefs
3. Emerging Innovator
 - Employs a sense of curiosity and inquiry; seeks to learn
 - Asks questions to extend, challenge and clarify the thinking of self and others
 - Applies a design process (e. g. research, ideation, modeling, prototyping and testing) to create new solutions, products and processes
 - Uses relevant information and feedback to continually improve solutions, products and processes
 - Takes appropriate risks, and makes adjustments based on successes and failures
4. Effective Communicator
 - Uses appropriate conventions and evidence to convey ideas clearly in writing, verbally, digitally and visually
 - Adapts message to purpose and needs of the audience
 - Uses discipline-specific writing conventions, formats and vocabulary to communicate ideas
 - Uses technology effectively and responsibly
5. Productive Collaborator
 - Works effectively with diverse groups to accomplish a common goal
 - Gives and receives meaningful feedback
 - Assumes personal responsibility for team outcomes
 - Actively listens to understand others' ideas and perspectives

APPENDIX E: AGENDA FOR NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

Agenda for Nominal Group Technique

Assalamu Alaikum. The purpose of the Nominal Group Technique is to help gain input from students, parents, teachers, admin, and community members on what should be the characteristics of a graduate from HIRA Institute. Currently, HIRA Institute's mission is to

instill Qur'anic values, so our students aspire to lead with integrity, confidence, compassion, and knowledge, lead future generations to be God-conscious and mindful-Muslims, and maintain well-rounded students who take pride in both their Muslim and global identity.

What characteristics do you feel a HIRA graduate should have? From your input, we will draft the Profile of a Graduate for HIRA Institute. This profile will guide our future strategic plan to try to work towards achieving this vision.

In this session, we are going to take 10 minutes and you are going to write down as many ideas that come to your mind as to what the characteristics of a Graduate of HIRA Institute should be. (10 minutes)

Now in this next part, we are going to create groups of 5 to 9 people. In our small groups, we will go around (round robin) and say one of the ideas you had. We will record your ideas. No discussion is allowed, not even questions for clarification. A member may "pass" his or her turn and may then add an idea on a subsequent turn. We continue around the group until all members pass or everyone has been able to share all their ideas. (15 minutes)

In this part, the group as a whole will discuss each idea in turn. Wording may be changed only when the idea's originator agrees. Ideas may be stricken from the list only by unanimous agreement or when there are duplicates. Discussion may clarify meaning, explain logic or analysis, raise and answer questions, or state agreement or disagreement. The group may also combine ideas into categories. (10 minutes)

Now we will vote to limit the list to 4-5 characteristics.

- Each member will select five items he or she thinks is most important. Then each member will rank the choices in order of priority, with the first choice ranking highest. For example, if each member has five votes, the top choice would be ranked five, the next choice four, and so on. Each choice will be written on a separate paper, with the ranking underlined in the lower right corner.

- Tally votes. We will collect the papers, shuffle them, then record on a flipchart. We will write all the individual rankings next to each choice. For each item, the rankings will be totaled next to the individual rankings.
- After votes are tallied, we will discuss the results and look for dramatic voting differences, such as an item that received both 5 and 1 ratings. If everyone is comfortable with the list, we will conclude. (15 minutes)

APPENDIX F: AGENDA FOR FUTURE CREATING WORKSHOP

**Strategic Planning for Character Development at HIRA Institute
Wednesday, November 22, 2023**

Part 1 Critique Phase

1:00 p. m.	15 min	Prayer	
1:15 p. m.	5 min	Introd uction	<p>Explain</p> <p>Brainstorming Characteristics of a HIRA Institute Graduate https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sNSsqihUZ-KBJ4Xd4o7LmNtjKWZ9CSHEm2fPQOP0ltI/edit#gid=361598649</p> <p>Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Si3563XPc1wG3T7FRjg1TgZfhShnzK3yEF0icF_Y2jA/edit</p> <p>Procedure for today https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IPEYSS84ryCUheKwD1bikmCvqWqvLhDr/edit</p>
1:20 p. m.	20 min	Critiqu e	<p>We now know what are the main character traits we are looking for in our students. How are our students today? How is their taqwa, akhlaq, desire to seek knowledge, leadership skills, and community service activities. We will divide into 2 small groups. Discuss with your groups specific examples you see of the character traits of our students and what may be preventing or hindering students exemplifying character traits identified in the initial character brainstorming sessions.</p>
1:40 p. m.	30 min	Cluster	<p>Let's come back to the whole group and share ideas generated in small groups. Please share the stories and examples you shared in small groups.</p>

Part 2 Utopian Phase

1:40 p. m.	5 min	Introduction	
1:45 p. m.	30 min	Visualize	In the previous session, we discussed where we believe our students are. Now, we would like to return to small groups to brainstorm: if you can implement any strategy or program in the school to help bring about the character traits we are looking for, what would you suggest? Think creatively and outside the box.
2:15 p. m.	15 min	Develop Utopias	Let's return to the whole group. We would love to hear your ideas if one of the group members can share.
2:30 p. m.	5 min	Break	

Part 3 Implementation Phase

2:35p. m.	40 min	Develop Projects	(pass out markers and a small poster paper) In this section, we would like you to choose a partner. With your partner, review all the ideas generated in the utopian phase, and agree on one single idea you believe can develop a certain character trait in the students. Formulate what is required for the idea to become reality as concrete recommendations. Ideally, these recommendations should cover short-, medium- and long-term aspects of the idea. Discuss: What do we want to do? Why do we want to do it? How are we going to do it? Who is going to do it? Who do we need to inform, to consult, to get support from? When and where do we start? Can we set measurable goals? How can we set future meeting times to involve more stakeholders? How and when will the project be evaluated to see how effective the strategy is to develop the character trait.
3:05 p. m.	30 min	Share	We would love for each group to present the idea they had.
3:35 p. m.	10 min	Vote	All the ideas are amazing. We are not able to develop all the ideas listed today. So, we would like to vote on three ideas that you feel are most promising. (pass out three sticky notes). Please walk around and look at the

			ideas and put your sticky note on three ideas you like the most.
3:45 p. m.	10 min	Conclusion	Thank you so much for taking your valuable time to discuss the most important aspect of education at HIRA, character education. Would any members be interested in furthering to develop and carry out the ideas that were started today? We really appreciate your time and commitment and hope you can work together with us as teachers, parents, and students to help positively influence our students.

APPENDIX G: STRUCTURED ETHICAL REFLECTION

Structured Ethical Reflection

Values

Faith - The primary focus of our school is to develop the Islamic identity of students, their faith, good character - and to put their faith in action by serving the community.

Respect - I would like the research study to respect all stakeholders, to develop collaboration and trust among all stakeholders.

Integrity - I have to act with integrity in all levels of the research.

Validity - I have to protect the validity of the research by allowing participants to explore their experiences instead of my personal interests.

Equity - I would like to promote equity by drawing participants from a diverse group from many regions of the world, with various socio-economic backgrounds, and with powerful lived experiences.

Faith	How can we develop partnerships that will foster faith in students?	How does this issue improve our strategy to develop faith in students?	How do our efforts to seek funding support the mission of developing faith in our students?	How do we identify sources of data that will promote faith in our students?	How can we foster faith in our students as we gather data?	How does my analysis of the data help promote faith in the students?	How do the actions I take as a result of the research help deepen faith among students?	How will the plan to disseminate the knowledge gained from the research reflect our faith values?	How will our future endeavors continue to build faith among our students?
Respect	How can we develop relationships based on respect?	How does the methodology reflect respect to all our stakeholders?	How do our efforts to seek funding show respect for our research partners?	How do we identify sources of data that will promote respect for our research partners?	How can we foster respect as we gather data?	How does my analysis of the data help promote respect for our stakeholders?	How do the actions I take show respect to our stakeholders?	How are we respectful of our stakeholders and we disseminate the knowledge gained from the research?	How will our future moves help build respect among our stakeholders?
Integrity	How can we promote integrity in partnership?	How can integrity affect the selection of the research questions and methods?	How do our efforts to seek funding reflect integrity?	How do we identify sources of data that will promote integrity?	How can we foster integrity as we gather data?	How does my analysis of the data reflect integrity?	How do the actions I take preserve the integrity of the process?	How will the plan to disseminate the knowledge gained from the research reflect integrity?	How will our future plans help strengthen integrity at school?
Validity	How can we uphold validity through upholding the views of our research partners?	How does the selection of the question and methods support validity?	How do our efforts to seek funding support the validity of our partner views?	How do we identify sources of data that will promote validity?	How can we demonstrate validity as we gather data?	How does my analysis of the data reflect validity?	How do the actions I take strengthen the validity of the research?	How will the plan to disseminate the knowledge gained from the research reflect validity?	How will our future steps maintain validity?
Equity	How can we develop relationships to foster equity?	How does the methodology answer a question that will bring about positive change in our school?	How do our efforts to seek funding support equity in our school?	How do we identify sources of data that will promote equity?	How can we promote equity as we gather data?	How does my analysis of the data promote equity?	How do the actions I take promote equity?	How does our plan to disseminate the knowledge gained from our research promote equity in our school?	How will our future plans help bring equity to school?

APPENDIX H: ADMINISTRATION NGT

Administration NGT Brainstorming September 9, 2023

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
Sr. Fouzia			good character - to Muslim and non Muslim community - to give back to the community			
Sr. Rabija	good character and positive	positive attitude	humbleness	continue self improvement and education		
Sr. Hala			integrity	empathy, spiritual, devotion, self awarness, sincerity	fostering a deep connection with Allah SWT; connection with family and community	embodying the Qur'anic character
Imam Ismail	tahara - cleanliness		not to be ashamed of their identity - embrace identity as Muslims - not to take thawb off	confidence to lead community ie ghust		
Br. Bilal	respectful to elders and not to argue	faithful and honest	patience ; charity work ; being more involved in community	family values		
Br. Humzaa	deep understanding of Islam so that they can guide and answer questions about Islam	self confident about their identity as Muslims				
Imam Asif	leadership skills	public speaking	Understanding the needs of the Muslim community	volunteering		
Imam Wasif		self awarness / taqwa - God consciousness / fear of God	discipline, steadfastness, perseverance especially with trials	challenges with modernity and living in the West ; how Islam is conservative/traditional	attitude in tune with shariah; adab; modesty	Qur'anic prophetic - social and personal
Imam Atif	self awareness	having a secondary skill - for livelihood - in addition to religious studies		public engagement		preservation of Muslim identity

Vote				
God Consciousness	Prayer and Worship	Character Development	Respect for Knowledge and Teacher	Community Engagement
Deep Knowledge and Understanding, spiritual & connected with Allah, self aware)	Moral Integrity/Morally Upright - embodying Qur'anic values (empathy, mercy, compassion)	Humility	Lifelong learners & beacons of knowledge	Taqwa
God Consciousness	Adab (discipline), respect, avoiding haram	Prophetic Character, leadership, protecting the community	Izzah, self confidence	Socially connected, should be connected to the times
Good Character	Leader (confident)	God Awareness	Self-Improvement	Giving Back to the Community
Taqwa (internal)	Practice Sunnah (external)	Create Relationships with Community	Continued Betterment	Benefitting Others
Taqwa: God Conscious	Akhlaq: Prophetic Character	Prophetic Outward Dealings	Self-Awareness	Globally Connected
God Fearing	Optimistic	Prophetic Manners	Knowledge/Continued Knowledge	Self-Awareness
God Fearing	Trustworthy (Honest), Good Character	Have Frugality	Thirst for Knowledge	Do Charity Work
Taqwa (salah, attachment to Masjid, fasts (optional fasting))	Inward/Islah/prophetic model, punctual, sincere, devoted, honesty	Rights of others, respect, empathy	Giving back, volunteering, charity, others services	Betterment, self-improvement

1	Giving back, volunteering, charity, others services	Do Charity Work	Socially connected, should be connected to the times	Prophetic Outward Dealings	Benefitting Others	Giving Back to the Community	Community Engagement	Globally Connected	Create Relationships with Community	Rights of others, respect	protecting the community
2	God Consciousness	God Fearing	God Fearing	God Awareness	God Consciousness	Taqwa	Taqwa (internal)	Taqwa	Taqwa: God Conscious		
3	Good Character	Prophetic Manners	Good Character	Character Development	Prophetic Character	Inward/Islah/prophetic model,	Akhlaq: Prophetic Character				
4	Knowledge/Continued Knowledge	Lifelong learners & beacons of knowledge	Thirst for Knowledge	Betterment, self-improvement	Continued Betterment	Self-Improvement					
5	salah	Prayer	Worship								
	Self-Awareness	Deep Knowledge and Understanding, spiritual & connected with Allah, self aware)	Self-Awareness								
	devoted	sincere									
	Trustworthy (Honest)	honesty									
	Adab (discipline), respect, avoiding haram	Respect for Knowledge and Teacher									
	leadership	Leader (confident)									
	Moral Integrity/Morally Upright - embodying Qur'anic values (empathy, mercy, compassion)	empathy									
	punctual										
	Humility										
	Optimistic										
	attachment to Masjid										
	Have Frugality										
	Izzah, self confidence										
	fasts (optional fasting)										
	Practice Sunnah (external)										

APPENDIX I: PARENT, TEACHER, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS NGT

Parent, Teacher and Community Members NGT Brainstorming October 7, 2023

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10	Round 11	Round 12	Round 13	Round 14	Round 15	Round 16	Round 17
Sr. Fatima	helpful	forgiving		learn how to be independent			belief in themselves						having faith				
Sr. Hana	Sadiq	humble		courageous and brave	cooperative	respect/giving		generous	skills	politeness	Sr. Hana						
Sr. Zaara							having a strong self identity		goals/self-driven			practicing role model	open to challenges and hardships				
Sr. Rohana	Patience	obedient	self-discipline	truthful to one self	being positive	charitable				optimistic	implement what they learn	trustworthy					
Sr. Safiya C.	Salah	intention	modesty	charitable	recognizing their talent	contentment	submission / availability	commitment	ambition	self-discipline	peace of mind	high moral	having boundaries	opportunistic			
Sr. Fatuma	Doing things continuously	good character		listen	ask Allah SWT to guide you		good communication skills		acknowledge weakness				prioritize				
Sr. Safiya M.	good akhlaq	Islamic identity	role model	leadership	scholarship	strong academics	Allima	public speaking		unity and diversity							
Br. Yaqoob	curiosity	respect teacher and elders	self-awareness	accept weakness/work on improving self	awareness that Allah SWT is watching you	empathy towards every living thing	adaptability and ready to change	accept failures and work on improving them	focus	willingness to listen to feedback	take responsibility for actions / and understand responsibilities / be truthful to responsibility	problem solving	zeal to help others				
Br. Mohamed K.	gratitude	good behavior	learning and teaching others	hafiz of Qur'an	giving back towards their school		trustworthy										
Br. Ahmed	self-confidence	practicing Muslim	motivation	Prophetic manners / following / reviving the sunnah	experience and computer skills	good reading and writing skills	problem solving	teamwork	develop understanding and asking appropriate questions	understand the meaning of verses of the Qur'an that apply to their daily lives	instill in hearts importance of giving charity	organization	understanding how people can affect them and importance to be in a good environment				
Br. Salam	persistent	passion to learning	set goals and objectives	awareness/ mental health	student to student and student to teacher relationship	leadership	time management	vision	consistent	student willingness to put effort	writing and communication skills	to be inquisitive	try to connect learning with life	students receptive	creative	confidence	resilience

Vote				
good character	commitment	self confidence	self discipline	self awareness
commitment	leadership	humble	self discipline	cooperative
belief in themselves	respect	patience	self confidence	organization
accept and work on weakness/adaptability	self discipline	respect elders/humble	showing traits of Prophet Muhammad	
obedient	implement what you learn	charitable		
good akhlaq character	hafidh	leadership	teach others or build confidence	patience
Islamic identity	leadership	trustworthy	role model	strong academics
aqlaq	role model	hafiz/alma	islamic identity	leadership
good character	self-confidence	resilience	reviving the sunnah	hafidh of Qur'an
good moral character	empathy	truthful to self and Allah	awareness that Allah is watching	love for your brother what you love yourself
set goals & objectives	resilience	vision	skills development	leadership

1	good moral character	good character	aqlaq	good akhlaq character	good character	showing traits of Prophet Muhammad
2	leadership	leadership	leadership	leadership	leadership	
3	self confidence	self confidence	self-confidence	belief in themselves	teach others or build confidence	
4	hafidh of Qur'an	hafidh	hafiz/alma			
5	self discipline	self discipline	self discipline			
	cooperative					
	charitable					
	forgiving					
	implement what you learn					
	obedient					
	love for your brother what you love yourself					
	awareness that Allah is watching					
	strong academics					
	organization					
	respect	respect elders/humble				
	trustful to self and Allah	trustworthy				
	islamic identity	islamic identity				
	committment	commitment				
	set goals & objectives	vision				
	patience	patience				
	role model	role model				
	accept and work on weakness/adaptability	self awareness				
	humble					
	resillience	resillience				
	reviving the sunnah					
	skills development					
	empahty					

APPENDIX J: TEACHER NGT

Teacher NGT Brainstorming October 10, 2023

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7
Sr. Maysa S	behavior - knowledge and eman		good Islamic knowledge to protect himself from the fitna around him and strength to stand up against these fitna	proud of him or herself and know the importance of modesty and also for the boys how they wear outside	akhlaq, adab, and knowledge		how to deal with the opposite gender; what is the limit
Sr. Heba	his ethics is the Qur'an	honesty	leadership to lead halaqaqs	enough knowledge to teach it to others	continuous education after they leave HIRA	honest in his religion and practice it	
Sr. Huyam	behavior	leadership	have a goal what they will do in the future; how to help the community	plan how to continue contact with the Qur'an; how does he/she think about the future; how to keep his/her eman ; ask them how will they deal with it	they should stay in contact with other students to give them their experience	students are active to give suggestions	
Sr. Bushra	Say Assalamu 'Alaikum		habit of giving sadaqah	pay attention to akhlaq	strong ability to speak about Islam	have good company	knoweldgeable about marriage life; how to handle difficulties according to Islam
Sr. Zinia	Following Qur'an and Sunnah	truthful	learn the dawah work	keep learning Islamic knowledge throughout his/her life and act on it	keep company with scholars after graduation	how to live their marriage life to educate the next generation	
Sr. Tahoora	know the whole the Qur'an	understand and act according to the Qur'an	in their attire, it should reflect their faith and knowledge of the Qur'an	speak humbly since they are hafiz and alims (their spech should reflect their knowledge)	follow the sunnah; try to inculcate characteristics of the Prophet	character impress non-believers about Islam	

Vote					
continue education after they leave HIRA	behavior & knowledge	strong ability to speak about Islam	honest in his religion and practice it	how to deal with opposite gender	
continue education after they leave HIRA	good Islamic knowledge to protect himself from fitna	lead halaqa	have target to future		
follow quran and sunnah	akhla, adab and knowledge	learn dawa work	keep learning Islamic knowledg and act upon it	learn how to deal with opposite gender and future life	
good character and behavior	act upon what they have learned from the Qur'an	follow sunnah and inculcate the characteristics of the prophet	character and behaviour should impress non-muslims positively	proper dressing and language according to their status	leadership quality
leadership of halaqahs	akhlaq, adab and knowledge	knowledge about marriage life according to Islam	follow the sunnah in every aspect of life	learn dawah	
good Islamic knowledge to protect himself from fitna	leadership	behavior	honest about his religion and practice it	have a goal what they will	

1	behavior & knowledge	akhlaq, adab and knowledge	good character and behavior	good Islamic knowledge to protect himself from fitna	behavior	akhla, adab and knowledge
2	strong ability to speak about Islam	learn dawah	learn dawa work	character and behaviour should impress non-muslims positively	lead halaqa	
3	continue education after they leave HIRA	continue education after they leave HIRA	keep learning Islamic knowledg and act upon it			
4	follow quran and sunnah	follow the sunnah in every aspect of life	follow sunnah and inculcate the characteristics of the prophet			
5	act upon what they have learned from the Qur'an	honest about his religion and practice it	honest about his religion and practice it			
	leadership of halaqahs	leadership				
	leadership quality					
	have target to future	have a goal what they will				
	learn how to deal with opposite gender and future life	how to deal with opposite gender				
	knowledge about marriage life according to Islam					
	proper dressing and language according to their status					
	good Islamic knowledge to protect himself from fitna					

APPENDIX K: HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS NGT

High School Girls NGT Brainstorming October 23, 2023

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10	Round 11	Round 12	Round 13
Juwayriya	loyalty		sensitive	open minded	God-conscious	emotionally available		team player	willing to compromise	good sportsmanship			
Reem	politeness	kindness				confident	understanding	intelligent	friendly	listening to other role model	good manners		
Muna	honesty	generous	clean	modesty	outgoing			obedient		athletic	funny	shyness	
Noor	humbleness	empathetic	conscious		active	proud	supportive		reliable		honorable		
Moyzidi	gratitude	disciplined	mindful	mentor	skilled	social	playful	strong minded	intentional	outside the box	ethical	positively influent	studious
Kaltuma	passionate		forgiving	welcoming	talented	articulate	serious	cooperative			leadership		
Fatema	respectful			giving	sense of humor			respecting others	privacy				
Halima	responsible	persistant	determined	well rounded	well-spoken	humble	integrity	reliable	positive	well-dressed	productive	compelent	
Huda	caring	considerate	consistent	composed	calm	encouraging	good-spirit	collective	self-aware	time-manager	resiliant	good intention	
Khawlah	understanding	patient					thoughtful	constantly listening			gratefulness	resourceful	
Hayat	merciful	loving	strong	lively	goodness in you - light	ambition	efficient	wise	usefulness with time and things	thinking of others			
Zahra	compassionate		modest with tone	comforting	organized	creative	faithful	independent	selfless	reliable	graceful	polite	
Nur	honorable		trustworthy		neat	beautiful	compassionate		fond of others	attentive	greatness		

Vote													
faithful	respectful	modesty	god-conscious	reliable	well-mannered	humble	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	trustworthy	trustworthy	god-conscious	
independent	grateful	respect	self-aware	self-aware	team player	god-consciousness	haya	polite	determined	god-conscious	honesty	respectful	
wise	supportive	god-consciousness	optimistic	social	god-fearing	trustworthy	determined	studious	supportive	determined	kindness	self-aware	
selfless	understanding	kindness	trustworthy	responsible	responsible	social	merciful	leadership	humble	influential	understanding	genuine	
athletic	modest	honesty	respectful	good-manners	determined	good-manners	leadership	honest	influential	self-aware	positive	reliable	

1	god-consciousness	faithful	god-conscious	god-fearing	god-consciousness	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	god-conscious	
2	trustworthy	trustworthy	honest	trustworthy	trustworthy	honesty	honesty	well-mannered	polite				
3	respectful	respect	respectful	good-manners	good-manners	respectful							
4	reliable	responsible	responsible	reliable									
5	determined	determined	determined	determined									
	supportive	understanding	supportive	understanding									
	kindness	kindness	merciful										
	self-aware	self-aware	self-aware										
	social	team player	social										
	modest	modesty	haya										
	leadership	leadership											
	wise	studious											
	humble	humble											
	optimistic	positive											
	influential	influential											
	athletic												
	independent												
	self-aware												
	selfless												
	grateful												

APPENDIX L. HIGH SCHOOL BOYS NGT

High School Boys NGT Brainstorming October 23, 2023

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10	Round 11	Round 12	Round 13	Round 14	Round 15	Round 16
Hudayfe	Belief in Allah	Loyalty	Helping others in need	Self-esteem	Forgiving others	Coping with others	Always having a positive attitude	Following the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad	Choosing the right friends	Being a good role model	Being social	Trying your best	Choosing the right path	Trust your problems with Allah	Never back down	
Mahmud	Honesty	Humility	Not afraid to do the right thing	Patience	Lifelong learner	Just	Modesty	Easy to get along with	Being a good speaker	Being charitable		Involved in dawa	discipline	Punctual	Organized	
Abdulmalek	Generous	Kindness	Correcting others	Following the sunnah	Having the ability to lead others in salah		Being able to teach	Being able to give a halaqah without any hardship	Being able to be gentle with kids	Having self-esteem		Not being arrogant	Having the ability to tell people what's wrong	Having the ability to state hadiths	Never giving up	Keeping a beard
Sohaib	Trustworthy	Humble		Caring for yourself and others	Teaching people what's right and wrong	Striving to do the right things	Being honest	Being a leader	Encouraging others	Having good eman	Having integrity	Volunteer to do good	Hard working	Never stop learning		
Imran	Faithful	Strong	Good adab	Positive mindset		Forgiving	Being gentle	Having courage	Being a role model	Having dignity	Guding others	Persevering		Being firm		
Mutasim	Ability to share Islamic knowledge	Selflessness	Respectful	Calm and collected	Good understanding of Islam	Shamefulness	Gratefulness	Being a listener	Being brave		Being open minded			Being friendly		

Vote					
Trying your best	Good adab	Being a good leader	Being a good leader	Having a high eman	Being a good role model
Being a good role model to others	Honesty	Following the sunnah	Having strong eman	Following the sunnah	Ability to share Islamic knowledge
Being respectful to others	Enjoining good/forbidding evil	Being trustworthy	Being a role model	Being respectful	Good adab
Having patience	Adhere to the sunnah	Being calm and collected	Following the sunnah	Being trustworthy	Discipline
To trust Allah SWT	Lifelong learner	Having self esteem	Having good adab	Being selfless	Shamefulness

1	Having good adab	Good adab	Good adab	Being respectful to others	Shamefulness	Being respectful
2	Being a good leader	Being a good leader	Being a good role model to others	Being a good role model	Being a role model	
3	Following the sunnah	Following the sunnah	Following the sunnah	Adhere to the sunnah		
4	Having strong eman	Having a high eman	To trust Allah SWT			
5	Being trustworthy	Being trustworthy	Honesty			
	Trying your best					
	Being calm and collected					
	Enjoining good/forbidding evil					
	Having patience					
	Lifelong learner					
	Having self esteem					
	Being selfless					
	Discipline					
	Ability to share Islamic knowledge					

APPENDIX M: PHOTO OF NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE SESSION

Photo of Nominal Group Technique Session



APPENDIX N: PROFILE OF A HIRA INSTITUTE GRADUATE

Profile of a HIRA Institute Graduate

A HIRA Institute Graduate will have

1. God Consciousness (Taqwa)
2. Prophetic Character (Akhlaq and Adab)
3. Passion to Continuously Seek Knowledge (Ilm)
4. Leadership Skills (Khaleefa)
5. Desire to Serve the Community (Khidmah)

Vision Statement

We are dedicated to guiding individuals on a journey of personal and academic excellence through Taqwa, Exemplary Akhlaq, Passion for Ilm, Leadership Development, and Service to the Community.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to instill God Consciousness and Prophetic Character through students memorizing and reciting the Qur'an, teaching the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, teaching about the wisdom of the religion of Islam, and teaching spirituality.

APPENDIX O: CRITIQUE PHASE GROUP 1

Critique Phase Group 1

Small Group	Round 1	Round 2	Round 2	Round 2
Imam Wasif Iqbal	hindrances - screen time; age younger students may not be reflected until they are older; environment is not necessarily set up at home; they goals are hindered; salah , the prophet SAW required them to pray but they are not expected to pray			
Imam Atif Iqbal	most of our students are afraid to speak in public or take leadership roles; even to call the adhan or lead the salah; also girls are shy	in assembly we talked to the students about the 5 day weekend and asked what are they doing to help others; they focused on helping their mom; they don't think about helping extended family, community, neighbors; some don't help at home	self awareness - how when we are sitting in the saff, in the masjid, even adults start talking loudly - there is no limit to self awareness- have it throughout the day - complete self	
Imam Asif Iqbal	prophetic character - brothers already wearing thawbs and imamas, sisters wear abayas; not always; especially dealing with others like the prophetic character			
Khawlah Estes	have to increase teaching the meaning of the Qur'an			
Bushra Furrukh	akhlaq and adaq - we need to work on it -			
Fouzia Shaikh	girls are concerned about GPA and colleges; passion towards worldly knowledge but not same passion for deen knowledge, to become scholars, tafseer	now we have some limited leadership roles; but we need more opportunities		
Tahoora Shaikh	see taqwa in elementary boys; see the desire to serve the community in the future; have intention to become imamas;			
Alina Zubairy	elementary girls don't know a lot, but when they are older we hope they will gain it			
Fatima Ali	students follow the directions they do not work on leadership			
Moyzidi	older students don't have a strong role model identity for younger students	if you are not doing the alamiyyah program, you don't have a lot of time to learn about the prophet SAW; only 30 minutes a day don't have a lot of time to grow deeper in their Islam	forget how to have boundaries and not given real life situations how to deal with other people	
Hana Alsharawi	if students have opportunities to participate in community service, we can see their desire to serve the community	uniform: have specific uniform	forget how to have boundaries and not given real life situations how to deal with other people	connect everything to prophet Muhammad and Islam
Fatuma Abdi	the students are memorizing the Qur'an; they should not only have a goal at the end of the year; they have to have a goal beyond			
Hala Buazza	cleanliness; taking care of the environment the students need to work on this; i love the uniform, no make up in school; love to see this behavior out of school			

APPENDIX P: CRITIQUE PHASE GROUP 2

Critique Phase Group 2

Small Group	
Sr. Fairouza	passion to continue seek knowledge, ILM events
Sr. Bushra	prophetic character - manners, discipline behavior
Sr. Hafsa	Hafsa, only if its mandatory
	Taqwa- only if its mandatory, sunnah prayer on when someones watching
	Appreciating staff,
	prophetic character - The dress outside of school
	Talked about mentorship but younger students didnt want to listen to them
	friends influence,
	Passion for ilm night, staying for speakers
	Wanting to do itikaf the right way
	leadership skills - shy to share, take control, dont think for themselves
	leadership for sports but not other things
	5. Volunteering to help with events, setup

APPENDIX Q: UTOPIAN PHASE GROUP 1

Utopian Phase Group 1

Small Group							
mam Alif	big brother and big sister	parent teacher association - whatever we are promoting at school doesn't make it at home - and vise versa					
mam Wasif	itikaf - jamaat - miftah retreat; school field trip to Muhammad Ali, focused on target goals	reward for do extra not for something you are supposed to do	praying sunnah without being reminded - recognize - how do you quantify that				
mam Asif	itikaf - jamaat - miftah retreat; school field trip to Muhammad Ali, focused on target goals						
Sr. Ammar	develop leadership skill - so many things they disagree with the admin but scared to tell us take ownership for school - meet once a month	Dr. Sadiq said no matter how much you train the student, can't help unless involve parent	we just punish them for not doing something - but there is no system to reward them for akhlaq - class dojo				
Khawlah	school can provide places to volunteer in the weekend which can be put on the resume						
Sr. Bushra Furrugh	prophetic character - develop say assalamu Alaikum - not just hi						
Sr. Tahoorah	make small groups of students and assign them some work so they get used to serve the community	leadership - only some students are OK with public speaking - encourage introvert student to lead small activities	encourage them to behave good and their good behavior should be rewarded. many student have good academics but not good behavior				
Sr. Alina	as a teacher I want to work with them to work on akhlaq - saw boys to throw the food to give to each other						
Sr. Bushra Fatima	akhlaq and adab - work together with parents at home						
Sr. Fatima	leadership - give topic for the students work by themselves to make the project they way they want	if they do something the whole month					
Sr. Hana	graduate should have volunteering hours - with them to sign	ilm - course with the meaning of the ayats and stories of the prophets - so they know what they are reciting	concur about saying assalamu 'Alaikum	be specific for punishment and reward	if they finish their goals before their time, we need to reward them	add modesty	for the test to develop leadership, let them present to build public speaking skills
Sr. Fairouza	leadership skills - leadership workshop - speech, decision making to improve leadership skills	reward of achievement	provide more public speaking opportunities- morning assembly	positive learning environment - so students feel more comfortable - library - seeking knowledge			
Sr. Hala	offer a class in school on adab and akhlaq - create time in curriculum	school wide wud - set of daily tasks as a reinforcement to connect knowledge into action and develop self awareness, character development retreats , assigning students duties throughout the year, enter city wide competitions to build self confidence and leadership skills	students are often overwhelmed - need a short activity to nourish their soul to increase their motivation- fun elective in between the classes to give them positive energy				

APPENDIX R: UTOPIAN PHASE GROUP 2

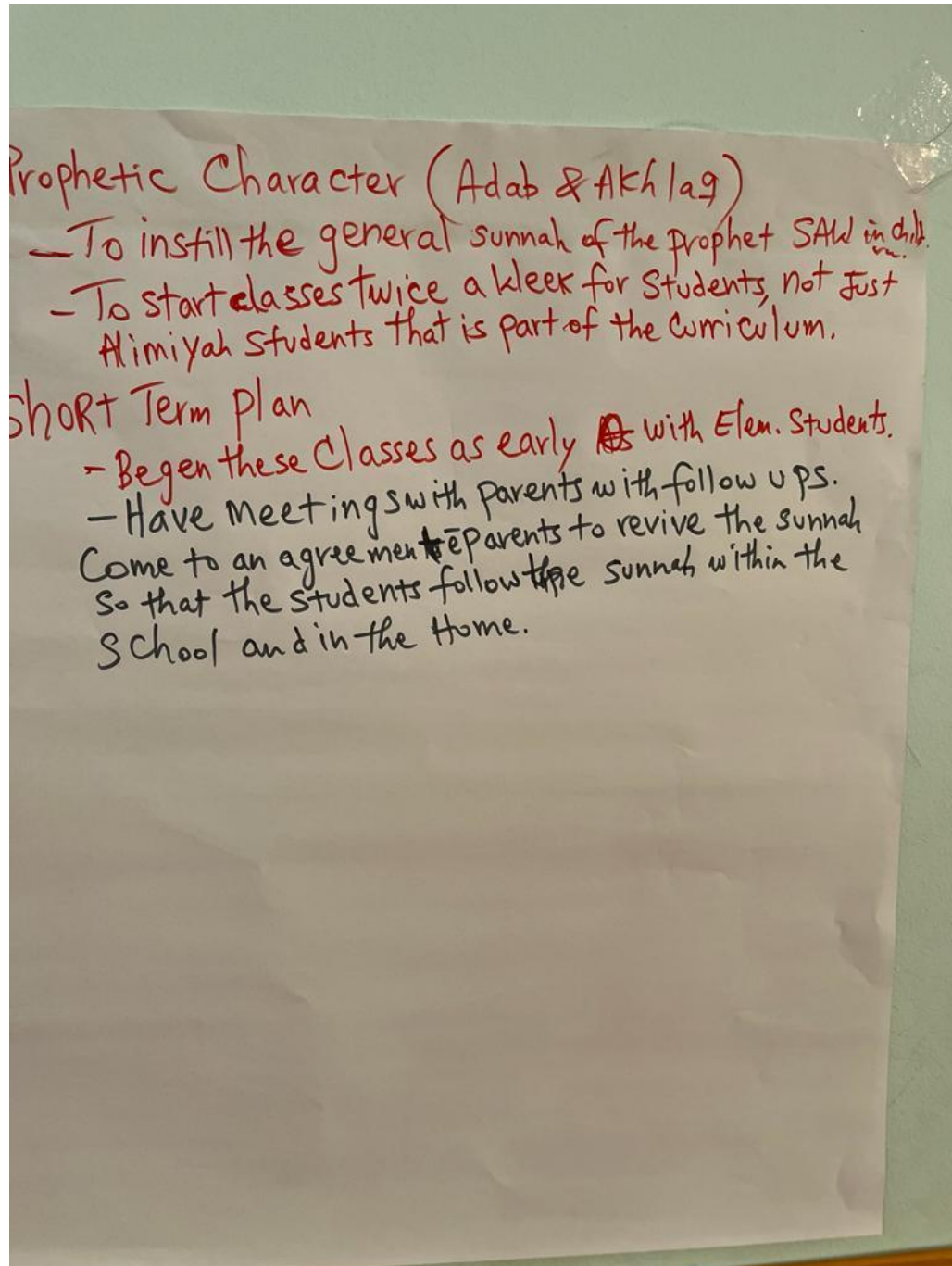
Utopian Phase Group 2

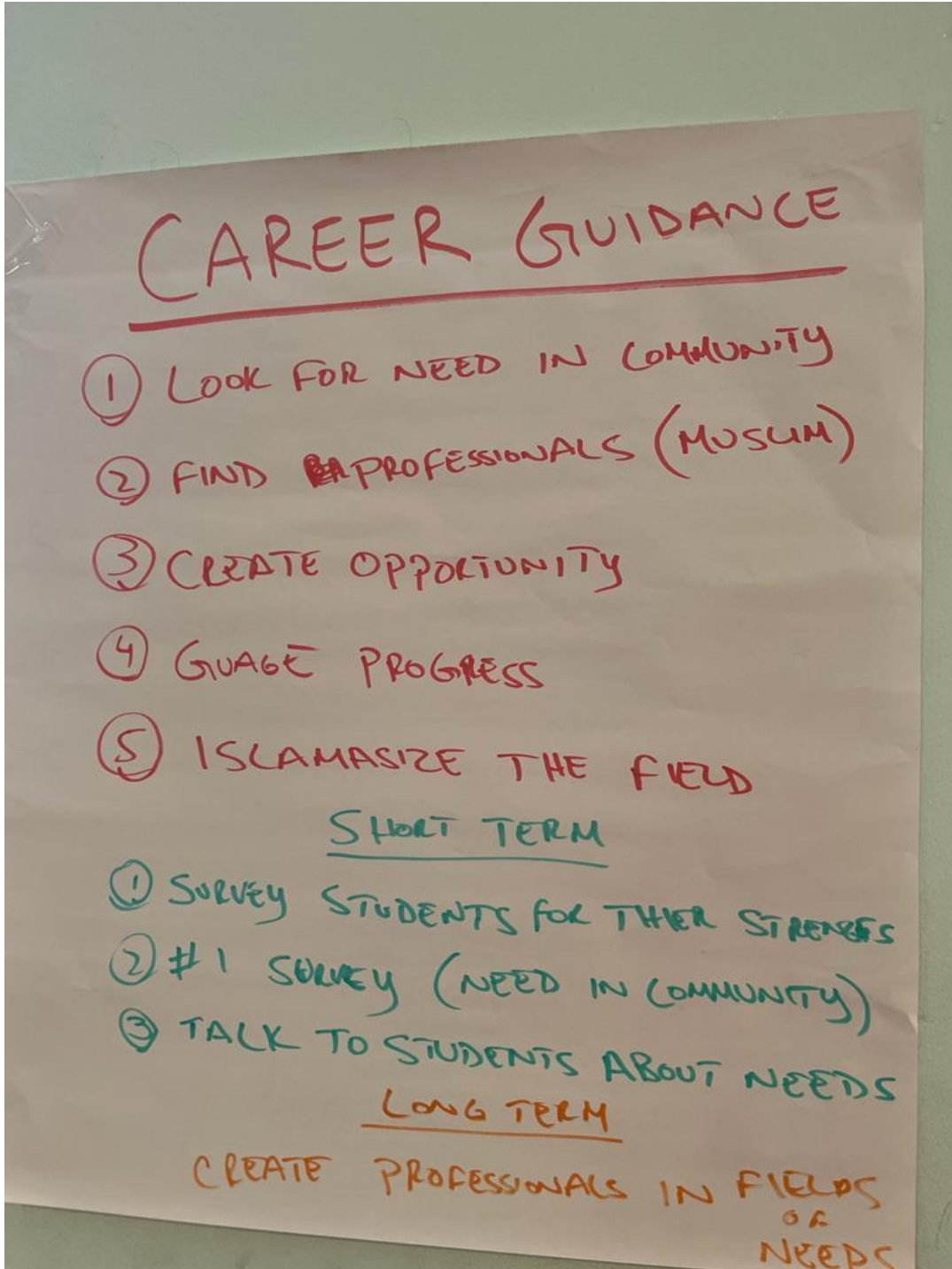
Small Group			
Moyzidi	desire to serve, have more community hours/events to help out outside of our events moyzidi - internships, getting out of their bubble Student council	Moyzidi - career counselor	
Juwayriya	having a set goal/hours of volunteering, and explaining how to volunteer	Jawariya - not having grades, to improve passion for memorizing More rewards	rewarding/displaying the students that display the characteristics
Sr. Fatima	Taught tajweed more, they just want to get the surah over with .	Know more about the surah they memorize, so they can connect Sr.Hafsa - general understanding of the surah,	having them lead volunteers, managing cleaning etc
Sr. Fouzia	worried about needing to make money/graduate from university - have path for them to come back and teach	leadership, having them scheduled to speak at itikaf/events for our public events	
Br. Mohamed	showing them how they can use this for their future, for college/career. Having a strategy of how they can have a career in islamic way	sharing small stories consistently about Allah watching, Taqwa. teaching the dua for students/parents of Taqwa.	
Sr. Hafsa	more positive reinforcement Jawariya - HIRA Bucks but something tangible		
	Alot of passion for wordly matters, so show how you can graduate here as a scholar. How they can impact the community		
Br. Ahmed	Prophetic character - given daily 3 hadith of behavior, practice it daily	Going to other communities, impact other kids	

APPENDIX S: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

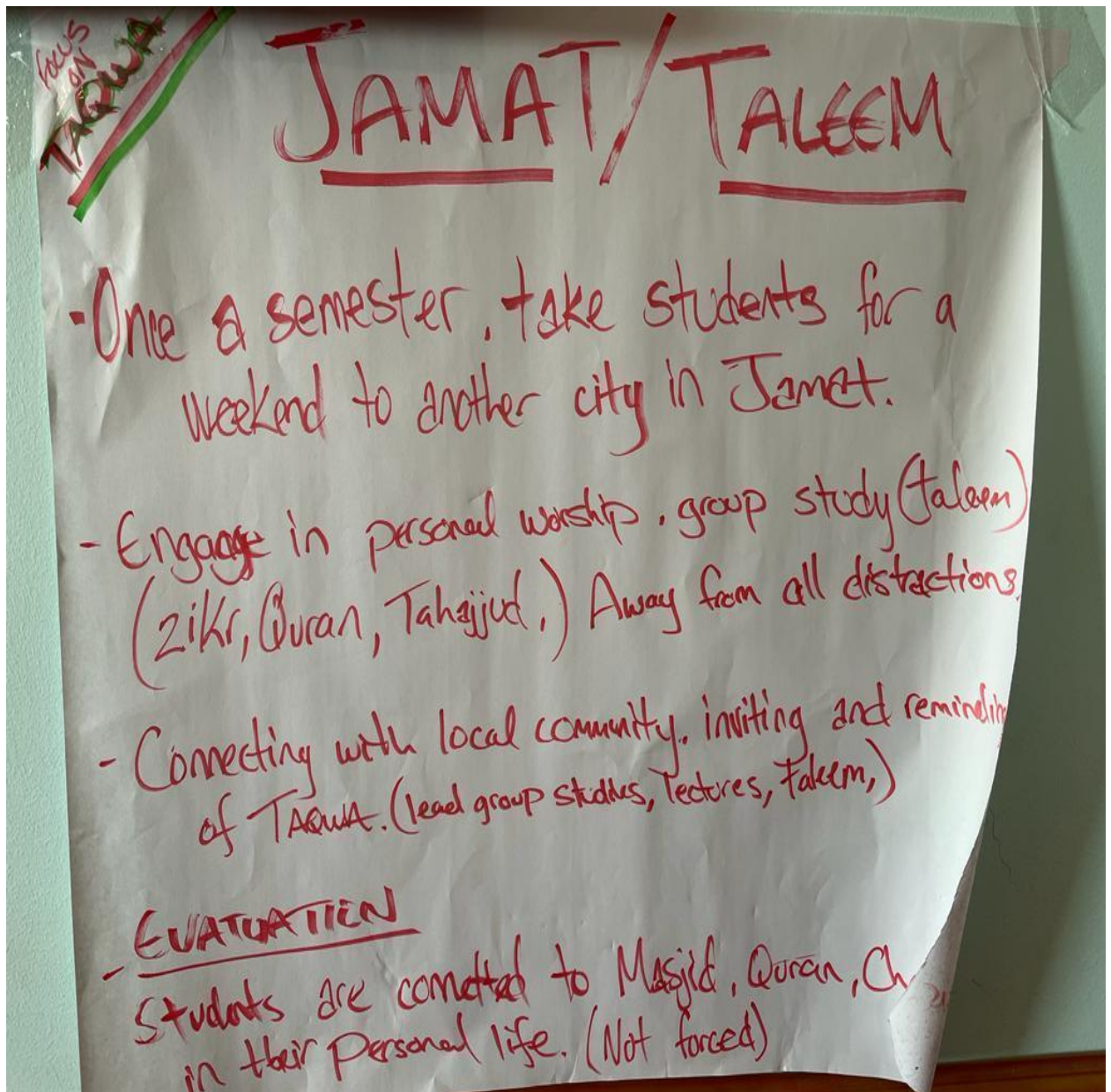
Implementation Phase

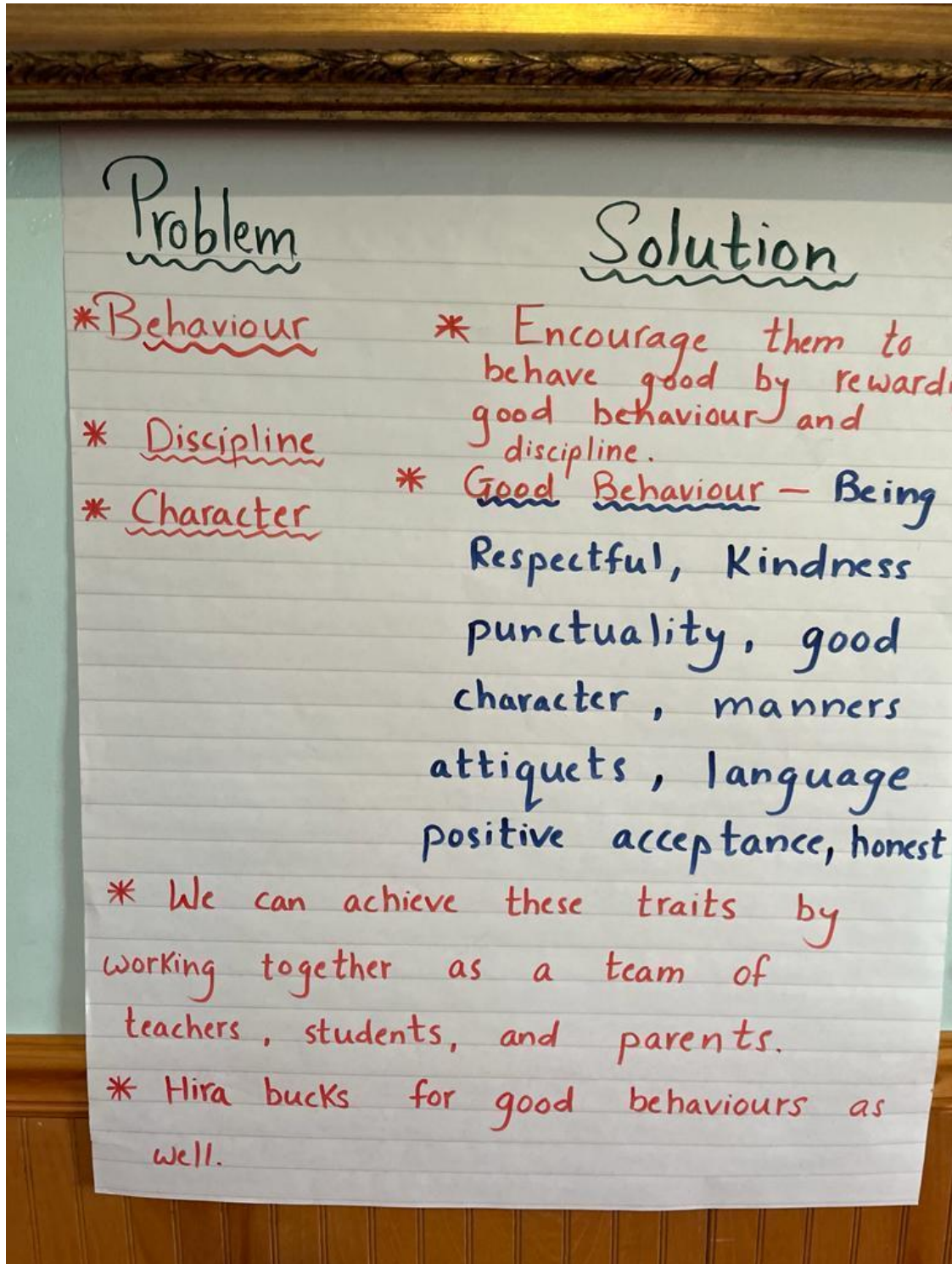
Classes about the Prophet from Elementary to High School to Develop Character





Jamaat (Visiting other Mosques) and Taleem (Educational Activities) to Develop God
Consciousnesses





Akhalag and Adab

By
Sr Hafsa
and
Sr Alina

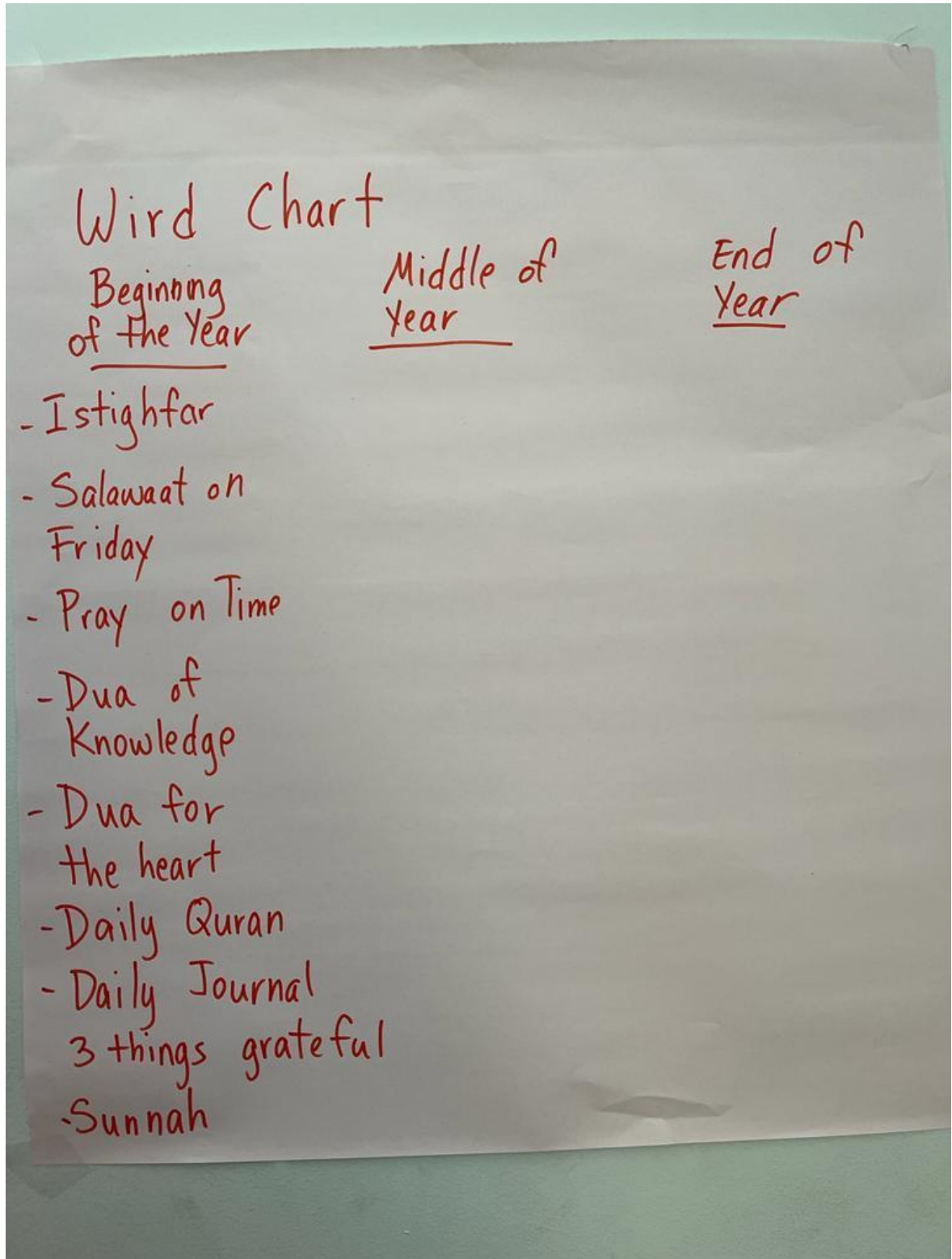
Solutions:

- 1) Give 3 daily Hadiths of behaviour
 - Have a designated time during the day where they read and share Hadith of behaviour (during assembly)
- 2) Have positive reinforcement
 - Give them small rewards every now and then.
 - Have an achievable reward goal.
- 3) Treat the students the same way we as staff want to be treated.
 - Respect their ideas and opinion.
 - Don't hold them accountable for every small mistake they make.
 - Greet them and talk to them in a respectable manner
- 4) Advise students of behaviour expectation before enforcing consequences.
 - Tell them how good behaviour is rewarded by both Allah and those around them.
 - Teach the students according to their age group.
 - Decide on the rules and behaviour expectation together with your students.
 - Have a behaviour chart for each classroom
 - If need be, make them compete with each other for good behaviour.

Rewarding vs punishing

- Positive Affirmations
- Having a student of the Month, for each HIRA characteristics
- Students share in assembly or mid day, examples they've seen of the characteristics being displayed from students.
- Announcing when a student finishes Quran Goal.

School Wide Wird (Chart of Good Deeds)



Requirements:
self confident
speech
Knowledge Seeker

Leadership

<p>short-term Classroom</p> <p>Conduct new methods of tests</p> <p>Exp: Assign a projects and submitted as a presentation</p> <p>- Should meet All the presentation Requirements (memoriz, eye contact, speak-up (Voice, words) Capable to Answer questions (Knowledge) Body language</p>	<p>School / Academy / t</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Team building (Events)- Decision-makers (students counselor)- Effective communication (School activities) Bake sale, sport....	<p>long term Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Participate in School Events- Join Volunteer Organization- Start small Begin with small manageable projects to build confident.
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Saying Salaam & Leadership Qualities

★ Teach them to say Salaam instead of Hi!

How? ① Explain virtues of Salaam with Hadith.

② Put posters on the walls as reminders to say Salaam

★ Giving High Schoolers leadership opportunities. (public speaking)

How? ① Girls can give Sisters' Halqaahs during our Monthly Itekef open to the community. (related to the topic)

② Lead morning assembly for 10-⁵15 minutes as a part of their grade

New Grading System to Develop Love of Learning

What?
NEW GRADING SYSTEM (For Taahfeebdh)

how?
• Continue keeping track of mistakes, but document them in Google Classroom instead of Jupiter.
This way the parents, students & staff are well informed of the student's progress without it affecting their grades or GPAs.

why?
begin
• Students ~~beginning~~ giving up because their grade begins to drop ~~heavily~~ drastically. They begin to cheat or skip just because they don't want their grade to drop. This affects their mental health as well as their will to carry ~~the~~ on. But if we remove the grade system, we establish a love for the Quran and wanting to do it for Allah, not our grade.

HOW?
• Help students raise their grades by having one specific teacher just for additional help.
ex. Saabq - mubalaq
manzil - side-by-side

Why?
Majority of taahfeebh students aren't doing so well because they aren't receiving the one-on-one attention they need. If there was a teacher there to help them out whenever they needed it, the students would feel more comfortable with admitting their mistakes, and that in turn, would help them grow as people. Ultimately, this would boost the student's grades and confidence and would shift their focus away from their report cards and towards their Akhirah.
~~Allah put the love of knowledge in our hearts but the grades are just do the students' passion to continuously seek it.~~

LACK OF
Passion to
Continuously
Seek
Knowledge (Ilm)

APPENDIX T. NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE RESPONSES

Nominal Group Technique Responses

Includes

Administration NGT Brainstorming September 9, 2023

Parent, Teacher and Community Members NGT Brainstorming October 7, 2023

Teacher NGT Brainstorming October 10, 2023

High School Girls NGT Brainstorming October 23, 2023

High School Boys NGT Brainstorming October 23, 2023

APPENDIX U. FUTURE CREATING WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Future Creating Workshop Responses

Includes

Critique Phase Group 1

Critique Phase Group 2

Utopian Phase Group 1

Utopian Phase Group 2

Implementation Phase

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