Leading Multiethnic Schools: a new understanding of Muslim youth identity

The management contexts of schools in Britain, particularly in the urban areas, are undergoing deep and sensitive changes in the wake of emigration, immigration, international mobility and globalisation. The emerging multi-ethnic (multi-cultural/multi-faith!) schools will continue to be a sure phenomenon in countries like Britain, in the backdrop of international socio-eco-political developments. Managing multiple and diverse ethnicities and identities is emerging as a serious issue for access and inclusion. This paper pleads for developing an understanding of the learners’ identities in the British schools, and argues that this has profound implications for the educational leaders working towards an agenda for inclusion and achievement. The paper aspires to draw attention to a developing situation, which has the inherent potential of growing more sensitive and complex.

However, in view of the vast diversity of ethnicities, and within/across-groups dynamics that challenge categorisations, it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt anything highly ambitious. I intend to concentrate on one group, loosely defined as Muslim learners. My choosing to focus on this group of school population is influenced by my being a Muslim educationist, with claims of access to religious knowledge and texts (Shah 1999), which I perceive as valuable in exploring the issues in a wider theoretical and philosophical context. Secondly, having worked in HE in an Islamic state for more than two decades has helped me gain an understanding of the Muslim learners’ perceptions and expectations, and the interface between leaders, learners and community. In the British context, multiple social, economic, strategic, historical and political factors have added to the complexities of interface, more so in the post 9/11 and 7/7 world, making the management of ‘Muslim identity’ a sensitive issue. Thirdly, there are 1.8 million Muslims in Britain (The Guardian 2002), and unlike some other faith groups, Muslims tend to highlight their religious identity (Brah 1996; Jacobson 1998; Modood 1990; Modood et al 1997; Nielsen 1987). According to the national statistics (2001), 33.8% of the Muslims are aged 0-15 years and thus fall within the compulsory education age. It is important that any association between the ethnicity/identity and educational performance/achievement of these
students should not foreclose the possibilities of investigating the impact of leadership values, perceptions and practices on how these students experience education in this specific context.

The paper argues for increased understanding of the learners’ perceptions and expectations for enhancing and sustaining effective leadership. Leadership values and practices formulated at the interstices of expectations and responses have particular significance for vulnerable groups who feel marginalised or ‘misunderstood’. An informed awareness of this impact can improve leadership responses and might contribute to improved leadership role.

The paper discusses ethnicity/identity with a focus on the Muslim students in the British schools, the related issues and tensions. How the identities are constructed, projected or imposed reflects a complex interplay of myriad factors. The emerging identities refuse to fit within prescribed categories of race/ethnicity, highlighting the need for the educational leaders to develop an understanding of ethnicities and ‘identities’. The management of students’ identity, and the interplay among ethnicity, identity, achievement and school leadership are some of the issues looked at in the second section. The final section offers some suggestions for leaders in multiethnic schools.

**Muslim Students in British Schools**

The radical changes taking place in the world around us are being reflected in the changing demographics in the British schools. My focus is explicitly on the secondary school students faced with a growing awareness of ‘self’ and ‘identity’, and the associated constructions and assumptions. According to Piaget (1969), this age phase concurs with the ability to think logically and to reason, and this reasoning becomes active in shaping and challenging identity constructions. As awareness of identity takes shape in the unsympathetic, rather cruel (Macpherson 1999), adolescent world of secondary schools, where the dominant values, practices, assumptions, and even the wider relevance of national curriculum to ethnicities, all become challenged overtly or covertly, making the educational sites locations for the interplay of competing notions and discourses (Foucault 1977, 1980).
Muslim students are a unique multi-ethnic group, defying the race/ethnicity categories (Afridi 2001) with claims to a transnational (Muslim Parliament 1992; Siddiqui 1992), cosmic (Mernissi 1991), or super-ordinate identity (Hopkins and Hopkins 2004). There is abundant literature on identity in sociology, social psychology and feminist theory (Bhabha 1994; Brah 1996; Braidotti 1991, 1992, 1994; Giddens 1993, 1996; Gilroy 1992; Hall 1993, 1996; Hall and de Gay 1996; Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2004; Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins 2002; Papastergiadis 1998; Tajfel 1978; Vincent 2003), presenting different theories, and analysing the factors involved. However, recognition of religion as a category of influence for identity construction in the recent scenario is not a fully explored phenomenon. There are increasing complaints of prioritizing ethnic and racial over religious groups and the complications emerging from that approach (Modood 1990). The revival of religions or religious resurgence in the post-modern world (Ahmed 1992; Ahmed and Donnan 1994; Bauman 1997, 1997a; Esposito 2002; Kepel 1997, 2003), and the heightened ‘political’ conflicts in the wake of 9/11 with reference to Islam and ‘Muslim identity’ highlight the significance to enquire into this sensitive area and its implications for school leadership. The sad events of July 7th (London Bombing 2005) are another signal that the educational leaders need to address these issue on urgent basis to ensure the democratic fabric of future society. These are indicators of ‘possible risks, [and] ‘we’ face a responsibility’ (van Loon 2000:176) to explore the sources of risk with open and fair minds, setting aside all easy assumptions. Beck argues that ‘The discourse of risk begins where trust in our security and belief in progress end’ (2000:213), and one way to rebuild and strengthen trust is to enhance understanding, particularly of self-perceptions and identity constructions.

Identity: a construction

The debates around identity, multiple-self, and static/dynamic identity highlight the need to understand the interplay of forces involved in identity formulations and the resulting impact on academic performance of ethnic groups. Giddens posits that ‘A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions’ (1991:186). This reinforces the argument that ‘identity is fluid,
Identity configurations occur at individual, group, community, country or international levels, and the interplay with race, ethnicity, religion and many others is a complex phenomenon. Identities keep changing as the nature of political and economic relationships changes between groups, communities and countries, and impact on participation in the public as well.

The drive towards a super-ordinate Muslim identity is international in dimensions including countries like China (Alles 2003; Chiang 2001; Djao 2004), America (Afridi 2001), Britain (Jacobson 1998; Hopkins and Hopkins 2004), France (Le Breton 1999; Limage 2000; Tlemçani 1997), and many others (Haddad 2002; Kepel 1997; 2003; Modood and Werbner 1997). The concept of Islamic *Ummah* provides the basis for this super-ordinate identity to an otherwise hugely diversely community. The root word of *Ummah* is *Umm*, which means 'mother' in Arabic (Ahmed 1992). There are sixty-four occurrences of the term in the Quran (Al-Ahsan 1992), where it is used as an overarching concept for wider Muslim community operative beyond geopolitical bounds. Commonly, this term is used among Muslims to convey the fact that all Muslims the world over constitute one *Ummah* or community irrespective of the differences of gender, race, tribe, colour, dress, language and many others (the Quran; see also Geaves 1996: chapters II and III; Iqbal 1996), and accept the Quran as the guiding philosophy.

An appreciation of the concept and its implications has relevance for understanding Muslim learners’ self-constructions and could be helpful in understanding their expectations and responses, particularly within the discourses of political Islam. Secondly, it can be usefully availed for developing ‘diversity-friendly’ teaching/learning environment by drawing upon the associated values underpinned by notions of ‘knowledge status’, ideological commitment to ‘knowledge’ and relationship between teacher/learner.

The concept of *Ummah* provides the philosophical underpinnings, supported by the Quranic insistence on equality and oneness, and is enacted in the most intimate details of daily life where culture and religion become inseparable for Muslims (Abdullah 1982; Jacobson 1997; Shah 1998). However, the interesting contradiction is a heightening awareness of ‘super ordinate’ religious identity in a post-modern era
predicated upon a falling apart of ‘unified world-views of religion and metaphysics’ (Habermas 1985:9). Is this engagement with identity projection and construction a new ‘force of resistance’ (Hall 1992) - in the category of gender, race, ethnicity, and colour - fighting for legitimacy (Habermas 1976)? Is this an expression of what Mernissi (1993) calls ‘political Islam’, in the ‘new world order’ scenario? It is important to engage with these debates to enhance understanding and leadership of the new school context.

Creating of identities is conditioned by affiliations, associations and by what Hall calls ‘histories’:

‘… identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past’. (Hall 1993:394)

But this ‘creating’ is also determined by ‘in opposition to what’ and ‘by whom’ at a particular time in ‘history’. Modood (2005) argues:

It is a politics of projecting identities in order to challenge racism and existing power relations; of seeking not just toleration for ethnic difference, but also public acknowledgement, resources and representation.

The development of political identity, especially among the young Muslims, as evident in Britain and elsewhere, is linked in some ways to religious revival (Saeed et al, 1999), but it also needs to be viewed in the backdrop of wider historical, political, and economic developments. The mention of crusades by George W. Bush in a post 9/11 context positioned the identities of the parties engaged in conflict across a politico-religious divide, requiring enormous diplomatic activity on the part of the USA to manoeuvre understanding across the implied super-ordinate identity configurations. The example points to the immense sensitivity and complexity of political identity formulations and how these lend to political exploitation. The perception among the Muslims, particularly among the youth, of being ‘targeted’ (Ahmed 2003; Esposito 2002a; Hagopian 2004) in the wake of post 9/11, and the processes such as special registration, police raids/interrogations, profiling of Muslims, and ‘stop & search’ practices targeting particular Muslim groups (MPA 2004) have left them feeling insecure and even paranoid. Shooting by police of a Brazilian who looked Asian in post 7/7 England, police activities to track terrorists, and increasing fears and
insecurities among Muslim community in different parts of the country, all demand very careful analysis. Why these young people, born and educated within the British education system are driven to such desperate measures? Why are they putting their lives and future at risk? What are their experiences in educational institutions, or in the wider society, and how these impact identity formulations?

Process of identification is located in time and context, and as Melucci argues, ‘definition of its borders and maintenance of its continuity are entrusted to our capacity to respond – that is, to our ability to recognise and choose among the opportunities and constraints present in the field of relations that constitute us at any given moment’ (1997:65). This has particular relevance for the emergence of political identities (Werbner 1997) and the resultant interplay on educational sites. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, the constructions of Muslim identity - in-group and out-group - raised poignant issues of the safety/security of Muslim students, impacting not only on their performance and achievement but also on their accessing education, posing questions of inclusion and equity.

Construction of identities is a political issue (Arendt 1959), dominated by multiple considerations and politics of representation. For the purposes of this paper, identity formulation is discussed at two broad levels:

Out-group constructions; and
In-group constructions.

**Out-Group Constructions**

Out-group constructions impact on self-perceptions, and affect partaking and performance in the wider context. Some elements influencing these constructions in the case of minority ethnic groups can further be placed within two broad sets:

The masses and the media; and

The state and administrative machinery, including public services departments.

*The Masses and the Media*
Literature and archives abounds with records of racist media constructions of Muslims ‘in very derogatory and vilifying ways’ (Vertovec 2002). These categorisations and definitions influence their participation in the mainstream activities in all fields of life including education. Hall argues that racism ‘operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constructed categories’ (1992: 255) and attempts to naturalise and perpetuate them (Brah, 1992:143), leading to the formulation and dissemination of a discourse reflecting complex contestations. The media, in its own interests and traditions, plays a strong role in spreading and perpetuating this atmosphere of mistrust and resentment among the masses (Ahmed 1992; Hall 1997; Said 1981).

Generalizations from individual examples in the media, or elsewhere, to wider populations further lead to misunderstandings and ambiguities affecting teachers/leaders’ perceptions of students’ needs and educational destinations (Bhatti 1999; Haw 1998; Parker-Jenkins 1995). Stereotyping and misleading assumptions impact negatively on these young learners’ aspirations and motivation, already burdened by the demands of an intricate balancing act in a ‘between cultures’ context (Anwar 1998).

Since the Nottingham riots of 1953, in particular, the media has played an active role in constructing negative images of non-white ethnicities and ‘during the 1960s [and onwards] white hostility towards coloured immigrants seems to have grown, and certainly become much more open’ (Banton 1972:172). They have been invented by the media as deviants ‘from the accepted cultural norms of the host society’ (Hill 1970: 115). In his study of Jewish community Simon Taylor argues that for most first generation immigrants the outside world tended to regard them with ‘hostility and suspicion’ (1993:61) because of differences of religion, customs and cultures, and this holds true for Muslims as well. Across ambiguities and misconceptions, images are constructed by media and masses, which highlight the differences and increase the distances. These images convey messages of rejection and exclusion. As a reaction to it an equally strong tendency develops to gravitate towards a concept of ‘community’ perhaps as a sheer defence strategy, and/or for the purposes of physical security. ‘External’ definitions formulated and disseminated by the media, and signalled by the masses, play a strong role in smoothing over the ‘internal differentiations’ (Hall 1996; Jeffery 1976), leading to struggle for empowerment through a reverse discourse (Foucault 1980). The ‘media portrayals of Islam as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist’ (Osler 2003) have contributed to the intensification of political identities that
are ‘asserted with pride and are capable of political mobilization’ (Modood 2005). These perceptions become intense in the backdrop of historical/political legacies such as the Muslims in Spain/Jerusalem, the crusades, the Western Imperialism, the Al-Qaeda factor, and the 9/11 have all making their marks both on in-group and out-group identity formulations in the case of Muslims. Kabbani’s comments in post-Satanic- Verses-situation is one example:

‘We were caught between two tyrannies: Khomeini’s impossible death sentence against a writer (fallible or foolish though he may have been) and the harsh "liberal" fatwa against our religious identity, with its blanket dismissal of us as alien, barbaric. Such was the polarisation, that even those who had hardly perceived of themselves as "Muslim" before, except in family ritual or personal reference, were suddenly forced to stand up and be counted as "warriors" for subtlety in either side’s position’ (2002).

The state and administrative machinery

Diverse communities are imagined and created by the state and administration for the pragmatic purposes of ‘managing’ them, appropriating terms for the convenience of policy formation and resource allocation. Blandly, it is representation for the study of ‘society’, ‘culture’, ‘people’, ‘community’, but as a political performance it can be misplaced essentialism (Werbner 1997:228), distorting the real thing (Said 1985:22). Political, social, economic and administrative implications are all involved in a complicated context where relations between ethnic groups and the state are played out, and which subsequently define the communities and their boundaries, working towards what Bauman (1997) explains as ‘order-building’ - a legacy of modernity. He defines the two strategies as:

Anthropophagic: annihilating the strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming them into a tissue indistinguishable from one’s own - a ‘strategy of assimilation – making the different similar; smothering cultural or linguistic distinctions; forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to encourage conformity to the new and all-embracing order;
promoting and enforcing one, and only one, measure of conformity’ (Bauman 1997:47).

Anthropoemic: ‘vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring all communication with those inside … a strategy of exclusion’ (Bauman 1997:47).

Bauman’s definitions show some interesting links to the approaches associated with managing ethnic minorities on educational sites, such as:

- Assimilation
- Integration
- Celebration

The dominant approach or mix is often influenced by the intended aims in a particular context at a particular time, involving a host of economic and political choices. For example, recent ‘celebrating diversity’ approach can be a genuine desire for inclusion and equity, or it can be a calculated effort towards tapping in unaccounted resources. Moreover, how even the best of approaches is viewed by those at the receiving end, complicates the debate:

Assimilation is a two-way, well-tended street, not a rubbish-strewn cul-de-sac like the one we were assigned. Even if we had desperately wanted to integrate - and a great many did - we could not have done it without a welcoming hand from our new compatriots. Such generous gestures were rarely forthcoming. Instead, there was stinginess and suspicion, at both local and government level. We were left to our sombre psychological or material ghettos, but not before being handed the bright flag of multiculturalism to wave obediently. (Kabbani 2002)

David Blunkett’s (2003) criticism of young British Muslims as ‘feeling part of their faith’, and suggesting to speak English in their homes (2004), or Peter Hain’s (2004) implied suggestion that second and third generation British Muslims are still foreigners if they maintain their religious identity raise questions about integration and identity. Is it integration ‘at the price of … becoming less Muslim’? (Smith 2002:14). Modood argues that:
‘Cultural racism is likely to be particularly aggressive against those minority communities that want to maintain - and not just defensively - some of the basic elements of their culture or religion; if, far from denying their difference (beyond the colour of their skin), they want to assert this difference in public, and demand that they be respected just as they are’. (1997:165)

Diversity is often treated as ‘otherness’, adding to the ‘moral panic’ (Werbner 1997) and insecurities of the ethnic groups², particularly those with distinctive identities. This draws attention to ‘group closure’ mentioned by Giddens (1993), maintaining that ‘people coming from one culture frequently find it difficult to sympathise with ideas or behaviour of those from a different culture’ (1993:39). The resulting atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty, coupled with exclusion, leads to ‘in-group cohesion’ (Jost and Major 2004; Stangor 2004), or ‘encapsulation’ (Anwar 1979), and subsequently develops and strengthens the sense of group belongingness around a concept of community which can be at times politically useful and psychologically satisfying.

In-group Constructions

Internal definition refers to the self-perception/s of a group and individuals, to make the members seen as they politically want to be seen. Identity construction is a highly charged terrain of contending ideologies and interests, laying claims to the power of ‘discourse formation and dissemination’ (Foucault 1980). This self-definition has a value and a meaning as long as the concerned people respond to the constructed symbol in relevant contexts.

In-group-identity-formulation is a dialectical relationship between social identity and social settings, evolving in interaction with ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his (her) knowledge of … membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’ (Tajfel 1978: 63). Referring to his family’s preference for identifying with religion (Islam) as compared to country of origin and home language, Modood (1997: 158) lists the religious principals and values as the deciding factor. In some
cases it can be a survival strategy, in response to perceived threats to lives, properties, businesses, even cemeteries (Vertovec 2002), which strengthen the bond of ‘belongingness’ to others of similar background (Pollock & van Reken 1999:19).

Discussing identity constructions of Muslims in Britain, Hopkins and Kahani-Hpkins agree that in-group identity is affected by a sense of group belonging, but they emphasise that it is a highly political discourse emerging from ‘one’s understanding of the boundaries and characteristics of one’s community, the processes by which particular forms and levels of categorisation capture the collective imagination’ (2004:42). An interesting example of the politics and process of identity construction is the Hui community - one of the 55 identified minority nationalities in China - for whom religion (Islam) is the only unifying category of identity, even though many members of the Hui nationality may not practice Islam (Chiang 2001).

There is abundant research claiming that even when the Muslims may not be practicing faith in many matters, they tend to emphasise their religious identity (Ummah). This identification is no longer necessarily connected to personal participation in distinctive religious practices (Jacobson 1998). Modood (2004) explains it as ‘political opposition to racism’, arguing that ‘the assertion of [political!] identity, the public challenge of externally imposed identities by campaigns promoting collective self-concepts’ reflects ‘an ethnic assertiveness, arising out of the feelings of not being respected or of lacking access to public space, consisting of counterposing ‘positive’ images against traditional or dominant stereotypes’. The in-group identity develops in this oppositional stance to external forces. Gaertner’s ‘common in-group identity model’ (Brown and Gaertner 2001) refers to inter-group interdependence, common fate, and shared exclusion as contributing to inter-group identity. For the young Muslim students it might signify all that and much more, as they struggle to cope with ‘racial frames of reference’ (Donald and Rattansi 1992:1), made more intense in the post 9/11 sensibilities and now worsened in post 7/7 England.

At the intersection of these cultural and political contestations an identity discourse is created ‘that urges to take care of its own problems, and assumes the major burden of managing its own public affairs’ (Gilroy 1992:49). Identity-construction becomes a political stance to contend assimilation and defend identity and interests - ‘a new
cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses differences...a difference which is positional, conditional and conjectural’ (Hall 1992:257). Most sociological analysis would disagree that there is any community with fixed definitions and permanent boundaries, pointing to the differences that cut across solidarities. The issue is categorization and the processes leading to it. Avtar Brah emphasises that various constructions:

‘signal differing political strategies and outcomes. They mobilise different sets of cultural or political identities, and set limits to where the boundaries of a ‘community’ are established’.

(Brah, 1992:131)

In the case of Muslims, the overarching identity, setting the boundary, is **Ummah**. Jacobson confirms that the British Muslim youth’s ‘attachment to their religious identity has not progressively weakened or diluted as a result of the fact that they are living in non-Muslim society’ (1998:126). Her analysis is that ‘religious boundaries are, by comparison to ethnic boundaries, clear cut and pervasive in this case’ (Jacobson, 1998:127), and any Muslim, even non-practicing, can claim to identify with it. Gilroy analyses the processes involved in the formulation of a ‘community’ in the context of a social movement. He suggests that ‘a political language premised on notions of community’ provides a context for spontaneous orientation of ‘demands’ and argues that ‘the social bond implied by the use of the term ‘community’ is created in the practice of collective resistance to the encroachments of reifications, ‘racial’ or otherwise’ (1987:234-5). Creating a religious identity can be another expression of collective resistance.

In spite of the fact that this super-ordinate Muslim identity is riddled with constructions, which are situated and subjective, and are liable to contending interpretations, it is all-embracing in essence. The four major strands of identity with which the British Muslim students of different ‘ethnic’ origins have to cope with are:

- Country of abode identity
- Country of origin identity
• Racialised identity
• Religious identity

The religious identity provides a flexible discourse for accommodating the other identities and at the same time denotes an agenda for resistance. It expresses the member’s commitment to the continuity and perpetuation of the group, working at the level where conflicts and oppositions do not emerge as active barriers. When the threat is to the group’s ‘values’, group members join and mobilise forces, rising above their internal conflicts and contradictions. Such politically constructed terms contribute to ‘build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities (Hall 1992:255). Muslim *Ummah* is an example of this heterogeneity, and an understanding of these layers of identity surrounding the core identity of *Ummah* has significance for the education of diverse Muslim groups.

**Management of students’ identity/ethnicity: a way forward**

The current literature concerning immigrant Muslim students’ education tends to offers a skewed critique or an apology. Comparative achievement/under-achievement statistics of students from different ethnic groups are often presented as given and predetermined by their ethnic identity, which in itself can have a negative impact on motivation and performance. There is a serious need to explore the conceptual and ideological contentions between the dominant discourse on educational sites and the reverse discourses (Focault 1977, 1980) and to appreciate the potential of ethnic diversity as a ‘source of new intellectual and moral energy’ (Parekh 2004).

The British government’s recognition of this potential is reflected in its emphasis on ‘widening participation’ and the strategies to facilitate ‘fair access’ to HE to the disadvantaged groups (White Paper 2003). In this regard, the significance of students’ experiences during compulsory schooling and the subsequent implications in determining relevant decisions to access HE cannot be ignored, which places a huge responsibility on the leadership/management of the schools, particularly those with multiply diverse populations:
‘The tendency to locate the blame for underachievement in students and their communities overlooks the role of schools as institutions, and teachers and headteachers as leaders, in processes that lead to poor student performance.’ (Blair 2002:182)

The leadership approaches and responses to diversity can play a vital role in shaping the learners’ engagement with teaching/learning, their performance/achievement and future aspirations. This adds a value dimension to leadership role highlighting ‘the moral and ethical imperatives that drive school leaders’ (Riley et al 2004:2), pointing to the leadership values as contributive to ‘success’ (Begley and Johansson 2003; Bennet and Anderson 2003; Day 2000; Gold et al 2003; Harris 2002; Harris et al 2003; Hopkins 2001). Peter Ribbins’ emphasis on the role of ‘wisdom’ and an understanding of values for the good leaders (2003:172) has great pertinence for complex contexts such as multi-ethnic schools. The notion of ‘Leadership a Moral art’ (Hodgkinson 1991; 1996; also Fullan 2003; Greenfield and Ribbins 1993; Sergiovanni 1992) in the recent leadership literature recognizes this dimension by arguing that leaders have to take value-positions. This requires an understanding and recognition of the values of the diverse groups, addressing the issues around ‘whose values’ or ‘what values’. If values with morals and ethics are ‘the very stuff of leadership’ (Hodgkinson 1991:11), the issue of ‘whose values’ gains central significance, posing challenges to leadership and ‘wisdom’. Riley et al (2004:9) engage with the issue by discussing the extent to which the leader’s values and beliefs, the school’s values and beliefs and the community’s values and beliefs can be harmonized for effectiveness. This harmonization can take place in a context of democracy, equality and mutual respect, and the ‘educational leaders need wisdom’ (Sternberg 2002), knowledge and understanding to make informed decisions:

“If moral leadership is to be exercised and pedagogy re-engineered with any degree of success, then future leaders will need a firm set of values. No doubt many will have their own list, but integrity, social justice, humanity, respect, loyalty and a sharp distinction between right and wrong, will all need to be included’. (Bennet 2000:3)
The culture and ethos of leadership "differ in fundamental ways across nations" (Fullan 1992:viii). Understanding the factors linked with the learners’ performance and addressing these is what the learners broadly expect from the school leaders. This expectation is particularly high in the case of the Muslim students because of the discourses surrounding knowledge status and teacher/leader status in Islam (Shah 1999a). An appreciation of these concepts (Shah, forthcoming) and of the student/teacher-leader relationship from an Islamic perspective can open spaces for engaging with the Muslim learners, and addressing related educational, behavioural and social issues. Categorising these notions as expressions of high power-distance cultures, reflects ignorance of the underpinning values and the concepts, such as *adab* (respect!) in Islamic philosophy and how these can be availed for enhancing the learners’ performance. An understanding of diverse values and perspectives can contribute to taking a fairer value-position.

*Adab* is a concept with many applications and shades of meaning. Rooke (1998) explains its socio-ethical side as primary and 'active', where *adab* designates a wide range of social and ethical virtues, like good manners, tact, grace, indulgence towards friends, refined taste, courage, erudition and literary skill. *Adab*, thus, is education and upbringing, high moral principles and correct behaviour, scholarship and knowledge, all at once (Rooke 1998). One example of violation of *adab* is the Satanic Verses, a book widely condemned by the Muslims because they perceived it as violating the value of *adab*; and it was more outrageous coming from an author brought up within Islamic traditions and claiming to be a Muslim. An understanding of these concepts and values can be a useful asset to leadership role.

The factors impacting on Muslim students’ schooling can be broadly grouped as being external to school and internal to school, but it is hard to draw the boundaries. There can be political, economic, social and other issues, related to the students’ backgrounds, affecting their schooling, but practically beyond the remit of the school leaders. On the other hand, issues as external to schools as Satanic Verses or 9/11 or 7/7 can effectively set off an avalanche of occurrences requiring the leaders to provide informed and sensitive leadership. An awareness of how identities relate to ethnicity and religion, and how these develop and change at individual, community, regional
and national levels can prepare the leaders to respond to the issues with enhanced understanding.

The educational leaders need to move beyond the assumptions and stereotyping, to understand the extent of de-motivation the Muslim students make conscious efforts to struggle against. Conflicting discourses are played out in the class-rooms, labs, corridors, play-grounds, cafeterias, and out in the streets, and identities take shape in response to active forces or reactive elements as personal responses, peer-pressure, or group reactions take effect. It would be useful for the school leaders to look further beyond the held assumptions of poor performance linked to ‘ethnicity’, into the issues like:

- Personal/group identity
- Media projections
- Stereotyping/assumptions
- Job routes
- Role models
- Peer pressure
- Community perceptions/stances

These and similar issues shape the wider learning environment. West and Pennell (2003) rightly draw attention to ‘wider social inequities or divisions that contribute to underperformance at system, school and individual level’, but that does not absolve schools and those who work within them from the responsibility for student learning. In fact the challenge to leadership is to take cognizance of multiple ‘inequities or divisions’, and to manage these towards improving students’ achievement. For example, an ‘FSM immigrant’, or a target for ‘Stop and Search’ (MCB 2004) identity cannot be conducive to enhanced performance. Leading multiethnic schools is predicated upon understanding the needs of the students (Anwar 1998), and engaging with them in the right perspective. It needs a genuine belief in equality to attempt through the thick fog of assumptions to gain an understanding of the reality. The racilised practices and even comments carelessly thrown around regarding, for example, social/familial structures and career destinations of Muslim students can be highly de-motivating for the concerned learners:
• Arranged marriages are forced marriages.
• Islam imposes segregation.
• Wearing Hijab is forced.
• Girls are married very young - are not allowed to pursue studies/careers.
• Boys are under-achievers and disruptive.
• Boys will become taxi-drivers.
• Boys will go into family business – shops/takeaways.

This stereotyping leads to processes of legitimation and de-legitimation in social relations, breeding resentment against the racist discourses, distancing the students from the educational space. Huge literature on similar assumptions, for example regarding performance of Afro-Caribbean boys (Benskin 1994; Mac an Ghaill 1994; 1988; Macpherson 1999; Majors 2001; Sewell 1997) draws attention to the pervasiveness of the issue. These assumptions further affect teachers’ support and attitudes towards the students, adding to the learners’ hardships. A study asking the Muslim girls in a school to complete the story of an immigrant Muslim female student, to study their attitudes towards academic success and career destinations, revealed strongly positive incline towards high academic achievement and careers, but also highlighted how teachers’ responses to their educational needs were constrained by widely held assumptions of early-marriages/no-careers for these Muslim girls (Haw 1998). All these assumptions, studies and debates raise questions:

• Is it a mismanagement of identities of the British-born and British-schooled Muslim youth turning them into underachievers, in spite of the high priority accorded to education in their religion?
• Is the British education system failing the Muslim community in some way?
• Is it Britain’s ‘education apartheid’ (Kabbani 2002) and a failure of will and imagination on the part of those involved in developing leadership for multi-ethnic institutions?

Imposed Inclusion!
The initiatives and strategies adopted over the last few decades to achieve inclusion in educational institutions have lacked full cognizance of the ethnic cultures and their value systems. This has often resulted in confusion and tensions at the implementation stage, adversely affecting the outcomes of the plans conceived with the best of intentions. The need is to change the approach towards inclusion. Imposed inclusion defeats its rationale - it needs to be worked towards in collaboration with the intended partners and can be useful only when positioned within the framework of equality. A problem with the notion of equality is how to accommodate it with ‘difference’, thus making it problematic for inclusion. From an Islamic perspective the argument is not constructed as ‘equal and different’ or ‘equal but different’; it is ‘different but equal’, a celebration of difference as a location for equality (Shah 1999). When inclusion defies diversity and identity, it may trigger off unanticipated reactions, including the learners’ disappointment with the educational leaders and institutions.

Concerns expressed by David Blunkett’s (2003) or Peter Hain’s (2004), and mentioned above, might have implications for educational achievements of Muslim students, but these need to be studied in context. Why are Muslim students not integrating in the schools? Why does a high performing Omer Sheikh drop out of London School of Economics to end in a prison? Werbner argues that ‘exclusion, silencing, any act of discrimination is an act of violence’, emphasising that ‘violence begets violence and violence need not be physical’ (1997:228). It breeds defence and defiance. The enhanced desire among Muslim youth to become more informed about their religious identity signifies their dissatisfaction with the racialised identity, and the absence of relevant provisions within the education system to satisfy this need pushes the students towards sources some of which may not be very responsible. There is no doubt that the religious identity is subject to harsh political opposition, but it also provides a power discourse to operate in. To a young teen-ager’s self-esteem, an association with a ‘powerful’ cosmic identity would be more appealing as compared to a negative racialised identity. The need is to raise questions and to search for answers.

**Implications for Leadership**
The educational leaders need to create a culture of genuine mutual interest and respect, and a belief of being valued among all ethnic groups to build an environment conducive to achievement. For policies and projects to be effective, a desire to share and ownership is important. Placing value and respect in individuals and groups can be more effective to encourage maximum participation and sharing, than all the glossy terms and projects. Even a term like multiculturalism is increasingly being perceived as a buzzword, reinforcing division and marginalisation. Parekh hints at the dissatisfaction with the associated discourse when he highlights the need to separate dialogical multiculturalism ‘from segregationist multiculturalism, which leads to ghettoisation, and also from hegemonic multiculturalism, which assigns minorities a fixed space’ (2004).

Schools are a part of the wider community and the world at large, and the impact of the political on the educational cannot be underplayed. Today’s context has moved much further from the early 1990s, when measures like language, dress, food, prayer-rooms, etc., were on top priority to facilitate schooling for the Muslim children (Parker-Jenkins 1995). Issue of needs now extends to demands for recognising faith as a category of difference and making greater provisions - or these learners would ‘go to private schools or mosques’ (Smith 2002:10) if the schools fail to recognise their needs. The role of mosques and imams in Britain (Lewis 1994) with reference to the education of Muslim youth is another related issue, but again is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the point I would like to make here is that the vacuum left by mainstream education provides them a space for functioning, which can be an exploitation at times, affecting the students’ education in the schools.

Another important role of leadership is to prepare teachers to be sensitive to religious and religion-related cultural differences. Jacobson recognises three levels of religious oriented actions that make Muslims distinctive – at the level of religious practice (daily prayers etc), routine behaviour (dietary issues), and social conduct (morality code etc) (1998:128). A sensitive leadership and informed management at all levels – from class-room to the community - can respond effectively to this diversity, making schooling a positive experience for the students.
The need is for a strongly positive action than to simply follow ‘laying down arms, suspending border skirmishes waged to keep the stranger away, [and] taking apart the mini-Berlin Walls’ (Bauman 1997:57). The new generation of British-born Muslims, in particular, sees itself as equal partners in national membership – not marginalised immigrants. Self-identity, as Giddens argues, is ‘the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography (original italics)’ (1993:53). ‘We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’ (Giddens 1993:75). The issue is no longer to which group these students have been born but the right to equality as British citizens with multiple identities. The resistance to the dominant educational discourse is not a rejection of education – this would not align with the Islamic philosophy – but a challenge to the existing power relations, seeking not just toleration for ethnic difference but ‘expecting others to respect them and adapt public attitudes and arrangements so that the heritage they represent is encouraged rather than contemptuously expected to whither away’ (Modood et al 1997:358). It is time to consider the thought provoking questions posed by Esposito (2002:viii):

- Can the majority of Muslims retain both their faith and their identities and do so in a manner that enables them to also accept and function within the secular, pluralistic traditions of Europe and America?
- Is Western pluralism a limited form of pluralism?
- Can Muslims (as well as Hindus Sikhs, Buddhists, and others) come to be accepted … truly and fully as fellow citizens with equal religious and political rights?

The debates can contribute towards positive practices. It is only when individuals from all religious, ethnic and other orientations are acknowledged as equally valued, ‘fellow citizens’, that the issue of students’ achievement in schools, or other educational institutions, can be considered in proper perspective. It would be too simplistic to expect ‘others’ not to realise the difference between being manipulated for reasons, or being the focus of genuine care as equal citizens - being a window dressing or valued partners (Rubin 2002).
Educational leadership has a professional and a moral dimension (Fullan 2003; Greenfield and Ribbins 1993; Hodgkinson 1991) which makes leaders’ task more complex and challenging. They need much more than professional competence to respond to contextual demands. Admittedly, every school context is a unique context, but a wider knowledge base can nevertheless enhance understanding. In schools with Muslim students, the leadership would need:

- An understanding of Islamic concepts of knowledge and knowledge bearers, and the notion of adab with reference to learner/teacher-leader relationship.
- An appreciation of the predicament of being caught ‘between cultures’ (Anwar 1998), and of the dilemma of the TCK – third culture kid (Pollock & van Reken 1999).
- Knowing the community through close links, by moving beyond the school walls, and developing community networks (Riley et al 2004).
- Developing values and inclusive attitudes/practices (Harris 2003), with attention to culture appropriate behaviour/values.
- Tolerance and understanding for cultural concepts like family values, honour, relationships (Anwar 1994; Shah 1998).
- Suggesting career pathways to students, and providing support and guidance (Metcalf et al 1996; Modood et al 1999).
- Ethnic minority teachers – recruitment, retention, development, progression (Abbas 2002; Osler 2003; Ranger 1988)).
- Providing role models (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Modood 1993).
- Valuing difference (Shah, forthcoming).

Admittedly, in a highly diverse multiethnic society, the school leadership feels compelled to attempt to cultivate commonalities for all practical purposes and for social cohesion, but an understanding leadership is essentially ‘sensitive to ethnic difference, and incorporates a respect for persons as individuals, and for the collectivities, to which people have a sense of belonging’ (Modood et al 1997:359). Getting to know students and communities, and soliciting comprehensive involvement and collaboration is important to make any progress towards the learners’ educational
enhancement, developing from where they are to where they can be. Rubin emphasises ‘building and managing relationships’ (2002:67) in partnerships, and it has equal significance for educating minority ethnic youth. A pride and confidence in their heritage contributes to the learners’ enhanced performance, and it is the leaders’ task to facilitate that goal by respecting diversity, by enhancing the students’ confidence in identity and by strengthening the notion of equality in relationships.

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3 The three cultures are the parent culture, the local culture of the adopted country, and the ‘new mix’ worked by the second/third generations of the immigrants.

References


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