Counselling and Wellbeing Support Services
in Australian Muslim Schools

Aminah Mah

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate School of Education
The University of Western Australia

May 2015
ABSTRACT

This study set out to develop understandings of issues involved for school counselling services in Australian Muslim schools for students in secondary levels of schooling. The objective of the study was to develop theory and principles of practice for a culturally appropriate counselling service for students in Australian Muslim schools. It was hypothesised that the needs of students and the delivery of counselling services for Muslim students are unique due to the largely migrant and non-homogenous cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Muslim community in Australia, as well as the role religion plays in living as a minority group in mainstream Australian society.

A qualitative approach was adopted to gain in-depth and contextual understandings of this topic. The research was located within the Interpretivist paradigm in the form of a perspectival study. Appreciative Inquiry was chosen to structure and guide the semi-structured interview questions and its four-D process (Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny) was used in the presentation of the research findings. Grounded theory strategies of purposeful sampling for participant recruitment, data collection and coding in data analysis were employed. The inquiry commenced with a pilot study which indicated a strong need to expand the scope of the study from counselling to wellbeing support due to the wider and deeper understanding of care in an Islamic context.

A total of 56 participants were interviewed from three cities with the largest Muslim populations in Australia: Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Fifteen of the participant-associated schools were independent Muslim schools while three schools were non-religious independent schools that implemented Islamic values in their school ethos and served a student body almost all of whom were Muslims.

Findings revealed a host of complex issues and ideals that participants in this study desired for their students’ holistic wellbeing. Variations in current practices in each school were as diverse as the communities themselves. Seven propositions were developed.

Proposition One is that some Muslim schools have been products of Muslims’ concerns over their future generations’ faith and economic mobility, and, that their operations reflect a certain mindset for success, which at times, have inadvertently compromised students’ holistic wellbeing.

Proposition Two is that school imams and counsellors are key stakeholders to raise their school community’s awareness and to facilitate acceptance of professional
and culturally appropriate counselling support for Muslim students, whereas school leaders have a responsibility over the holistic wellbeing of students including those with specific and special needs.

Proposition Three is that a reformation of student wellbeing services necessitates that schools align the categories of student wellbeing – assets, appraisals and actions – with a student-centred education focus.

Proposition Four is that Muslim schools considering adopting positive education are urged to understand the major philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam in how wellbeing is viewed.

Proposition Five is that a holistic approach to facilitate Muslim students’ wellbeing involves a three-directional connection from an Islamic perspective: vertically, inwardly and outwardly.

Proposition Six is that pedagogical implications for educators of Muslim students facilitating sustained wellbeing from an Islamic perspective should include: an outline appropriate for students’ developmental stages; specific pedagogical responsibilities, and, key operational practices.

Proposition Seven is that the prospect to improve student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is positive and timely in light of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises and thanks are due to Allah All-Mighty to Him I owe my existence.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman and Professor Marnie O’Neill. You have truly been a God-send to me throughout this journey. Your consistent, attentive and prompt feedback, professional guidance and warm encouragement are deeply appreciated.

To my participants, thank you for enriching my journey. It would not have been possible without your open and generous input. May Allah reward each and every one of you for sharing your experiences and perspectives on a topic that is close to all our hearts. In particular, to Aisyah, Amin, Govand, Imran, Iqra, Nabila, Nader, Nadia, Nur, Sarah, Ubaydah, Zubair and members of the Muslim communities, thank you. Your support and trust mean so much to me. If any positive outcome should eventuate from this work, know that your input had been invaluable.

To Dr. Elaine Chapman, your administrative support is much appreciated.

Special thanks to Ms Penny Vincent, for your exemplary work ethics. Your willingness to go the extra mile to ensure all my paper work is in its exact order and form at every stage of this journey has been extremely helpful.

To my enthusiastic cheering squad, Abdullah, Osama, Latifa and Sakina, may Allah reward you for keeping me positive and for entertaining my thinking out loud ramblings in good humour. Thank you for the many dinner celebrations I got out of you; even when most of the “little triumphs” were really excuses for me to shirk my kitchen duty.
I dedicate my effort to the One and Only, the Protector and Guide for having blessed me
with the company of those with the gentlest of souls:

Alliah, my big sister, who held my hand during my year of crisis as a pre-teen;
My husband and soul mate, Abdullah, for believing in me more than I myself; and,
Zalina and Samira as my trusted confidantes.

I ask You, my Lord, to grant them the ultimate wellbeing.
This journey would not have been possible had it not been for their counsel.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

- Purpose of Study 1
- Significance of the Study 2
- Research Methodology and Design 4
- Muslims in Australia 5
  - Muslims in Pre-colonial and Colonial Eras 5
  - Settlement of Muslims under the “White Australia” Policy 6
  - Post World War II Immigration 7
  - Directions for Immigration under the Howard Government 9
- Australian Muslim Demographics 12
- Muslim Schools in Australia 13
- Counselling in Australian Muslim Schools 14
- Ethics Considerations 15
- Overview of the Thesis Content 16

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

- Counselling at a Glance 17
- Diverse Issues in Multicultural Counselling 18
  - Multicultural Counselling 18
  - Cultural Sensitivity and Competence 19
  - Counselling Minority Groups 20
    - Individualism vs collectivism 20
    - Acculturation levels among minority populations and counselling 21
    - Spirituality/Religion and counselling 23
Counselling Muslims

Barriers to Seeking Help through Professional Counselling

Perceived incompatibility between Muslim and

Secular views

Stigma

Unfamiliarity with counselling

Psychology/Mental Health in Islam

Muslims’ contributions to Psychology

Muslims and Western Psychology

Illnesses attributed to Jinn and sorcery

Coping methods commonly used by Muslims

The Qur’an and Muslim wellbeing

Approaches to Counselling Muslims

Mental Health of Young People in the West

Young People and Mental Health

Young People’s Perspectives on Counselling

Wellbeing of Young Refugees

School Counselling and Wellbeing Support for Students

School Counselling

Pastoral Care

Values Education

Summary

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Philosophical Foundations

Interpretivist Paradigm

Symbolic Interactionism

Perspectival Study

Location of the Researcher

Research Design

Reflective Journal and Memoing

Appreciative Inquiry

Data Collection

Pilot Study

Semi-structured Interviews
CHAPTER 4 – CONTEXT OF STUDY: PARTICIPANTS
AND THEIR ASSOCIATED SCHOOLS

Part 1
Profile of Schools 62
Participants 63
Overview of Muslim Schools’ Student Counselling and
Wellbeing Support Services 65

Part 2

Muslim College 69
School background 69
Participants 70
Vignette 71

Mu’min College 74
School background 74
Participants 74
Vignette 75

Muhsin College 79
School background 79
Participants 80
Vignette 81

Summary 83
CHAPTER 5 – DISCOVERY: WHAT IS IN PRACTICE?

Part 1: Ethos of Care and Spiritual Wellbeing Support in Participant-associated Schools

Focus: Imparting Knowledge
Practice: Ritual Development
Support for Spiritual Wellbeing
Spiritual Support
Religious scholars
Islamic studies
Spiritual upliftment
Routines
Religious Pedagogy
Content
Time allocation
Pedagogy

Part 2: Academic Support in Participant-associated Schools
Provision of Information and Resources
Teacher Efficacy
Streaming
Academic Hyper-focus
Career and Pathway Bias

Part 3: Support for Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Participant-associated Schools
Extent of Student Needs at a Glance
Issues in Relation to Students’ Social and Emotional Wellbeing
School atmosphere
Isolation
Social skills
Muslim identity
The other side of the coin
Examples of support
Part 4: Counselling Services in Participant-associated Schools

School Communities’ Expectations and Attitudes toward Counselling

- Expectations
  - Behaviour management
  - Problem solving
  - Role confusion
  - Responses

- Attitudes
  - Resistance
  - Misconceptions
  - Value given to counselling

Examples of Issues for which Students Seek Counsel

Structure

- Staffing
- Access
  - Awareness
  - Confidentiality
  - Adequacy of service

Support for counsellors

- Collegial support
- Professional support

Summary

CHAPTER 6 – DREAM: WHAT’S THE IDEAL?

Focus 1: Ideals for Implementing Islamic Ethos of Care

- Goals
- Approach
  - Humanistic
  - Process focused
  - Modelling values

- Attitude
  - Positive
  - Happy
Focus 2: Ideals for Student Wellbeing Support 123
  Care 123
    Early intervention 123
    Specific student-centred care 123
    Duty of care 123
  Direction 124
    Values education 124
    Whole school 124
    Holistic 124
  Change 124
    Stigma of mental illness 124
    Target group 125
Focus 3: Culturally Appropriate Counselling Service 125
  Assurance of Confidentiality 125
  Minimum Power Distance 126
  Supply Meeting Demand 126
Focus 4: Roles, Qualities and Skills of a Culturally Appropriate Counsellor 127
  Counsellor’s Roles 127
    Direct support 127
    Indirect support 130
  Counsellor’s Qualities and Skills 131
    Essential 131
    Desired 134
Focus 5: Ideals for Smooth Transitioning 136
  Adjustments in High School 136
    Initial settlement 136
    Study skills 137
    Personal development 137
  Preparation for Life after High School 137
    Social and life skills 137
    Work experience 138
    Life as an Australian Muslim 138
    Acceptance by wider community 138
Summary 139
CHAPTER 7 – DESIGN: HOW CAN THE IDEALS BE ACHIEVED? 141

Focus 1: Design to Implement the Islamic Ethos of Care 141

Recognising 142
Concerned individuals 142
Empathic individuals 142
Willing individuals 142

Organising 143
Team work 143
System change 143

Utilising 143
Goodwill 143
Mobilising key players 144
Existing human resource 144

Focus 2: Design for Culturally Appropriate Student Wellbeing Support Service 144

Academic Wellbeing 145
General 145
Specific 147

Holistic Wellbeing Support 148
General 148
Specific 152

Whole School Approach 154
General 154
Specific 156

Focus 3: Design for Counsellor’s Job Description and Selection Criteria 157

Job Description 157
Role towards school community 157
Role towards students 158

Selection Criteria 158
Essential skills and qualities 159
Preferred skills and experiences 159

Focus 4: Design for Transitioning Support 160

Programs for Junior Secondary School Students 160
General programs 160
Specific programs 161
Programs for Senior High School Students 163
Cultures in context 163
Integration know-how 163
Civil rights and responsibilities 164
Health and safety 164
Leadership and peer support 164
Summary 165

CHAPTER 8 – DESTINY: THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS 167
Proposition One 168
Sub-proposition 1 168
Concern over Muslim children’s faith and values 169
Economic mobility 170
Sub-proposition 2 171
Mindset for education pathway 171
Student wellbeing 172
Proposition Two 173
Sub-proposition 1 174
Overcoming resistance 174
Key stakeholders 174
Sub-proposition 2 176
Support for adolescent students 176
Support for students’ special and specific needs 178
Proposition Three 179
Sub-proposition 1 179
Positive school environment 180
Parenting 180
Community education 180
Sub-proposition 2 181
Status of young people’s wellbeing 181
Student wellbeing and performance 182
Student Wellbeing Model (SWBM) 183
Brief review of student wellbeing in Muslim schools 184
Re-aligning Islamic education objective with Muslim school education

Proposition Four

Sub-proposition 1

Sub-proposition 2

Proposition Five

Sub-proposition 1

Source of guidance

Object for submission

Foundation of security

Sub-proposition 2

Awareness

Self-regulation

Individual purpose in life

Sub-proposition 3

Relationships

Responsibilities/Service

Acceptance

Proposition Six

Sub-proposition 1

Sub-proposition 2

Model practice

Foster meaning

Facilitate growth

Sub-proposition 3

Recognise

Nurture

Strive

Safe-guard

Proposition Seven

Sub-proposition 1:

Desire for change: think outside the square

Indications of readiness for change

Potential for change: think outside the square

Strength from within: faithful citizens
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Avenues of Recruitment with Indication of Participants’ Main Roles in their Associated School Communities 54
Table 2. Participants’ Multiple Roles in their School Communities 64
Table 3. Student Support Services in Participant-Associated Schools against the 2012 ICSEA Index and %LBOTE 68
Table 4. Participants and Their Association History with Muslim College 70
Table 5. Participants and Their Association History with Mu’min College 75
Table 6. Conceptualised Areas of Focus for a Culturally Appropriate Student Counselling and Wellbeing Support Service 145
Table 7. An Adapted Table from Soutter, O’Steen and Gilmore’s (2010) Student Wellbeing Conceptual Framework 183
Table 8. A Proposed Outline on Developing Muslim Students’ Wellbeing 202

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Theoretical proposition development flow chart 57
Figure 2. Roles and gender of participants 65
Figure 3. Representation of participants’ cultural backgrounds 65
Figure 4. Adequacy ratings for participant-associated schools’ counselling and wellbeing support service 66
Figure 5. Participants’ dream of wellbeing support for students in Muslim schools 140
Figure 6. Connection emphases for student age group 0-7 years 203
Figure 7. Connection emphases for student age group 7-14 years 203
Figure 8. Connection emphases for student age group 14 years and older 203
Figure 9. Proposed distribution of emphasis on wellbeing practice 210
CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

The study presented in this thesis aimed to develop understandings of issues involved for counselling services in Australian Muslim schools for students in secondary levels of schooling. The focus of the study was the school communities’ perspectives on issues related to the provision of a culturally appropriate school counselling program. A qualitative approach was used to address the central research question: What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling services in Australian Muslim schools? This introductory chapter includes a description of the purpose of the study, its significance, research methods used, followed by a contextual account of Muslims in Australia and an overview of Muslim schools in Australia, as well as counselling initiatives and programs in Australian Muslim schools. Ethics considerations of the research are addressed. This chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Purpose of the Study

This research aimed to develop understandings of the Australian Muslim community’s perspectives on school counselling with the objective of developing theory and principles of practice for a culturally appropriate counselling service in Australian Muslim secondary schools.

The researcher of this study hypothesised that the needs and especially delivery of counselling services to students in Muslim schools are unique due to the role religion plays in their lives and the influence of their ethnic culture in their decision making, as well as the policies and processes preferred by the school hierarchies. Varied interpretations of how Islam is practised among the school population could make the discourse of counselling in Muslim schools even more challenging. Moreover, the impact on Muslim youth of unrelenting waves of negativity over anything Muslim for two decades in the West was thought to add to its complexity. It was on these premises that the proposed study based its inquiry.

The researcher’s employment as a student support person in a Western Australian Muslim school in the early years of the 2000s provided her with some insight into issues that Muslim students from multicultural, multiethnic, newly arrived and second or third generation migrant backgrounds had to face. Lack of clarity in the role of the school counsellor was reflected in a job description with conflicting tasks of a disciplinary nature alongside guiding/advisory tasks. Throughout the period of her employment the researcher would often have to deal with situations of task overload
due to the vagueness in the role, often seen as highly flexible, superfluous and therefore ‘stretchable’ across the school timetable wherever and whenever the need arose.

Student issues presented during this period also reflected some underlying influences such as reluctance associated with seeking counsel from an outsider that the community held in general, as well as a lack of support from the school administration in particular. Eid (2008) urges Muslim schools to recruit school counsellors, as they can play an important role not only in providing advice and support to students, but also to “serve as a bridge between school, students and parents” (p. 237).

It appears that the role a school counsellor plays is also still evolving in other parts of the world outside Australia. In the United States, for instance, Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett and Yoon (2007) describe the impact of counsellors on immigrant students’ adjustment through counselling activities. This situation is further challenged by the proposed role expansion of counsellors in partnership with schools (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010) and the need to develop and implement programs to better “address the social, economic and other barriers that hinder students’ learning” (Steen & Noguera, 2010, p. 42). Low (2009) categorises and discusses challenges faced by school counsellors in the World to include internal, external, systemic and personal domains. The diverse interpretations of Islamic teachings that migrant Muslims in the West subscribe to, and how these interpretations affect the way they practice and interact with the wider communities, make clarification of the role counsellors play in Muslim schools essential.

The researcher in this study also postulated that the counsellors in Muslim schools had an important role to play in supporting students to make transitions from a Muslim school environment to the wider community. One way to do this might be through a range of cross-cultural activities held during and after school in collaboration with teachers, chaplains or counsellors of independent and public schools. Due to a lack of literature addressing this topic, the researcher considered this study as an opportunity to gain better understandings of how counselling services were viewed and delivered in Muslim schools across a number of states in Australia. It was anticipated that this study had the potential to make a significant contribution to knowledge as elaborated in the following section of this chapter.

Significance of the Study

Dei, James, Karumanchery and James-Wilson (as cited in Zine, 2001) warn of disengagement from schooling among many marginalised minority youth. The hostile situations in which Muslims have found themselves in the West in the recent decades
(Ata & Windle, 2007; Kabir, 2006; Poynting & Noble, 2004; Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008) call for urgent attention by those who have Muslim children in their care. Since the September 11 incident, a media and politics induced “conflation of negative images with anything Muslim had equally affected the educated and the uneducated, English speaking and Arabic speaking, wealthy and employed alike” (Ihram, 2009). Effects of negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam (Williams, 2005; Zine, 2001) on Muslim children, and the notion of Muslim schools being seen by some as the breeding ground for terrorists necessitate explorations in counselling services as part of a holistic approach in supporting students in Australian Muslim schools.

Studies have indicated the non-homogenous nature of Muslims in Australia (Chelebi, 2008; Duderija, 2007; Kabir, 2006; Yasmeen, 2008). Similar descriptions of Muslim identities are also found in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada (Ansari, 2002; Horwedel, 2006; Kobeisy, 2001; Zine, 2001). Depending on the demographics of student population, Muslim schools in Australia may or may not have one dominant culture, despite their common religious orientation. The cultural backgrounds of students in Australian Muslim schools are as varied as, if not more than, in any other school with a student population from ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ (CALD) backgrounds.

Rahmani (as cited in Eid, 2008) reported that Muslim schools were the fastest growing private schools with a religious affiliation in Australia as was reflected in a growth rate of 300% between 1993 and 2002, followed by Christian schools with a growth rate of 150% over the same period. With a history of three decades since the first Australian Muslim schools were established in 1983 (Chelebi, 2008), Muslim schools as a whole are still developing in every aspect of their establishment. Australian Muslim schools represent a microcosm of diversity, including but not limited to the varied religious interpretations interwoven with ethnic cultures within their school communities. Therefore the delivery of counselling services to students in Muslim schools could be equally as complex as the makeup of their respective student demographics.

It order to gain a better understanding of the topic in focus, a study of the perspectives of stakeholders on counselling services in Muslim schools using qualitative research methods was essential. These perspectives could provide valuable information on how the services were viewed, delivered and utilised, which in turn could affect the quality and appropriateness of student support in Muslim schools. Despite its importance, hardly any study has been conducted in this area. This research would
make an original and significant contribution to academia, educators and carers of Muslim students by providing informative material on counselling services to better support their students’ social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing within a culturally and religiously appropriate context.

The next section outlines the research design and methodology employed for this study, followed by contextual information constituting Muslims in Australia.

**Research Methodology and Design**

A lack of literature on counselling in Muslim schools in a Western context warrants the use of qualitative research methods to gain a more in-depth and contextual understanding of this topic. The proposed research was located within a qualitative Interpretivist paradigm (O'Donoghue, 2007), in the form of a perspectival study to address the central research question: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling services in Australian Muslim schools?* Appreciative Inquiry’s (AI) 4-D (Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny) approach (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) was adopted to guide the key interview questions. Grounded Theory strategies of purposeful sampling for participant recruitment, data collection and coding in data analysis were employed until theoretical saturation was achieved. The same AI’s 4-D structure was again used to present the analytical findings in this thesis.

This study involved stakeholders of counselling services in secondary Muslim school communities from New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. Close to 90% of Muslims in Australia reside in major cities in these three states (Matthews, 2007). For organisational purposes, stakeholders were differentiated in terms of their positions as professional providers, consumers and interested stakeholders.

Semi-structured interview questions were directed by guiding questions initially developed from the researcher’s memos on personal reflections with references to literature on multicultural counselling, relevant research pertaining to Muslims, mental health of young people and school counselling. Interview questions were tested for their appropriateness in a pilot study in Western Australia before data collection took place in other states. Participants were sampled for diversity to reflect the varied composition of Muslim communities in Australia. Diversity in size of schools, participants’ ethnic backgrounds, gender and their involvement in support services were some of the sampling considerations. Interviews were conducted individually or in small groups for approximately 90 minutes per session. The discussions were recorded on a digital note-taker with participants’ written consent (for those under 16 years of age, parental consent was also obtained), then transcribed and analysed using grounded
theory coding strategies and memoing to generate themes and concepts for the
development of theory.

To establish the context for this thesis, some background information on
Muslims in Australia is presented in the following section. This includes Muslims in
Australian history up to the end of the White Australia Policy followed by immigration
policy shifts from the colonial era to the development of multiculturalism in Australia.
This is followed by a brief account of the Australian government’s responses to global
events affecting Muslims in the recent decades and reports of the public’s attitude
towards Muslims in Australia. Current demographics of Muslims in Australia along
with a bird’s eye view of Australian Muslim schools are then exhibited. Illustrations of
ethical considerations of the research and an overview of the remaining chapters of the
study conclude this chapter.

Muslims in Australia

Muslims in Pre-colonial and Colonial Eras

Jakubowicz (2003), in his address at the Federation of Ethnic Community
Councils of Australia’s Annual Conference, describes Australia’s multiculturalism as a
continuing process to be viewed from its historical roots. According to Jakubowicz,
since its invasion in the late 1700s, Australia has been governed by politicians driven by
a need “to defend the land, taken by force from its Indigenous owners, against other
governments or cultural groups that might contest their taking, and ... to control both the
Indigenous people and new arrivals internally to ensure a continuing cultural, social and
economic order” (2003, p. 1).

A brief look at Australian history sets the scene to the background, atmosphere
and attitudes encountered by migrants. The focus here is on Muslim migrants.
Evidence of interactions between Muslims and Indigenous Australians dates back as
early as the 1600s from effects of Macassar Muslims from southern Sulawesi found in
the Marege area along coastlines east and west of Darwin (Stevens, 1989). Arnhem
Land1 Aborigines referred to this period of contact with the Macassar Muslims as the
Golden Age in comparison to the European settlement in later years (Cleland, 2002).
On this note, Worsely writes, “The contrast is plainly between the generosity and
democracy of the Macassarese and the parsimony and colour bar of the Whites” (as
cited in Cleland, 2002, p. 8). Letters written in the mid 1700s provide more reliable
evidence that these two groups of people were engaged in the trepang (sea urchin) trade.

---

1 Arnhem Land: Aboriginal Land, covering 97 000 square kilometers of the north-eastern corner of the
Northern Territory. Retrieved 17 May, 2007 from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnhem_Land
In the Census of 1828 in Australia a number of convicts and settlers known as Mohammedans (as Muslims were called at the time) were noted; convicts from India, Bengal, Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Mauritius and South Africa arriving in Australia between 1791 and 1830s were also noted (Kabir, 2004). Apart from some who perished under the inhumane penal regimes, those who gained freedom after serving their penalty left no traceable records of their Muslim identity. It was thought that they might have changed their names, returned home or assimilated into the community (Cleland, 2002).

The first Afghan cameleers arrived in South Australia in 1830. Official migration of Muslims began in the 1860s. The first mosque was built in 1861 in Marree, South Australia. It is estimated that 2000 to 4000 Afghans were brought to Australia over this period, initially for the sheep industry, but later as labourers in banana plantations and mining sites; others traded with farmers in the outback (Johns & Saeed, 2002). These men and their camels provided an indispensable lifeline between the developing settlements across the continent (Kabir, 2004). Some of their most significant contributions were the rail link between Port Augusta and Alice Springs and the overland telegraph line between Adelaide and Darwin that connected settlers in the east and south coastal regions to England through India (DFAT, 2008), yet they remained a marginalised group (Johns & Saeed, 2002). The camel service lost its appeal following the introduction of mechanised transport in the late nineteenth century and many Afghans returned to their homeland. The majority of the remainder lost their Islamic identity to a mainstream white Anglo-Celtic society. Surviving them were the camels, mosques, and in some instances, their names (Cleland, 2002).

In the late 1800s, Malay pearl divers and Asian workers received slightly more lenient treatment to work in Australia for the survival of the pearling and fishery industries (Kabir, 2006). In 1890 the first large mosque was built in South Australia.

Settlement of Muslims under the “White Australia” Policy

The Australian Federation in 1901 further discriminated against coloured, non-European immigrants from settlement through naturalisation. Under the Immigration Restriction Act since 1901, more commonly known as the White Australia Policy, few Muslims were permitted to enter Australia. Lebanese immigrants, among them Muslims (who earlier identified themselves as Syrians when they began to arrive in 1870 and 1880s), despite passing the infamous dictation test to immigrate to Australia were denied rights to apply for Australian citizenship (Mansouri, 2005). Between 1920

---

2 A policy aimed at developing a homogenous Australia made up of Britons and Europeans of an Anglo-Celtic tradition (Johns & Saeed, 2002, p. 196).
and 1930 small numbers of Albanian Muslims were granted entry due to their European origins, to work on sugar cane farms and fruit farms in Northern Queensland and Victoria respectively.

Initially in the 1940s, small numbers of European Muslims, mostly from Turkey, migrated to Australia. This was followed by the Colombo Plan in the 1950s that brought students from South East Asia into Australia, many of whom were Muslims. Since 1966 Australian immigration opened to skilled and highly qualified non-Europeans. Muslims from Europe, especially immigrants from Turkey, followed by Kosovars and Bosnians, migrated to Australia to meet the demands of the country’s booming economy during this period (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1995). This prepared the ground for the rapid changes that shaped the multicultural Australia made up of people from diverse racial, language and religious backgrounds of today.

In a nutshell, the governance of Australia since the invasion of the continent in 1788 until World War II can be described as essentially British and discriminatory against coloured races, including the Australian Indigenous people. The continent was governed as separate states until 1829 (Multiculturalaustralia, n.d.) when it was declared British Colony Territory as a whole. Workers from non-Anglo backgrounds were only recruited for their labour. Most of the men had to leave their families behind only to be reunited upon their return years after completion of their work in Australia. Since Australian Federation in 1901, a dictation test was introduced which was used to implicitly exclude immigrants from entering Australia on the basis of race.

**Post World War II Immigration**

Australia’s narrow escape from Japanese invasion during World War II brought politicians to the realisation that Australia’s existence depended on a choice between “populate or perish”. Arthur Calwell, the then Minister for Immigration said, “...we cannot hold our island continent to ourselves and our descendents unless we greatly increase our numbers...” (Zubrzycki, 1995). The need to strengthen within and engage with the rest of the world resulted in gradual modifications to the intended mono-cultural immigration policy over the next 25 years (Johns & Saeed, 2002).

Gradual changes to immigration policies regarding coloured immigrants until the demise of the White Australia Policy in 1973 began with easing the conditions for people of non-British backgrounds to settle permanently then moving to accepting non-White migrants with skills or on humanitarian grounds as citizens.
Granting entry to non-Anglo immigrants also led to debates among Australian politicians and the general public between ideas of assisting immigrants to assimilate and respecting immigrants’ rights to express their ethnic identities in the late 1970s right through to the 1980s. The United Nations Educations, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) declaration in 1978 of its commitment “to contribute to universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the people of the world” (UNESCO, 1982, p. 1) had influenced to some extent the emergence and evolution of a multicultural Australia. The Galbally Report produced by the Fraser government was aimed at ensuring equal access and adequate support for immigrant communities to integrate into the wider society based on four guiding principles of: equal opportunity for all Australians; respect for people’s rights to maintain their cultures; special services to facilitate migrants’ access to services for all Australians; and, consultations with clients to facilitate self-reliance (Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, 1982). In a policy discussion paper entitled *Multiculturalism for All Australians* presented by the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, multiculturalism intended for “all Australians to accept and appreciate diversity as a normal fact of communal life and, within the necessity to maintain social cohesion, all people would be free to express their cultural identities” (Zubrzycki, 1982, p. 1).

At around the same time, the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr. MacPhee invited the public to express their opinions on the proposed changes to the Citizenship Act (Zubrzycki, 1982). This public consultation brought to the surface a range of viewpoints. Among them a vocal, well-organised, albeit minority group demanded a racially discriminatory migrant entry policy motivated by reasons of “religious belief, economic/employment factors, overt racism and a fear of change and of the unknown” (Zubrzycki, 1982, p. 3). There was also a strong expression of the public’s desire “for Australia to be, and to be seen as, an independent entity” (Zubrzycki, 1982, p. 5), distinct from the British subject status.

Despite Australia’s underlying discriminatory attitude towards non-Europeans since the White settlement, up until this point, Muslims had not been more disadvantaged nor considered any more alien than other “aliens” from Italy or China, for example (Kabir, 2006, p. 196). In the decades leading up to and after the turn of the Millennium, especially since the 9/11 bombings in the US, Muslims around the world had to encounter a great many challenges from the backlash of governments, media and global responses to terrorist attacks linked to Muslims.
Directions for Immigration under the Howard Government

A description of factors influencing the Howard government’s foreign affairs and immigration policies since the mid-1990s states:

During the early years of Howard's government, foreign affairs and immigration policies were influenced by events such as the arrival of immigrants and asylum seekers by boat, communal violence in Indonesia and Malaysia, the continuing warfare in the Balkans following the collapse of the former Communist state of Yugoslavia, the vote for independence in east Timor and attempts to find a peaceful solution to the troubles of Northern Ireland. (National Museum of Australia, n.d., 7th bullet point under 3rd heading Prime Minister John Howard)

Towards the end of the 1990s, the term “Australian Multiculturalism”, underscoring the adjective “Australian”, shifted the focus from celebrating and supporting diversity to highlighting the “critical role of social cohesion, and allegiance and responsibility to Australia” (Jakubowicz, 2003, p. 6).

Since the turn of the 21st century, a series of international terror events in various parts of the Western world would change the lives of many individuals, but collectively, of the Muslims in the West, including Australia. Beginning with bombings on September 11, 2001 in the US, followed by Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, Madrid, Beslan and London in the subsequent years, these events fed into an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim prejudice not present during the White Australia era (Kabir, 2006). Headlines in the media and manipulation of language by politicians associating Middle Easterners with Muslims, Muslims with illegal immigrants, extremists, terrorists and so forth contributed to “Islam has become the criterion for discrimination for some Muslims” (Kabir, 2006, p. 219).

Prime Minister Howard’s internalisation of the September 11 bombing in the United States was evident in his interpretation of what this event meant to Australia. From one whose focus was primarily on his pragmatic approach to the nation’s domestic affairs prior to becoming the prime minister, John Howard turned into “one of the strongest advocates of the ‘War on Terror’” since September 11 (Michael, 2009, p. 46). Howard’s view that this event was a “rare moment when ‘evil’ challenged the human decency of Western democracy” (Michael, 2009, p. 47) was believed to have “underlined all [his] subsequent internal and external policies and pronouncements” (Michael, 2009, p. 47). The Liberal party’s victory in the 2001 election at the brink of its impending defeat reflected the existence of a dormant dissension over policies that had embraced multiculturalism over the previous 30 years.
Between 2001 and 2005, the Australian government proceeded to strengthen measures on counter-terrorism and pushed for legislative regimes to ensure higher security for Australians, first within Australia, then for Australians abroad. During this period, the Jamiah Islamiyah's link to Bali bomb attacks in 2002 alerted the Australian government to focus on the threat of domestic terrorism (Michael, 2009). The government's attempt at passing a new anti-terrorism legislation to counter terrorism offences was met with oppositions from civil libertarians, the opposition and minor parties, state and territory governments. This resulted in the original legislation undergoing significant amendments by a Senate committee for inquiry and was passed as the Anti-Terrorism Act in December 2005 (Michael, 2009).

According to Michael (2009), “The elusiveness of identifying an ‘enemy’ in the ‘War on Terror’ ... has resulted in a widespread perception that the ‘enemy’ is the ‘other’, and that this ‘other’ is Muslim” (p. 62). Australian Muslims regarded in this light were forced to come forward to engage with the wider community on the one hand, and on the other hand for some, particularly young Muslims from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with associated identity issues, this situation only increased their sense of insecurity (Michael, 2009).

This political climate of “us and them” led to a perceived mutual exclusivity of values through a conjured fear associated with ignorance over Shari’a law as being incompatible with Western democracy and human rights. In reality, the extent to which Muslims living in a non-Muslim country are to abide by the law of the land and to live by Shari’a is a judicial issue discussed and carefully deliberated among Islamic scholars due to the many contextual variables involved in each case. Abdalla (2012), in examining traditional and contemporary jurists’ viewpoints regarding the differing contexts of democratic societies, argues that “contrary to the fear-mongering discourse propagated by media and politicians, the application of Islamic law in Australia is limited to personal status law only” (p. 676). Acknowledging Islam’s model of multiculturalism and multi-faith civilisations that embedded all manner of human rights and social justice into its own laws in the early Middle Ages, Lovat ((2006) calls for a religious education that breaks the cycle of negative stereotypes of beliefs and interpretations by modern Islamic scholarship, and instead “supplanting them with beliefs based on scriptural and historical evidence” (p. 52).

In his attempt to address the concern of home grown terrorism, Howard set out to consult members of the Muslim community with the central objective of eliciting their loyalty to Australia and Australian values and institutions, and to denounce
terrorism. This resulted in the formation of the Muslim Community Reference Group in September 2005. Strategies born out of consultations with the Muslim Community Reference Group by the government left a distinction between “the ‘moderates’ and the ‘extremists’” (Michael, 2009, p. 61), singling out Muslims further as the ‘other’. Chris Sidoti, former Human Rights and Equal Opportunities commissioner, warned that leaders from major Australian political parties were “turning us into a nation of thugs” (Mansouri, 2005, p. 157). Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser condemned those political leaders for departing from the principles of liberty, using fear and deception to justify ASIO’s anti-terror laws and Australia’s support in attacking Iraq (Fraser, 2005). Frow (2007) urged Australians to judge critically over this double bind un-Australian reality. Michael (2009) suggests that “the whole anti-terrorism discourse is fraught with social and political ramifications for Australian Muslims.... fraught with uncertainties and damaging implications.” (p. 61).

Howard’s preference for “loyalty to Australia” (Bennett & Tait, 2008, p. 79) was extended to all immigrants to Australia as was evident in the introduction of the Citizenship test in October 2007. Since October 2009 a revised Citizenship test was made compulsory for all applicants of citizenship between the ages of 18 and 60 with few exceptions.

Criminal acts by the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria in 2014 prompted the Abbot government to react in the perceived exaggerated raids of homes for suspected terror links (Om, 2014), followed by a push for expanding ASIO’s power to tighten national security through the Counter-Terror Foreign Fighters Legislation Amendment Bill (Bacon, 2014). Lawyers, rights groups, academics and Australian media organisations have condemned the proposed extraordinary power ASIO will have for fear of it breaching civil and human rights (Grubb, 2014). Voting against the Bill, the Australian Greens party condemned the new measures as extreme and an incessant extension of power (Grubb, 2014). A parliamentary joint committee on Human Rights, including Coalition, Labor and Greens senators raised concerns over sections of the Bill’s overly generalised statements that had the potential for violating human rights and recommended further scrutiny before becoming law. Senator Wright, one of very few dissenting voices in the Senate, comments that “this is a failure to uphold and protect some of the most dearly held tenets of the democracy that we cherish.... This is irresponsible and antidemocratic.” (Bacon, 2014). Despite the opposition, the Bill passed both Houses on 30 October 2014 (Australian Parliament House, 2014).
From the harmonious and peaceful interactions with the Indigenous Australians in the 16th century, to the anti-Islam, anti-Muslim phenomenon since the new Millennium, relationships between Muslims and fellow Australians have never been more precarious. Muslims during the era of the White Australia Policy were equally unwelcomed as other coloured immigrants. Three decades following the Second World War had seen Australia’s population mosaic take on an unprecedented shift to a multicultural, multiracial nation that recognised the need to embrace differences in the common goal of the country’s prosperity and participation internationally. Large groups of immigrants came to settle in Australia, including Muslims from over 180 countries. A series of global terrorist events linked with Muslims since the beginning of the 21st century shook the Australian politicians in power. Residual feelings resurfaced during the 11 long years of the coalition government from segments of the Australian population who begrudged the notion of multiculturalism promoted by the Hawke and Keating governments. These resistant attitudes brought about another shift in immigration policies which affected the fate of asylum seekers, many of whom were Muslims from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran.

The various policy changes to Australian immigration and enforcement of anti-terrorism legislations briefly outlined so far are introduced to provide a useful context for studies related to Australian Muslims. It is this mixed atmosphere of hostility, suspicion, sympathy and support that migrant Muslims in Australia ought to consider when attempting to integrate into the Australian society without compromising the integrity of their faith. Australian Muslim schools in their efforts to dissociate from being suspected as breeding grounds for home grown terrorists have developed a Muslim Schools’ Charter affirming their commitment to promote peace and pledging their loyalty to Australia (AISNSW, 2005). Hewer (2001), in supporting state-funded Muslim schools in Britain to produce “young people who are fully affirmed and at ease in their religious and cultural identity” argues that, “they [Muslim religious educators] are producing integrated individuals who can take their place in wider society from a position of personal strength and confidence” (p. 525). Hewer’s view echoes the intent behind this study to examine perspectives of the school communities on how well Muslim schools are supporting their students in an Australian context.

**Australian Muslim Demographics**

This section presents broad demographic figures on Australian Muslims followed by a brief sketch of Australian Muslim schools.
In the 2011 Australian Census figures, there were 476,300 Muslims in Australia, with approximately 38.5% of Muslims born in Australia (ABS, 2013). Demographics of Australian Muslims have shown few changes between 2006 and 2011 Census figures. The main countries of origin include Turkey, Lebanon aside, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Indonesia (DFAT, 2008).

A little over 50% of Australian Muslims reside in New South Wales, close to 32% live in Victoria, and approximately 6.9% live in Western Australia (Matthews, 2007). Of significant interest to the present study, is the 48.9% Muslims in Australia who are under the age of 25 years (Matthews, 2007). Among the multitude of challenges faced by Muslims in Australia, the importance of dealing with issues concerning the effectiveness of Muslim youths’ integration, and the preservation of their religion cannot be overemphasised. Many Muslim children of refugee backgrounds are enrolled in Muslim schools and colleges. Needless to say these students require wide ranging assistance from learning a new language to adapting to a new life in a foreign country. Students who have witnessed torture and loss in their war torn countries may find it impossible to learn if left without receiving professional help. How Muslim schools address these issues is of great interest to this study.

**Muslim Schools in Australia**

Since the establishment of the first Australian Islamic schools in 1983 (Chelebi, 2008), the number of Islamic schools in Australia has increased more than tenfold according to the Islamic Schools Association of Australia (ISSA, 2012). The rapid growth of Muslim schools is a response to the demand for education institutions that cater for the needs of the young Muslim population in Australia. Preston (as cited in Eid, 2008) reported that Muslim schools in major cities around Australia catered for 15,874 students in 2007. However, 81% of primary and 87% of secondary Muslim students remain in non-Islamic schools (Eid, 2008). Reasons for Muslim parents’ schooling choices for their children vary depending on the social, educational and political contexts.

Islamic schools are non-government, faith-based schools that offer hybrid curricula, inclusive of a curriculum as set out by the Curriculum Council of each state, as well as additional Islamic studies and Arabic Language learning areas (Chelebi, 2008). There are currently 35 Muslim schools across Australia. New South Wales being the state with the highest Muslim population accounts for 19 Muslim schools, followed by nine in Victoria, three in Western Australia, two in Queensland, and one
each in South Australia and the Australia Capital Territory (ISSA, 2012). Currently there are no known Muslim schools in the Northern Territory or Tasmania.

While some schools are registered only as providers of primary schooling, most schools have developed secondary levels up to year 12 with some of the newer schools projected to expand to year 12 in the near future. Teachers in Islamic schools come from various backgrounds. In New South Wales, about half of the teachers in Muslim schools are Muslims (AISNSW, 2005).

Most schools are co-ed with the exception of a few schools, for example, Al Zahra College (Al-Zahra College, 2011) in New South Wales and two campuses of the Australian Islamic College in Western Australia, where only girls are currently enrolled in their secondary levels. Not all schools practice segregation between boys and girls in their secondary education. Those that implement segregation differ in their practices. Some offer single sex classes from upper primary or junior secondary levels; others offer partial segregation in seating arrangements within the same class. According to Instruction to become mindful of modesty in conduct starts from childhood in Islam (Al-Munajjid, n.d.). Preference for segregation stems from the principle of guarding one’s modesty with the objective of protecting the family unit through a range of measures leaving little room for any course of action which has even the slightest potential that will lead to jeopardising the sanctity of marriage (Al-Kawtharî, 2005). Interpretation and degrees of strictness in practices of modesty vary from culture to culture among Muslims. Preference for segregation is one measure among others introduced around the age of puberty in many Muslim communities.

**Counselling in Australian Muslim schools**

One of the 12 recommendations made by Eid (2008) highlights the need for Muslim schools to recruit counsellors in order to provide students with appropriate advice and help. This recommendation resonates with the author of this thesis in her belief that adequate support in developing students’ emotional and social competence in school enhances student wellbeing, resulting in improved behaviour that contributes positively to their learning (De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007). Furthermore, Hearn, Campbell-Pope, House and Cross (2006) mention that students are in need of developing resilience not only to cope with or overcome risks but also to develop “competence and protective factors” (p. 16) essential for managing the challenges they will face in life. The importance of resilience cannot be overemphasised for Muslim students especially when making the transition from a protective community school
environment to engaging with the diverse attitudes towards Muslims in the wider community through employment or further studies post compulsory schooling.

Government and non-government initiatives and programs are currently available for the promotion, prevention, and early intervention of mental health and wellbeing of students in Australian secondary schools. A greater demand for the “wellbeing, values and spirituality of young people” is evident in the voluntary National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) by the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (DEEWR, 2011a) put in place since 2007 to fund Australian public, Catholic and independent schools to establish or enhance existing chaplaincy or pastoral care programs (DEEWR, 2011a). This initiative has been met with positive feedback from key stakeholders in a discussion paper from a national consultation released in February 2011 (DEEWR, 2011b) at the end of the first round funding period. The role of the school chaplain includes but is not limited to pastoral care and spiritual guidance. The NSCP discussion paper lists the valuable roles the school chaplains play in terms of their support not only to students and teachers, but also in liaising with and giving support to the school community, namely parents, their community networks and to the community at large in their interfaith and intercultural roles (DEEWR, 2011a). A number of Muslim schools in the Eastern States have been listed as recipients of the NSCP funding (DEEWR, 2011a).

**Ethics Considerations**

Ethical issues were carefully considered during this research. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Western Australia granted approval to the considerations regarding research methods and approach to be adopted for this study. These considerations were demonstrated in the documents for obtaining consent, information sheets to access schools, stakeholders, including non-participating guardians to stakeholders under the age of 18 years complete with explanation of the safe-keeping of the data including audio recordings (see Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4).

The researcher had a keen awareness of what was considered culturally appropriate from an Islamic perspective being a member of the Muslim community in Australia as had been demonstrated in her previous research for her Master in Education on Muslim parenting issues. A detailed account of the ethical considerations will be presented in chapter three where descriptions of research methods and design are described.
Overview of the Thesis Content

This thesis is presented in nine chapters. This chapter introduced the research topic of the study, its significance, a short account of the research methods employed followed by the contextual background of the site and participants studied. Chapter Two is a literature review on discussions and research relevant to the topic at hand. Chapter Three describes the methodology and design employed with a detailed report on ethics considered for this study. Chapter Four consists of two parts: Part One presents a profile on the participant-associated schools and background of the participants, as well as an overview of the student counselling and wellbeing support services; and, Part Two presents vignettes of three schools to illustrate the range of services offered by the participant-associated schools. Appreciative Inquiry’s 4-D principle, Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny was adopted in the sequence and structure of data presentation and analysis for Chapters Five through to Chapter Eight. Chapter Five-Discovery, organised in three parts, features participants’ perspectives on the ethos of care in Islam, support for spiritual and academic wellbeing in Muslim schools and social and emotional support through counselling services respectively. Chapter Six-Dream presents participants’ ideas on what they dream to see happening in the areas of counselling and wellbeing support services in Muslim schools in five specific areas: (a) implementation of the Islamic ethos of care; (b) best wellbeing support; (c) culturally appropriate counselling; (d) the role and quality of counsellors in Muslim schools; and, (e) helping students with transitioning. Chapter Seven-Design builds on Chapter Six offering suggestions and measures proposed by participants to design their ideal counselling and wellbeing support service for Muslim schools. Drawing on emergent themes from the preceding chapters, seven theoretical propositions addressing what ‘is’, what ‘can be’ of counselling and wellbeing support services in Australian Muslim schools are presented in Chapter Eight-Destiny. Chapter Nine concludes this thesis with a summary of the findings, addressing the significance, implications and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review on the discourse of counselling with the aim to inform and guide the study. The sizeable body of literature on counselling indicates that counselling, despite its relatively short history as a profession, has rapidly weathered on-going discussions on the perceptions and definitions of what it should encompass, and as a result of these perceptions, its existence or lack of it, is found to differ from culture to culture, and from one country to another. The discourse of counselling covers a wide range of topics from directions and foci of counsellor training, to examination of its efficacy using different approaches, to models and theories aimed at accommodating cultural differences, to counselling in diverse settings, such as medical and allied health or education, to name a few. Due to the diverse background of Muslims in Australia, literature dealing with multicultural counselling and Muslims’ perceptions of counselling in the West had been selected for review. Attention had been given to contributions made by early Muslim philosophers between the 8th and 14th centuries towards human psychology and strategies of coping with emotional, spiritual and mental health issues. Literature addressing counselling students in Muslim secondary schools in a Western context (Australia) is scarce. For the benefit of this study, literature pertaining to counselling young people and in educational settings had been included in this review. This chapter begins with a general overview of counselling under the heading of Counselling at a Glance, followed by literature organised and presented under four main headings: Diverse Issues in Multicultural Counselling, Counselling Muslims, Mental Health of Young People in the West, and Counselling and Wellbeing Support for Students. Subheadings under each main heading will be introduced as the chapter unfolds.

Counselling at a Glance

Lambert (2008, p. 251) describes counselling as a systematic, solution-based approach to help individuals resolve or improve their situations using families or intermediaries. Counselling is widely used in numerous settings, such as in medical and allied health services, as well as in other settings including workplace and education settings, such as in schools and universities. The Australian Correspondence Schools (ACS, n.d.) offer a “simple” definition of counselling:

... counselling is a working relationship where the client is helped to manage what is happening in their life and to explore their life. It is a form of psychological or talking therapy that offers people the ability to change how they live and feel. The aim of counselling is to provide the client with a more
satisfying experience of life. Everyone has different needs, so counselling can be concerned with many different aspects of a person’s life…. The scope and nature of counselling keeps changing.

A review of the existing literature reveals a wide range of issues being explored, discussed and studied within the discourse of counselling by researchers and practitioners. Some of these issues include examining the expanding role of counsellors in today’s societies (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000), the need for developing cultural awareness and competence of counsellors in the face of increasing global human movements across cultures and continents (Lambert, 2008; S. Sue, 1998), and challenges to counsellors’ skills in dealing with clients affected by impacts of wars and natural disasters, and in turn how these experiences affect the victims’ acculturation processes in host countries (Ahammed, 2010; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Some research is concerned with the need to consider spirituality, beliefs and worldviews such as that of Muslim clients (Ansary & Salloum, 2012; Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012; Fischer, Ai, Aydin, Frey, & Haslam, 2010), and the need to address the increasing demand for counselling services for young people against alarming statistics of youth mental health issues such as depression, violence and suicide (Ahmed & Amer, 2012; Cairns, Massfeller, & Deeth, 2010; Glasheen & Campbell, 2008). While counselling is constantly undergoing evolution as a profession (Goh et al., 2007; Low, 2009), it remains not a well-known concept among some populations of the world, as observed in studies of immigrants of Middle Eastern and Asian descent (Kobeisy, 2001; Lambert, 2008; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003), for instance. In the following section, a number of diverse issues in multicultural counselling are presented.

Diverse Issues in Multicultural Counselling

This section explores literature that deals with the development of multicultural counselling, cultural sensitivity and cultural competency in counselling clients of diverse cultural backgrounds and counselling minority groups.

Multicultural Counselling

Gerstein, Rountree and Ordonez (2007) examine a number of multicultural theories that have been developing over the past three decades. A definition of multicultural counselling and therapy (MCT) by Ivey (as cited in Gerstein et al., 2007, p. 384) states that it is “a frame concerned with counselling and psychotherapy as liberation – the viewing of self in relation to others and to social and cultural context”. A lack of awareness of the differences in worldviews between the client and the
therapist may result in misjudgement of client’s responses and ineffective therapy outcomes (Gerstein et al., 2007).

The evolution of multicultural counselling has brought about two major trends in this field: one focuses on training counsellors for multicultural competency, and the other with a focused orientation on the particularity of specific cultural groups (Gerstein et al., 2007). The latter trend is based on the assumption that a universal approach to multicultural counselling may still alienate certain critical cultural groups (Gerstein et al., 2007). Torrey (as cited in Ponterotto & Benesch, 1988) proposes five overarching principles of successful cross-cultural counselling. These are: (a) identification of problem; (b) qualities (personal) of the counsellor; (c) client expectation met; (d) perceived credibility of counsellor; and (e) techniques applied to relieve a client of his/her sufferings. Cultural variations can be expected within each principle. Elements within each principle may also vary depending on the level of acculturation of the individual with the dominant culture. Ponterotto and Benesch (1988) comment on Torrey’s principles, saying that “although the five counseling principles of Torrey (1972) may transcend all races and ethnicities in helping encounters, culture-specific knowledge is needed to accurately conceptualise and understand the client’s ‘place’ in each stage” (p. 239). The culture-specificity and professional competence in counselling is presented in the next sub-section.

**Cultural Sensitivity and Competence**

Researchers in the 1970s (D. W. Sue, 1978; D. W. Sue & Sue, 1977) began linking resistance to seeking help from mental health and psychological professionals among minority populations with counsellors’ cultural awareness and competence (Lambert, 2008). Sue and Sue (1977) define culture to include the ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which each member of society is born (p. 424). Sue (1998) points out that “the lack of rigorous research examining the efficacy of treatment for any ethnic minority population does not mean they have less mental health issues” (p. 441).

In 1991 a systematic study was carried out to appraise the characteristics of cultural competence based on thousands of African American, Asian American, Mexican American and White clients seen in the Los Angeles County mental health services (Sue, 1998). Among the many facets studied, Sue (1998) examined the effects of “cultural match” on counselling session attendance, dropout rates and treatment outcomes (p. 441). Ethnic match, service match and cognitive match have been found
to positively affect counselling attendance and treatment outcomes and lower dropout rates (Sue, 1998).

Since then much work has been dedicated to addressing cultural issues as a result of the ever changing population demography in the West. The American Psychological Association (APA), for instance, has emphasised cultural competence training for mental health service providers working with minority clients for decades (Ansari, 2002). Resources providing guidelines for similar purposes can also be found in the United States Department of Health and Human Services (Ansary & Salloum, 2012) and the U.K. (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010).

**Counselling Minority Groups**

Literature focusing on specific groups, namely immigrants, international students and refugees relevant to the attributes of the Muslim student population being studied in this research was identified for review. This section deals with issues such as individualistic and collectivistic worldviews, minority populations’ acculturation levels and counselling, and the place of spirituality and religion in counselling minority groups.

**Individualism vs collectivism.** In the 1980s concepts of individualism and collectivism in the field of cross-cultural social psychology attracted much attention as evidenced in the quantity of literature examining their differences (McCarthy, 2005). Hofstede (as cited in McCarthy, 2005, p. 110), in his seminal work on individualism-collectivism, defines it as a paradigm of a cultural syndrome expressed in terms of “shared attitudes, norms, and values that are centred around a common theme”. Christopher, as cited in Lambert (2008) considers individualism to be associated with autonomy, assertiveness, internal locus of control and separation-individuation. Collectivism on the other hand, promotes communal stability and common good over personal aspirations. Terms such as “strangers/outsiders” (D. W. Sue & Sue, 1977, p. 425) or “members of an out-group” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 111) have been used to describe helpers other than immediate family members or someone not of the same culture respectively. In seeking help, people from collectivistic cultures disfavour outsiders and more so members of an out-group; they are regarded with a degree of suspicion and distrust towards (McCarthy, 2005), as well as concern over shaming the family or ethnic community (Kobeisy, 2001). Contrastingly, people who hold an individualistic worldview consider the counsellor as an advisor, and often are quite open to seeking intervention of a counsellor either voluntarily or through referrals made by other care providers (Kobeisy, 2001).
McCarthy (2005) indicates that individualistic cultures give more importance to personal achievement, promote social freedom and facilitate personal responsibility, whereas people in collectivistic cultures value stronger social commitment and higher levels of harmony and respect towards authority than those in individualistic cultures. Changes to global human movements in recent decades mean that people from some collectivistic cultures have settled in individualistic societies. Counsellors therefore encounter clients grappling with conflicting values (Kobeisy, 2001). This dichotomous description of preferences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures may be quite limiting when one attempts to provide clients with culturally appropriate advice. Some suggest that they can coexist and are situation dependent (McCarthy, 2005).

Counsellors’ awareness of their own as well as their clients’ worldviews can impact positively on the validity of assessment, rapport building, therapeutic alliance and treatment effectiveness (Kobeisy, 2001; Lambert, 2008). On professional providers’ own moral values, Lambert (2008) remarks:

As the media continue to vilify and build momentum against the popular “other”, it is a critical time to exercise restraint in our assumptions of human nature, to consider that our theories are just theories, and to evaluate how our moral values have come to take root in colouring our own worldviews. (114)

Lambert (2008) compares worldviews between North Americans and Emiratis. North American worldview is described by Lambert as being individualistic, secular, liberal, freedom-focused, heterogeneous, participatively democratic, individual malleability of fate, directly communicative and future-focused. Emiratis on the other hand, have worldviews of being collectivistic, non-secular, traditional, responsibility-focused, homogenously indigenous, tribally representative, deference of fate to God’s predetermination, indirectly communicative, and present-focused. Lambert (2008) finds that an approach combining an Ecological Model with the Brief Therapy Model in client-preferred single-visit sessions effective for the counsellor. It helped the counsellor to gain an understanding of clients’ constructions of their worldviews, and hence enabled the counsellor to make sense of the worldviews their clients are exposed to (Lambert, 2008). The next sub-section examines literature concerning counselling and minority populations’ acculturation levels with the culture of their host country.

**Acculturation levels among minority populations and counselling.** Factors such as levels of acculturation and pre-migration circumstances have been related to minority populations’ willingness and efficacy in seeking help for mental health and psychological problems. Not a great deal is known about this association (Al-Krenawi...
Van der Stuyft, De Muynck, Schillemans and Timmerman (1989) have studied the roles of acculturation, urban-rural provenance and length of residence as determinants of the utilisation pattern of first line health services by Moroccan, Turkish and Italian migrants in Belgium. Higher levels of acculturation in this study have been related to a decrease in demand for preventive care among clients of Arabic origin, a reduction in delay for seeking intervention and with improved prognosis. In terms of psychological help, Tata and Leong (1994) in their study of Chinese-American college students found that help seeking was positively affected by participants’ higher levels of acculturation, as well as by those with more positive social networks.

Nassar-McMillan and Hakim-Larson (2003) in a group interview conducted with therapists in a large-scale, comprehensive family service agency in an Arab American community found that among some Arab-American immigrants, the country of origin and level of education affected their receptiveness to counselling. This study advocates for more studies to be conducted on reasons for migration among minority immigrant populations in light of providing culturally appropriate services to facilitate their successful acculturation. Differences within sub-groups in Nasser-McMillan & Hakim-Larson’s study have been attributed to cultural attitudes toward emotional and psychological issues and the group’s preference in how these are dealt with in a culturally acceptable manner. Lebanese immigrants were found to be more open to expression of emotions than Yemeni immigrants. As a result of the latter group’s preference to hold in their problems, counsellors should be mindful of the likelihood of somatisation of psychological distress and emotional stress among these clients (Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003).

The impact of language difference and generational/cultural conflicts as a result of different levels of acculturation within family members are also factors to be taken into consideration in the counselling process among minority populations. Certain expressions in either native or second languages used by parents from migrant backgrounds can sometimes be understood differently by their second generation children brought up in Australia (Mah, 2009). In a study of acculturation issues among Australian Sudanese adolescent refugees reported by Poppitt and Frey (2007), English language proficiency, issues of parental control and conflicting cultural rules were found to be the main sources of acculturation stress. Poppit and Frey (2007) suggest that counsellors should bear in mind that female Sudanese adolescents are likely to be the most vulnerable to feelings of depression.
In another Australian study, Ang and Liamputtong (2008) investigated international students coming from Asian countries on their use of university counselling services. A barrier to these students accessing counselling services on campus is the students’ lack of language proficiency which affected their ability to express their feelings and thoughts adequately. Stigma associated with mental illness, a lack of awareness of the counselling service on campus, what it does and how to access the service, are also reasons why students underutilise the service. In keeping with S. Sue’s (1998) investigation on ethnic and cognitive match between clients from a minority group and the counsellor, students in Ang and Liamputtong’s study believe that counsellors from a vastly different culture to their own will not understand the cultural contexts of their issues nor do they see counselling services as an avenue where they can learn coping skills.

Common issues presented by refugee populations include disengagement, if not absence, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), depression and substance abuse, and many present severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). The devastating effects of war and horror experienced by refugees call for specialised intervention. For some, their coping mechanism for survival from such traumatic experiences overrules basic religious and cultural values, which when carried over to the host country are counterproductive to their acculturation, leading to mental or psychological disorders. In some instances, youth and children of refugee immigrants are required to assume responsibilities beyond that of their peers in the mainstream, which may lead to conflicts between family members and is often disruptive to these students’ attendance at school (Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003).

**Spirituality/Religion and counselling.** The relationship between spirituality, religion and science in mental well-being and therapeutic benefits is regaining its importance in the mainstream (Blando, 2006; Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012; Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Lonborg & Bowen, 2004; Passmore, 2003). In particular, the development of multicultural counselling has given rise to consideration for clients’ spirituality and religion in relation to the efficacy of counselling in various population groups (Hanna & Green, 2004; Mattis, 2002; Passalqua & Cervantes, 2008; Passmore, 2003).

Religion and spirituality are different but interconnected concepts in which the former reflects more on group membership with specific behaviour characteristics within a system of worship, whereas the latter refers more to personal experiences in the
quest for meaning and value in life, and an aspiration to connect with a transcendent power (Passalaqua & Cervantes, 2008). Pargament (2013) defines religion as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 272); and argues that “the most fundamental function of religion is spiritual” (Pargament, 2013, p. 271).

Graham, Furr, Flowers and Burke (2001) conducted a study examining 115 graduate students in counselling for relations between religion, spirituality and stress management. Graham et al. (2001) find that religion and spirituality have positive correlations with students’ coping with stress. Students who expressed spirituality through religious beliefs presented greater spiritual health and immunity to stressful situations than students who described themselves as spiritual but not religious. Graham et al. (2001) consider it useful to train counselling students to learn how to help clients draw strength from their spiritual/religious worldviews.

It has been purported that sometimes the best way to establish rapport with Asian students is through their spirituality (Hanna & Green, 2004). Hanna and Green state that respect is given when a counsellor makes an effort to understand his/her clients’ spiritual beliefs and values in their cultural context and clients’ personal conviction to their religion. Mattis (2002) found that African American women relied on their spirituality/religion in the meaning-making process when coping with adversity, and that this process brought about deeper insight to the Black women themselves and to life, as well as achieving personal growth in a principled manner. Similar findings among women of colour have been noted by Passalaqua and Cervantes (2008) in their review on the implications for counsellors from the dimensions of gender, culture and spirituality.

Although spirituality and/or religion have been recognised as playing a central role in counselling, information regarding how these can be applied clinically to enhance clients’ well-being remains limited (Blando, 2006). Passmore (2003) questions the assumption of value-free counselling by some traditional counsellors. Passmore holds that not only do the counsellors have to give consideration to clients’ spiritual and religious values, they should also be critically aware of their own values to avoid unwittingly imposing their values onto their clients. Passmore (2003) asserts that despite some exceptions of efforts made by specific interest groups and discussions at conferences on religion and spirituality in counselling from time to time, Australian psychologists are “dragging the chain” (p. 190) in this regard which means they are slow in satisfactorily considering religious issues in therapy.
Of particular relevance to the current study is the call for training to better equip counsellors’ cultural sensitivity and skills when treating Muslim clients from a non-Western culture. This has given rise to studies on the importance of counsellors’ awareness of their own and their clients’ worldviews, and the benefits of helping clients to work through their problems using coping preferences that they trust. Literature aimed at understanding issues related to counselling Muslims from the religious viewpoints and efforts towards promoting mental health and psychological well-being among Muslims in the West is presented in the next section.

**Counselling Muslims**

Increasing interest in counselling Muslims in the West is reflected in the growing body of literature in the psycho-social and mental health professions in the recent decade (Ahammed, 2010; Ahmed & Amer, 2012; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; S. R. Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Eltaiba, 2007; Fischer et al., 2010; Kobeisy, 2001; Mehraby, 2003; Podikunju-Hussain, 2006; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010; Williams, 2005). Amidst wide interest in multicultural counselling and counselling Muslims specifically, spirituality and traditional forms of coping from Islamic teachings and philosophies have begun to emerge in the form of Islamic psychology and counselling (O. M. Ali & Aboul-Fotouh, 2012; Amer & Jalal, 2012; Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012; Haque, 2004; Smither & Khorsandi, 2009). The call for counsellors’ sensitivity and respect for Islam as well as adequate knowledge and understanding of Muslims’ religious worldview for the growing Muslim populations in the West have been amply documented (Fischer et al., 2010; Haque & Kamil, 2012; Williams, 2005). That said, researchers on mental health, counselling and psychology have repeatedly underscored the relative scarcity of empirical literature on Muslims and Islam in a Western context (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011; Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013; Khan, 2006; Sheridan & North, 2004; Turkes-Habibovic, 2011).

**Barriers to Seeking Help through Professional Counselling**

Among Arab Muslim American populations, it has been found that factors affecting favouring or disfavouring help seeking include cultural and traditional beliefs about mental health problems, knowledge and familiarity with formal services, perceived stigma, and the use of informal indigenous resources (Aloud & Rathur, 2009). Abu-Raiya (2005, as cited in Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011) found that many Muslims view psychology as a “western, anti-religious” endeavour and consequently “improper” to understanding Muslims’ religious lives and ways of thinking (p. 107). Among very limited literature available on Muslim and counselling in the West, a doctoral
dissertation on attitudes of 10 American Muslim women towards counselling finds that utilisation of religious coping, individual’s support network, accessibility of Muslim counsellors and counsellors within the Muslim community, and imam-counsellor liaison have a significant impact on counselling seeking attitudes of Muslim women studied (Turkes-Habibovic, 2011). A general reluctance to seek counsel outside of the family for personal/family issues has been noted in Arab-American immigrants (Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003) and some Asian immigrants (Kobeisy, 2001). Awareness of the Muslim clients’ diverse cultural differences is also essential in helping the counsellor to select therapies which are more likely to be accepted and hence effective (Amer & Jalal, 2012). Padela, Killawi, Forman, DeMonner and Heisler (2012) believed that their study was likely to be the first on the topic of major agents and their roles in healing from the perceptions of an extended American Muslim community. In this study, a God-centric view of healing was identified. Human agents of healing for the study sample included God, imams, health care practitioners, family, friends and community. Health care providers were one among many sources that participants in this study accessed for healing purposes. Deterrents to participants’ seeking treatment with professional health providers in this study include: perceptions that their religious and cultural needs not being accommodated for, communication difficulties, mistrust and perceived discrimination. Although the focus of Padela et al.’s (2012) study is not specifically on Muslims’ perceptions of professional counselling, it does offer valuable insights into some of the underlying issues American Muslims have towards mainstream professional health care from a religio-cultural perspective. This section of the review makes an attempt at presenting some of the underlying issues discussed in literature on barriers to seeking professional counselling among Muslim populations.

**Perceived incompatibility between Muslim and secular worldviews.** It has been noted that Muslims’ reluctance in seeking counselling for psychological and mental health concerns is, in part, related to their reservations towards Western psychology (Eltaiba, 2007; Haque, 2004; Kobeisy, 2001) and therapists (S. R. Ali et al., 2004; Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) stresses the importance of counsellors trained from a scientific positivist perspective and secular worldview to be sensitive towards Muslims’ way of life and belief system. On counsellors’ self-awareness and recognition of factors that could influence their perceptions of their Muslim clients, Williams (2005) comments:

> Western perceptions of Islam often tend to focus on fundamentalism, perceived threat or danger, suppression, holy war, refugees or the treatment of women in
Muslim communities. Counsellors working with Muslim clients need to be aware of these strongly stereotypical images and should have a commitment to respect and value the faith, beliefs, and practices. Counsellors who work recognising the ‘spiritual’ aspects of their work, whether through the arts, moments of silence and reflection, the use of metaphors of story, have a great deal to offer Muslim clients. (p.125)

In addition, Muslim American clients may welcome the opportunity to openly express their beliefs, their reservations toward the therapist, and the treatment process (S. R. Ali et al., 2004). Kobeisy (2001) in his doctoral dissertation concerning inclusion of American Muslims in counselling asserts that religion plays no greater significance in his participants’ decisions on whether to seek help through counselling; it does, however, play a central role in the counselling process. Kobeisy (2001) stresses that counsellors should bear in mind that religion has a strong influence in the lives of most Muslims, but it is not the only influence that Muslims recognise. Since many Muslims have understood and practised Islam in ways that are intertwined with the cultures in which they have been brought up, it is sometimes difficult for them to differentiate culture from religion (Kobeisy, 2001; Podikunju-Hussain, 2006).

**Stigma.** Kobeisy (2001) observes that the perceptions of and attitudes toward formal counselling among ethnic groups of American Muslims are often associated with negative connotations or reflect their lack of adequate information about counselling. Several barriers to counselling among “non-white” American Muslims (Kobeisy, 2001, p. 120) have been identified, including: stigma associated with mental health and services; the perception of seeking counselling as a sign of weakness or diminished social status/power; shame and guilt towards family or community; a lack of awareness of what counselling does and what the process involves; and suspicions about the counsellors’ feelings and values. However, Muslim clients may, at times, prefer a non-Muslim counsellor out of concern over confidentiality. Ansary and Salloum (2012) also summarised obstacles to help-seeking among Muslims that overlap with Kobeisy’s findings to include: fear of shaming one’s family; stigma associated with mental illness; and deep-seated mistrust of Western treatment options.

Stigma associated with mental health services is also true with Arabs in non-Western societies (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). In the male dominant Arab societies, stigmatising of mental illness is particularly strong among women. Mental health issues could potentially damage their marriage, lose custody of their children, or be used by the husband and his family as grounds for marrying a second wife (Al-Krenawi &
Graham, 2000). Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) point out that in many Muslim societies “mothers are known to endure years of marital problems to avoid the stigma of divorce or the prospect of losing their children” (p. 11).

As with most collectivistic societies, Ansary and Salloum (2012) view Muslims’ support systems through family and community as a double edged sword. While “family and community can be sources of support to protect one against the onset of mental illness … they can simultaneously serve to undermine treatment-seeking, with potentially grave consequences” (Ansary & Salloum, 2012, p. 164). Delaying or avoiding therapy often worsens the individual’s condition which can lead to more complex situations (Kobeisy, 2001).

**Unfamiliarity with counselling.** Unfamiliarity with formal mental health and psychological services is found to be one of the factors affecting help seeking among Arab Muslim Americans (Aloud & Rathur, 2009). In Eltaiba’s (2007) study of Muslims in Jordan, in some instances, insufficient knowledge on counselling has contributed to participants’ confusion regarding the role of counsellors, where and how to access counselling service, and a lack of trust in supporting health professionals in terms of their medical knowledge or life experience gauged by their age. It appears that the participants in Eltaiba’s study were unfamiliar with seeking help from professionals other than psychiatrists.

Eltaiba (2007) found that, among her participants, seeking treatment for illnesses including mental health problems was seen as an obligation along with putting their trust in God. This may be attributed to the factors of their living in Jordan, where Muslims are as the majority and hence are motivated to seek professional treatment by increased likelihood of being received by culturally aware professionals; that is, Muslims. However, most of the participants discussed negative experiences they had with psychiatrists, such as: limited time the psychiatrists spent with them; appointments which only involved prescribing medications; and being asked to repeat unpleasant experiences each time they changed a psychiatrist (Eltaiba, 2007). Only a few participants were happy with their psychiatrists (Eltaiba, 2007).

Many issues from the literature reviewed have been associated with Muslims’ help seeking for psychological or mental health problems. These include stigma, shame, distrust, and a lack of awareness of the nature or range of services available. Although Muslims from a religious perspective consider seeking help for treatment of illnesses an obligation, their help seeking with Western professionals may be affected by their distrust in non-Muslims’ worldviews and attitudes toward them and their faith,
or negative experiences they have had in the past. In summary, it is evident that literature in the field of mental health and psychology of Muslims in English language is scarce; even less, is literature specifically on studies of the attitudes and barriers to help seeking of this population. The representation of Islam and Muslims in psychological publications “remains the focus of only a small proportion of the total number of published works” (Sheridan & North, 2004). Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2011) in their critique of literature stated that “empirical studies of Muslims are scarce; the field of psychology of Islam is still in its infancy” (p. 107). Much research is warranted to address the lack of knowledge in this field due to the diversity and complexities in cultural, religious and social contexts of Muslim communities around the world.

Psychology/Mental Health in Islam

Although literature and research present a general picture of reluctance among some Muslims in recognising, accepting or accessing Western professional counselling for their psychological or mental health problems, understanding of psychology and therapeutic practices have their deep origins in Islamic sciences dating back to the 8th century. This section provides an account of this knowledge under the subheadings of Muslims’ contribution to Psychology and Coping methods commonly used by Muslims.

Muslims’ contributions to Psychology. It was under the broad discipline of philosophy, an all encompassing knowledge of the divine and all things human (Haque, 2004), that the Muslim scholarship since the 8th century pioneered in developing knowledge in the fields of psychology, medicine and mental health, among others (Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012). Psychologists and mental health professionals in the United Kingdom have expended efforts in researching early Muslim scholars’ contributions to psychology (Haque, 2004; Smither & Khorsandi, 2009) and in developing therapeutic models based on ideas proposed by some of these traditional Muslim philosophers, as well as exploring to bring faith-based methods of healing from the Qur’an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad into a clinical setting (Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012).

Haque (2004) makes a distinction between Islamic and Muslim philosophy. By Muslim philosophy, Haque (2004) refers to the unique characteristic of philosophy which blends Islamic philosophy with foreign philosophies. Unlike the Greeks who broke away from the Christian religious systems of belief, Muslims had reconciled religion with philosophy (Haque, 2004). The human nature from an Islamic perspective is explained in Islamic classical legacies (e.g. Al-Ghazali & Al-Rumi as cited in
AbdulRaheem, 1998) as well as by contemporary Muslim scholars in the field of psychology in terms of one’s fitrah, or human’s innate inclination to believe in and to worship God (AbdulRaheem, 1998; Haque, 2004). This understanding of human nature is closely related to one’s understanding of the metaphysical, an essential aspect of faith according to divine revelation, i.e. the Qur’an (AbdulRaheem, 1998). This philosophy is considered to be the distinguishing factor between the bases of modern Western psychology and Islamic psychology (Badri, 1979 & Al-Attas, 1994 as cited in AbdulRaheem, 1998). Muslim philosophy had seen its transformations from primarily theological concerns initially, to the development of mysticism, to the significant contributions to natural sciences up until the 14th century (Haque, 2004). Dharamsi and Maynard (2012) appraise this significance as follows,

In our view, what marks these contributions to medical progress and psychological understanding is that they successfully embodied both reasoning and revelation. In Islamic tradition, as exemplified by these scholars, there was no inherent conflict between the pursuits of scientific and spiritual knowledge as found in the Western world after the enlightenment….Seeking to understand the universe includes reflecting upon – and being aware of – oneself (Qur’an 41:53). (p. 138)

Haque (2004) lists some of the prominent Muslim thinkers, physicians and scientists who had contributed to concepts and interventions related to human psychology in his research on psychology from an Islamic perspective. Al-Kindi (801-866), one of the earliest Muslim philosophers, for example, explained sorrow as a spiritual grief over the loss of a loved one or possession, or due to failure in acquiring what one strongly desires (Haque, 2004). A distinction was made by Al-Kindi between the existence of the upper world, which consisted of the intellect, nature and the soul and the lower world which included the finite substances such as the body, creation, matter and form (Haque, 2004). At-Tabari (838-870) (Haque, 2004), a pioneer in child development, emphasised strong relationships between psychology and medicine. He discussed ancient Indian texts in relation to medicine and psychotherapy and mentioned the therapeutic function of counselling (Haque, 2004). Al-Balkhi (850-934) made classifications of neuroses to include fear and anxiety, anger and aggression, sadness and depression, and obsession. He further classified depression into normal depression (everyday sadness), endogenous depression (originated within the body) and reactive depression (originated outside the body) (Haque, 2004). Persian scholar Abu Bakr Al-Razi (864-932) considered the soul as a substance and the brain as its instrument. He
made comparisons between Greek and Arab medical opinions, criticised the works of Hippocrates and Galen, and was recognised by the West as a medical authority up until the 18th century. Other prominent contributors to Muslim psychology include Al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), Al-Razi (1149/50-1209), Ibn Arabi (1164-1240), to name a few (Haque, 2004).

**Muslims and Western Psychology.** Up until the 18th century, religion had been an integral part of both physical and mental healing throughout the history of humanity (Al-Issa, 2000). A deep-seated cause for Muslims’ distrust in Western psychology may possibly be attributed to the secular approach to this science. Through the separation of psychology from philosophy, the metaphysical elements were left out of this discipline since the late 19th century (Haque, 2004). This process of adopting a positivistic approach to the study of psychology, eliminating philosophy and metaphysics, grounded in a secular worldview has separated man from his spirituality (Haque, 2004). As Haque (2004) comments, “It is indeed true that many of the concepts inherent in the Western psychology are atheistic in their philosophy and approach and thus present the biggest dilemma for Muslim psychologists unless human behaviours are examined from an Islamic framework” (p. 372). Haque (2004) stresses the need for Muslim psychologists to put their efforts towards scholarship and training in psychology from an Islamic perspective in order to help Muslims affected by mental health and psychological problems, through developing standardised scales of measurement and providing various forms of counselling appropriate for this population.

Some Muslims, regardless of whether they are the minority or the majority in the society they live in, opt for spiritual healing from those individuals they can trust who are believed to have the skills and knowledge to treat mental or psychological illnesses from an Islamic perspective (Utz, 2012). Various ways in which Muslims choose to deal with their psychological or mental health issues through cultural or traditional modes of healing are discussed next.

**Illnesses attributed to Jinn and sorcery.** Recognising clients’ perceptions of the cause of mental health problems and their help-seeking preferences are among the themes identified by Eltaiba (2007) in her dissertation on textual and experiential analysis of how mental health problems are perceived in Islam. Worth mentioning is Muslims’ belief in the existence of creatures belonging to the world of the unseen,
including the *Jinn*³ and the effects of sorcery or evil eye associated with mental illnesses (Eltaiba, 2007; Utz, 2012). Numerous references on *Jinn* and sorcery can be found in the Qur’an and various Hadith. Muslims believe that among *Jinns* there exist believers and disbelievers in God (Qur’an 72:1-2) not unlike humans. Practising, learning and teaching sorcery falls under the major sin of associating partners with the Creator (Eltaiba, 2007) and is therefore prohibited. In explaining Muslims’ view on the influence of these metaphysical beings belonging to the world of the unseen, Eltaiba (2007) writes, “The influence of *Jinn*, sorcery, and the evil eye, are placed within Allah’s will and the context of a person’s relationship with Allah whether this entails Qadar [predestination], a trial, a blessing, or a punishment” (p. 135).

Certain illnesses, either mental or psychological, are sometimes attributed to manifestations of *Jinn* possession (Utz, 2012). Physical manifestations of *Jinn* possession may be represented in a person’s unexplainable strength, catatonic symptoms, voice changes, irresponsiveness to pain, or psychosomatic pains. Psychological manifestations of *Jinn* possession may come in personality or behaviour changes, cognitive changes or spiritual changes (Philips as cited in Utz, 2012). Contrary to findings from studies in societies where Muslims are the majority, participants in Eltaiba’s study (2007) did not attribute their mental illnesses to the adverse effects of the *Jinn*, the evil eye or sorcery.

**Coping methods commonly used by Muslims.** On Muslims’ traditional mental health coping and help seeking, Ali and Aboul-Fotouh (2012) used fictionalised case scenarios to demonstrate behaviours of religious coping among Muslims. The coping methods have been found to belong to one or a combination of three strategies: “(a) strengthening essential Islamic practices, (b) diminishing supernatural causes, and (c) seeking sage guidance” (p. 34). The first strategy involves a person making individual efforts to increase their practice of obligatory and/or recommended religious activities, which includes attending the mosque, religious learning, recitation of the Qur’an, giving charity etcetera. The second strategy involves reciting verses from the Qur’an and supplications taught by Prophet Muhammad to ward off evil spirits, both for prevention as well as for treatment. The third strategy involves afflicted individuals seeking out a trustworthy religious person for mediation, counselling support from spiritual and psychological perspectives (O. M. Ali & Aboul-Fotouh, 2012).

---

³ *Jinn*: The *Jinn* are being created with free will, living on earth is a world parallel to that of man, and are invisible to human eyes in their normal state. The Arabic word *Jinn* comes from the verb Janna which means to hide (Ibn Taymiyah as cited in Elbatiba, 2007, p. 137).
The Qur’an and Muslims’ wellbeing. Among the various religious coping strategies (Amer, Hovey, Fox, & Rezcallah, 2008) used to deal with mental health problems among Muslims, Qur’an plays an explicit role in attaining psychological wellbeing and in clarifying directions at difficult times (Fischer et al., 2010).

Ahammed (2010) points out that the Qur’an, a shared and communal belief of all Muslims due to it being the revelation from God addressing mankind, can be considered a useful and powerful tool in counselling Muslim clients regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In particular, Ahammed (2010) holds that the use of Qur’anic metaphors is likely to reduce possible resistance that Muslim clients sometimes have towards the counsellor or the counselling process. The Qur’an is “rich in metaphors and mystical symbolism embedded in figurative language, and offers the reader insights and interpretations of life circumstances” (Ahammed, 2010, p. 251).

Treatment using Qur’anic verses and supplications from the Sunnah of the Prophet is called Ruqyah (Utz, 2012) in Arabic. Muslims believe that cure comes from Allah (Utz, 2012), that is, the authority and power of healing belong to none other than the Creator. All forms of treatment, be it medicine or therapy, are agents through which healing may be obtained by God’s will. Prophet Muhammad was quoted to have said that, “There is no disease that Allah has sent down except that He also has sent down its treatment” (Al Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 76, no. 5678 as cited in Utz, 2012, p. 17). There are recommended verses and supplications for all Muslims to recite on a regular basis as protective and preventive measures against the evil of the supernatural beings. Specific Ruqyah recitations may be obtained from a learned person who has specialised knowledge on treating illnesses caused by Jinn, evil eye or sorcery (O. M. Ali & Aboul-Fotouh, 2012). Some may also use Ruqyah in conjunction with medical or psychological interventions (Utz, 2012). Some others view illnesses caused by these supernatural beings as a sign of the person’s weakness in faith and as a result, may not wish to discuss this openly with a non-Muslim clinician (Utz, 2012).

Approaches to Counselling Muslims

Models of Islamic counselling vary according to the perspective of Islamic teachings from which one derives one’s framework, or according to whether existing theories and therapeutic interventions are incorporated, and if the approach appropriately addresses the needs of a particular Muslim population (Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012). In their book chapter, Islamic-Based Interventions, Dharamsi and Maynard (2012) discuss the nafsiyyat (Islamic science of the Self). Dharamsi and Maynard (2012) identify two distinct sources from which Islamic counselling and
psychotherapy have developed in the United Kingdom: the *tibb an-nabawi* (medicine of Prophet Muhammad [Peace Be Upon Him]) and the *tasawwuf* (Islamic science of self-knowledge [Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012, p. 141]). The authors discuss how Islamic teachings can be incorporated into existing counselling models. They believe that a transformation of the therapeutic relationship can take place when the practitioners manage to find a way to connect with the spiritual truth that is appropriate for their Muslim clients, whereby clients are helped to develop spiritual and psychological insights that will help them grow.

A number of initiatives aimed at addressing Muslims’ reluctance to seek help for mental health and psychological issues have been reported. Mehraby (2003) considers counselling to be a duty of every Muslim and a main responsibility of Islamic studies. In 2009 the *Borneo Bulletin* reported positive feedback on training courses extended to government officials and personnel from private sectors to equip them with adequate guidance and counselling skills. The courses were well received by over 100 imams and mosque officials. These courses were based on the ethos of care from an Islamic viewpoint, in which the author stressed that “every person in authority must help those without authority” (Anonymous, 2009, p. 1).

Another approach was taken in the form of a Community Outreach Program task force initiated by several organisations in the North eastern region of the United States to address the mental health needs of the Muslim population (Ansary & Salloum, 2012). The task force strategised preventive and interventional approaches to improve mental and social well-being of Arab Muslims in America. Key community individuals, non-Muslim mental health service providers, and mosque representatives were among some of the members serving on this task force (Ansary & Salloum, 2012). Suggestions put forward and implementations carried out by this task force for Muslims in a Western society are said to be the first of its kind (Ansary & Salloum, 2012). Ansary and Salloum (2012) emphasised the importance of community education and trust building in overcoming the obstacles to accessing services by Muslims in need of help. Soliciting support for and endorsement of the range of outreach programs by the mosques had been instrumental in breaking these barriers (Ansary & Salloum, 2012).

In the United States, McWhirter (as cited in S. R. Ali et al., 2004) emphasised rapport building with American Muslim clients and outlined an empowerment model for the therapist to integrate collaboration, context, critical consciousness, competence and community when working with American Muslim clients. Specifically, the mosques and schools in Muslim communities are among the most immediate resources
through which a wide range of counselling issues can be addressed (Ansary & Salloum, 2012; Fischer et al., 2010). A number of studies highlight the importance of identifying key members within the Muslim community to help promote mental health awareness and the various professional services available (Ansary & Salloum, 2012; Eltaiba, 2007; Fischer et al., 2010). Outside immediate and extended family members, sheikhs or imams (people with considerable religious knowledge or training who play the roles of leading prayers in congregation, performing religious ceremonies and so on) are found to be the preferred options for Muslims seeking help for either guidance or healing, or for both, when experiencing personal, family, and/or mental health problems.

In summary, Muslims’ coping with stressful events in life is strongly influenced by their faith and the collective family structures (Amer & Jalal, 2012; Fischer et al., 2010). Efforts in community outreach and education through Islamic schools and mosques in North America have seen encouraging results in Muslims accessing professional help for their mental health and psychological concerns. The strategy of depicting counselling as a duty of care has brought about wider acceptance across government and religious sectors in Brunei. The remaining sections of this chapter deal with literature on mental health of young people in the West and counselling in educational settings. Issues of counselling thought relevant to adolescent Muslim students have been woven into the sub-sections under various subheadings.

**Mental Health of Young People in the West**

This section presents the current concerns in literature over young people’s mental health status and their presenting problems, their perspectives on counselling, and in particular, issues related to the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds.

**Young People and Mental Health**

Concerns over increasing levels in severity and complexity of presenting issues at university counselling centres have been raised by researchers in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom since the 1980s (Cairns et al., 2010). Glasheen and Campbell (2008) consider adolescent mental health a major social concern in modern societies; this is supported by a fact sheet by Kids Helpline (Kids Helpline, n.d.) in an Australian context, which states that: “Australia has more than 5.5 million people aged between 5 and 25 years. Estimates say that 10% are experiencing abuse or neglect, one in seven have mental health issues, and almost 30% are concerned about family conflict” (Kids Helpline, n.d.).
Sawyer, Miller-Lewis and Clark (2007) studied data of 1,490 adolescent participants aged 13-17 years in Australia from a National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing to examine prevalence of mental disorders, the demographic characteristics, adolescent health-risk behaviour and service use among this group. Adolescents being at a critical developmental period characterised by changes to physical, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal relationships, are likely to experience onsets of chronic or recurring mental disorders (Sawyer et al., 2007). Sawyer et al. (2007) observe that most of the participants identified as having mental health problems rely on their parents and guardians to help them access professional services. Adolescent participants in Sawyer et al.’s study reported a number of major obstacles to seeking help that included cost, lack of awareness of where to get help and long waiting lists.

Young People’s Perspectives on Counselling

Kids Helpline was established in 1999. It remains to be the only private, confidential and free 24 hour telephone and online counselling service for children between five and 25 years in Australia. Among young people’s perceptions and experiences of school counselling (Reid, 1996), confidentiality has been a key aspect of Kids Helpline which makes it attractive for young people to access. Since 2002, contacts with this service about mental health issues have doubled (Kids Helpline, n.d.).

Fox and Butler (2007) in their UK study of the effectiveness of a school-based counselling service find 84% of young participants appreciate having someone they can turn to in school. Social stigma makes it difficult for them to access school counselling. Suggestions made by participants in this study are worth keeping in mind when one starts to look into ways to improve school counselling service for adolescent students. These include having a full-time or more counsellors, more effective promotion of the service and developing strategies to build rapport between counsellor and students. Fox and Butler point out that counselling services were underused by the ethnic minority students in their study.

This review found no literature with a specific focus on Muslim youths’ perspectives on counselling in a Western context. One question that remains to be asked is how Muslim youth in the West cope with stress. For Muslim youth who were either born and/or raised in a predominantly individualistic society since a very young age without the collectivist social structure their parents relied upon (Podikunju-Hussain, 2006), or when values conflict between the children and their parents (Podikunju-Hussain, 2006), who is there for them and what is available to support them
when they encounter developmental, emotional and social challenges? The school population in Australian schools and especially Muslim schools has been further diversified from enrolment of children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to children of refugee and humanitarian backgrounds since the last two decades. Having some awareness of issues affecting the wellbeing of refugee youth may shed light on the extent of demand for school counselling services in order to adequately support these young people having experienced untold trauma of war, injustice, loss and displacement. A review of existing literature on counselling areas which are considered relevant to establish the background of the current research concerning refugee young people are briefly accounted as follows.

**Wellbeing of Young Refugees**

Drawing on data from a project at the Australian Catholic University researching refugee youth homelessness, Couch (2011) focuses her article on the voices of young refugee people experiencing homelessness. The Centre for Multicultural Youth reports that in 2008-2009 two out of every three refugee arrivals in Australia were young people under 30 years of age (Couch, 2011). Less than 10% of refugee people successfully access public housing in the first 18 months of their re-settlement (Campbell, as cited in Couch, 2011). Although scant research acknowledges disadvantages experienced by homeless refugee young people as not being dissimilar to the wider population of homeless youth, refugee youth in this study specifically attribute lack of long-term, appropriate shelter services as the main cause of their homelessness (Couch, 2011). Major barriers that hinder their attempts to get out of homelessness include lack of adequate education, language skills, and employment opportunities (Couch, 2011). Some expressed the need for counselling to help them deal with the trauma from the past as well as the trauma of homelessness they were facing (Couch, 2011).

Brough, Gorman, Ramirez and Westoby (2003) analysed mental health and wellbeing of refugee youth across three states in Australia. Aptly put, they state that, “trauma and consequent emotional instability is better conceptualised within a life continuum rather than a series of discrete events” (Brough et al., 2003, p. 206). They find that past experiences had significant impact on a person’s mental wellbeing, particularly so for a young person who was undergoing a period of rapid emotional development. Moreover, past trauma and challenges in their present environment had the potential of leading to future mental illnesses in young refugees. Bearing in mind the resilience reflected in many of the participants in their study, Brough and colleagues
urged counsellors to harness this inner strength within them in striving to build a better future.

Warr (2010), in her study of significant issues that affect refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K., explores appropriate counselling approaches to this group. Warr highlights safety and a sense of home as crucial factors to a refugee’s psychological and physical wellbeing against the severe loss they suffer throughout their pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences. Te Riele (2010) explores the meaning of hope in practice in an article discussing concepts of hope and their applications for working with marginalised youth. Since hope can be a critical resource for those working with disadvantaged, excluded and marginalised youth, Te Riele (2010) proposes the application of four resources by teachers and others who work with marginalised youth. These resources are: a positive culture; focusing on possibility; establishing a community of hope; and critical reflection within a schooling context.

Given the student demography in most Muslim schools in Australia, Warr (2010) and Te Riele’s (2010) studies offer particularly useful information for counselling services in these schools due to their on-going intake of students from refugee backgrounds in terms of the significance of stability and security to these students and what a school and community culture of hope can potentially do for them. The fifth and final section of this literature review addresses the issue of counselling in educational settings.

### School Counselling and Wellbeing Support for Students

A considerable amount of literature is available on counselling in tertiary education settings (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Cairns et al., 2010; Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008). What is more relevant to the current study, is literature pertaining to counselling secondary school students that deals with counsellors’ roles, trends and issues of presenting problems, school counselling challenges and the different approaches to supporting mental, emotional and other developmental well-being of students in schools (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Inman, Ngoubene-Atioky, Ladany, & Mack, 2009; Low, 2009; Steen & Noguera, 2010). Many faith schools support their students through chaplaincy, while in non-faith schools the support is delivered in the form of pastoral care, or school counselling services (personal communication with Rev’d John Clapton, Head of Religious Education & Volunteer Services, YouthCare, WA, 7 March, 2012). A growing body of literature shedding light on the central role values education plays in student wellbeing and academic performance is also reviewed for its relevance to Muslim schools. The
following is a summary of literature reviewed on school counselling and wellbeing support for students under the subheadings of school counselling, pastoral care and values education.

**School Counselling**

There appears to be a range of different concepts of what school counselling should entail; and this concept appears to continue to evolve. Towards the end of the last century in Australia, for example, a number of recommendations in relation to shaping school counselling by Kids Helpline (Reid, 1996) included: clarify school counsellor’s role; develop boundaries regarding sharing confidential information; determine desired qualifications of the counsellor; and develop service appraisal processes. According to Reid (1996), the school counsellor should be part of a collaborative team of community stakeholders to respond to issues faced by young people in society (Reid, 1996).

In a study on teachers’ opinions of school counselling programs in Nigerian secondary schools, Aluede and Egbochuku (2009) find that the majority of teachers rate career information as the most important role of the school counsellor. This is followed by individual counselling services, group guidance and orientation services and maintenance of students’ discipline. Aluede and Egbochuku (2009) identify the need for and highlight the importance of educating key stakeholders of the significant and dynamic roles counsellors can play to enhance students’ academic performance and wellbeing.

The need to expand and modify the traditional roles school counsellors play in the U.S. has been advocated (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Steen & Noguera, 2010). Traditionally, school counsellors in the U.S. have been responsible for duties such as scheduling classes and administrative tests, addressing individual students’ behaviour and academic concerns, connecting with selected families for specific student difficulties, making referrals and providing career or academic advice (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Similarly, Inman, Ngoubene-Atioky, Ladany and Mack (2009) describe school counsellors in the U.S. as generally engaged in either guidance for academic/career and life-skill development or counselling in response to preventive or intervention-based individual or group advice with the aims of meeting the academic and mental health needs of the students. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) believe that increasing demands for school counselling call for effective utilisation of the skills and talent of school counsellors to shift toward the direction of leadership, linking school
communities to support students collaboratively. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) examine this need from theoretical and practical viewpoints and recommend that counsellors utilise 20% of their current work time on improving school atmosphere, outreach programs to parents and communities, and collaborating with stakeholders of the school community to improve student learning.

Low (2009) categorises challenges of counselling practice in schools into four domains. These are internal, external, system and personal domains. Included in the internal domain are clientele groups, teachers’ attitudes and students’ willingness to access service. In the external domain, socio-economic changes beyond school, pop culture, globalisation and human movements affect counselling practice in schools. Within the system domain, challenges to take into consideration include ministries, schools and counselling bodies. The counsellor’s needs and skills fall within the domain of personal challenges.

Inman et al. (2009) investigate critical issues and challenges faced by school counsellors in international schools around the world. Typically these schools follow an American educational curriculum in English and enrolments consist of host country nationals, expatriates as well as “third culture kids” (Inman et al., 2009, p. 81) who are neither American nor nationals of the host country. In their study, the authors identify a list of mental health issues encountered by counsellors of students at these schools. The top four among them are: coping with cultural transition; relational aggression; self-esteem; and family conflict (Inman et al., 2009). The top three among ten identified challenges faced by school counsellors, particularly those trained in the U.S., are school personnel’s lack of knowledge of their professional role, a lack of trust in them, and a lack of teamwork and communication between the counsellors and school personnel (Inman et al., 2009). These findings resonate with the researcher’s experience with counselling in Muslim schools in Australia.

Sawyer et al. (2007) reveal that school counselling is the most frequently used service in their study of the mental health of 13-17 year-olds in Australia. This highlights the importance of the provision of appropriate training for school counsellors and adequate networks with specialised mental health services to help young people with significant mental health problems (Sawyer et al., 2007). In a first-time study examining the efficacy of school counselling in the U.K., Fox and Butler (2009) urge researchers to ask complex questions regarding the effectiveness of treatment, and the specifics of best match between service provider and client presenting a particular issue under particular circumstances, in order to inform the discourse of school counselling.
for improved efficacies of this service. Fox and Butler also suggest community-based counselling for youth outside school hours.

Not specific, but may equally be applicable, to Muslim immigrant children in democratic countries, is the role of schooling in nurturing students’ civic engagement. Lessons may be drawn from studies on immigrant children’s civic education in their parents’ adopted country where its culture is perceived as being very different to their own. Immigrant children from such communities are often “deprived of both upbringing in their ancestral homeland and assimilation into their host society” (Ueda, 1999, p. 661). Sink (2002) recommends close involvement of school counsellors in the development of multicultural student-citizens through a comprehensive guidance and counselling program (CGCP). This involves counsellors taking part in reviewing existing programs, developing activities and programs based on citizenship education literature, exposing students to multicultural citizenship education in small and large group sessions and making connections with parents and community members. Australian Muslim schools may find that to have a comprehensive guidance and counselling program in place is useful in helping students develop some of the necessary skills to participate in mainstream Australian society.

Muslim schools in Australia are a microcosm of Muslim communities within the dominant culture. Although Muslim schools comply with the curriculum of each state (Chelebi, 2008), deep rooted cultural perspectives of individuals within the school community vary greatly which may make meeting the needs of students of this group challenging. Literature reviewed on more holistic approaches to student support in the forms of pastoral care and values education are presented next.

**Pastoral Care**

The term pastoral care took shape in the late 1960s but its idea and practice are said to have dated back to the first half of the 19th century in Great Britain. Broadly speaking pastoral care deals with “all aspects of work with pupils other than pure teaching” (Marland, as cited in Lang & Young, 1985, p. 221). Lang and Young (1985) examine pastoral care and school counselling in Canadian English schools. Similar to the situation of school counselling in Britain, the authors notice the phenomena of dwindling interest in the North American approach to school counselling in Canadian English schools, but a growing support for pastoral care, in the 1980s. School counselling in Canada seems to mainly focus on therapeutic more than disciplinary, remedial more than preventive or developmental roles. Student achievement has been determined by a more comprehensive profile of the overall development of the whole
person rather than the traditional academic measurements. Although comparable in certain respects, pastoral care in Canadian schools is not parallel to guidance and counselling programs implemented in North American schools (Lang & Young, 1985). It remains an integral part of British secondary school organisation as well as in some Australian, New Zealand, Nigerian and Isreali secondary schools, with variations in its interpretation and implementation (Lang & Young, 1985). However, the researcher of this study found no literature on pastoral care for students in Islamic schools.

Some variations in pastoral care can be seen in literature that discusses teachers’ involvement in counselling students (Aluede & Egbochuku, 2009; De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007; Lam & Hui, 2010). Secondary school teachers in Hong Kong (Lam & Hui, 2010) consider guidance and counselling an integral part of their profession. Lam and Hui (2010) believe that Hong Kong’s Education Commission’s policy on the whole school approach to guidance has impacted positively on teachers’ sense of responsibility as front-line workers who help with early identification and intervention for students in need. During homeroom or class teacher periods, teachers teach students ways of handling emotions and stress as part of the guidance curriculum. These teachers pay attention to students with behavioural or emotional difficulties both within and outside class time. Consulting with parents, school counselling team teachers and making referrals to mental health professionals are among the means of care extended to students by teachers (Lam & Hui, 2010). Involving regular teachers in guidance and counselling is seen as an appropriate and effective way of delivering care to students in collectivist societies (Lam & Hui, 2010).

In response to World Health Organisation’s global health initiative, Australia’s National Safe Schools Framework sets the tone for all Australian schools to build safe and supportive communities towards achieving students’ physical and emotional safety and wellbeing (Hearn, Campbell-Pope, House, & Cross, 2006). Hearn and colleagues (2006) from Edith Cowan University in Western Australia reviewed and audited pastoral care policies and standards of government and non-government schools from 29 sectors across Australia. In this report, four core components of pastoral care have been identified to include health and wellbeing, resilience, academic care and social capital (Hearn et al., 2006). Best practice models of pastoral care in Australia, Great Britain, Canada and the United States were examined and drawn upon to make recommendations for future practice of pastoral care in Western Australian schools.

One of such models was MindMatters developed in Australia (Hearn et al., 2006). It was further developed into MindMatters Plus, focusing on mental health and
wellbeing for secondary school students. This was an action research project involving schools around Australia to implement this model. From this project, a number of resources had been developed to address the mental health and wellbeing of secondary school students. One of the resources was a whole school pastoral care framework proposed by De Jong and Kerr-Roubicek (2007). This framework offered a number of dimensions in school counselling with a focus on pastoral care given to each and every student in support of their learning. Instead of providing pastoral care to students as an “add on” service, the framework proposed that schools should implement pastoral care as an intrinsically integral part of school life (De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007, p. 2).

Mann likens pastoral care to the “oil of learning” (2006, as cited in de Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007, p. 5), with its significance described as the nourishment for the learning journey. Schools having been increasingly recognised as crucial environments that impact on students’ mental health and wellbeing play a vital role in developing school connectedness, relationships, health and wellbeing of their students (De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007). Related to pastoral care but with a more specific focus on pedagogy and teachers’ commitment and disposition as moral mentors to students, is a body of literature on values education, to be briefly presented in the next and final section of this review.

Values Education

The role of education is becoming increasingly challenging in order to prepare future global citizens with skills, the ethics and the tenacity to effectively deal with the complexities of issues such as human rights, the need for peaceful coexistence within nations and harmony between nations and concerns over environmental sustainability, to name a few. This sparked a renewed interest in scholarship on the effect of character education in enhancing students’ positive developmental outcomes across the cognitive, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and personal domains. A range of terms is currently being used for character or values education; these include: moral education, social-emotional learning, or positive psychology (Berkowitz, 2011). It appears that mounting evidences from research on values education are overturning the dominant belief of the twentieth century that schools function best in values-neutral mode of teaching and schooling (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013). Lovat and Hawkes suggest that, “teaching and schooling that function in values-neutral mode might actually serve to undermine the potential effects of other socialising agencies, including families” (2013, p. 1). The emphasis on values education has its roots in works by ancient philosophers of the Greek and the Chinese civilisations, such as Aristotle and Confucius respectively (Lovat
& Hawkes, 2013). Subsequent proponents and theorists who carried on the baton or reenergised the discourse on values education include al-Ghazali and Thomas Aquinas, among others, in the medieval times, followed by Dewey, Kohlberg, Peters and so on, in more recent times (Lovat, 2011).

Various research foci within the discourse of values education consist of, but are not limited to, values education and student wellbeing (Clement, 2010; Dally, 2010; Noble & McGrath, 2010), values education in view of teacher training and professional development (Carr, 2011; Carrington, Mercer, & Kimber, 2010; Lovat, Dally, Clement, & Toomey, 2011; Thornberg, 2008); and pedagogy and practices in values education (Berkowitz, 2011; Davidson, Khmelkov, & Lickona, 2010). Research and scholarship on the discourse of values education are thought relevant to Muslim school education because the founding objectives of these schools were primarily that of imparting values (Islamic) and that of facilitating for students to achieve successful academic outcomes. Positive contributions of values education confirm that school environment, pedagogy and teacher quality as being imperative to effecting and enhancing all dimensions of students’ holistic development and wellbeing, inclusive of their academic learning (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013).

**Summary**

It is apparent from this literature review that counselling as a profession is still undergoing constant evolution. Literature reviewed on counselling ranged from practices in different social and cultural settings, to practitioners’ skills in meeting the diverse needs of clients, to the different domains in which counselling was utilised in educational settings. Of specific relevance to this study is literature on Muslims’ perspectives of counselling, mental health and psychological interventions. Research and literature on counselling youth, and the various forms of support in educational settings through pastoral care, values education, or mental health prevention programs were also selected for review. Perspectives that hold school as having a significant part to play in transforming students into responsible, moral and ethical global citizens appear to be reverberating with a similar intent behind the formation of Australian Muslim schools. A whole school approach may shed light on effective ways in which to promote the mental health and emotional wellbeing of students in Australian Muslim schools. Considering the unique social, cultural and political milieu within which young Muslims in the West have been situated since the late 20th century until now, a school culture or ambience for students’ holistic development based on Islamic values, including strategies involving teachers to become better attuned to and committed to
enhancing student wellbeing, may be well worth exploring if a culturally sensitive counselling and wellbeing support service in Australian Muslim schools is to be realised. Scarcity of empirically based research on counselling, mental health and psychology pertaining to Muslims was consistently raised in the literature reviewed so far. Specific to counselling Muslim students and wellbeing support in Muslim schools in a Western context, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, is non-existent. The current study attempts to make a significant contribution to address this gap with a focus on perspectives of stakeholders on counselling and wellbeing support services for students in Muslim secondary schools in a Western context.
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Empirical research on counselling services in Muslim schools in a Western context is scarce. Qualitative research methods were considered most appropriate for a study of this nature as they provide the scope for a more in-depth exploration within specific contexts of a topic. This study was undertaken with the aim to develop theory and principles of practice for counselling in Australian Muslim schools for secondary school students that are considered culturally appropriate by the school community.

The study set out to ask: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling services in Australian Muslim schools?* Located within an interpretivist symbolic interactionist paradigm this study adopted the approach of a perspectival study, using semi-structured interviews to generate data from key stakeholders of Muslim school communities on the subject of school counselling. Semi-structured interview questions were steered by the Discovery-Dream-Design-Destiny cycle of Appreciative Inquiry’s framework (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Grounded Theory strategies for participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis were employed with the aim of achieving theoretical saturation.

This chapter is structured into seven sections under the headings of: philosophical foundations; location of the researcher; research design; data collection; data analysis; ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Under the heading of philosophical foundations, brief descriptions of symbolic interactionism within an interpretivist paradigm and the rationale for employing a perspectival approach for this study are presented. Next, considerations for inclusion of the researcher’s own voice are discussed in brief, followed by a description of how this process helped to shape this study’s research design. Under the heading of data collection, are subheadings discussing journaling and memoing the researcher’s own experience, the development of guiding questions and semi-structured interview questions. Participants as stakeholders in this study are described and access issues are tended to, followed by a brief discussion of sampling criteria. Within the section describing methods used for data analysis, grounded theory strategies including coding, memoing and theorising are described. Following from here, a discussion on ethical considerations in compliance with The University of Western Australia’s Human Research and Ethics Committee requirements, in particular, of the researcher’s awareness in approaching participants of the Muslim school communities, is presented. This chapter then addresses the limitations of this study.
Philosophical Foundations

Of the four major paradigms that form the basis for social research assumptions, namely, positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and postmodernism (O'Donoghue, 2007), all except postmodernism are commonly adopted (Neuman, 2011). This qualitative study has adopted the assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm. An account of the epistemology and ontology behind the assumptions that form the Interpretivist paradigm will provide the philosophical premises from which the current study originates, and how the organising framework for the system of thinking (Neuman, 2011) behind this study came about.

Interpretivist Paradigm

The ontology of interpretivism, or the aspect of philosophy that deals with the nature of being, usually concerns internal realism and subjective idealism (Walsham, 1995). Subjective idealism is the reality of each individual’s personal construct. Internal realism is seen as an intersubjective construction of the shared human cognitive approaches (Walsham, 1995). The epistemology of the interpretivist view of knowledge can be an intertwined tangle between facts and values (Walsham, 1995) and understanding social construction involves getting inside the world of those generating it (Walsham, 2006).

An interpretivist paradigm “emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 9). Knowledge is therefore validated through verbal or written accounts “negotiated between the speaker and the listener” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 10). Blumer’s assumptions (as cited in O’Donoghue, 2007) from an interpretivist perspective recognise: that everyday activity is the building block of the society; that there is always some autonomy and freedom to it; that individuals rarely act in isolation of others; and that it involves a process of negotiation of meaning through which people come to modify their understandings and views.

Within this framework, in order to make meaning out of the current state of counselling services in Muslim schools in Australia, the researcher set out to understand the interactions between stakeholders of the school community on the subject of school counselling. One way to achieve this was to consider the theoretical approach of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic Interactionism

Quoting Newman (2011), the key assumptions behind symbolic interactionism are:
People transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact. People create perceptions of each other and social settings. People largely act on their perceptions. How people think about themselves and others is based on their interactions. (p. 86)

Two main types of studies can be developed from symbolic interactionism, namely, phenomenological and perspectival studies (O'Donoghue, 2007). The present study is of the latter kind.

**Perspectival Study**

Studies conducted on perspectives of a group in focus are concerned with “generating theory about the perspectives which a group or groups have with regard to some particular phenomenon at a particular point in time” (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 32). This study aimed to generate theory on the perspectives of stakeholders of counselling services in Australian Muslim schools within the recent three decades since the first schools among these establishments came into existence in Australia.

On the importance of deciding upon the issue of focus, O’Donoghue (2007) asserts:

...it was vital for them to establish that the issue of focus was a real issue for the participants and not just of academic interest to themselves as outsiders.... there is no point in designing a study about participants’ perspectives on something unless we are convinced before we commence the study that it is something about which they [i.e. participants] have fairly well formed views and that they feel sufficiently free to discuss these views” (pp. 36-37).

The researcher was confident that the issue of counselling for secondary school students was an issue of great interest to members of the Muslim school community due to her experience working in roles that resembled that of a counsellor for secondary school students in a Muslim school, followed by teaching middle years’ students in another. The following paragraphs locate the researcher’s position in this study and the deliberation in selecting the most appropriate approach to adopt in order to include her own contribution in this study.

**Location of the Researcher**

The researcher of the study approached the project as an informed and interested participant, rather than someone neutral, due to: (a) her membership with the Muslim community as a Muslim, and through her voluntary work in the Muslim community since her migration to Australia in 1988; (b) her being a parent in a number of Australian Muslim school communities for a total of 18 years; (c) her experiences
working in Muslim schools; and, (d) her understanding of migrant Muslim parents’ perspectives on successful outcomes in parenting gained from her earlier research (Mah, 2009).

Researching Muslim schools demands the researcher to be reflexive about the cultural subjectivity of community members who, although sharing the fundamental principles of the faith, bring with them diverse interpretations of Islam to the Muslim community in the receiving country, depending on the culture in which they grew up (Johnson & Castelli, 2002). Qualitative research with structured reflective thinking is helpful in both checking and complementing the context and background the researcher brought to the decision-making and evaluation process (Johnson & Castelli, 2002).

**Research Design**

Careful considerations to include the researcher’s own experience to this study led to the decision that the researcher would begin with a reflective journal, write memos to this journal, and then use the memos to form the key foci of this study. It was through this initial deliberation that the research design gradually came into its form. Using Appreciative Inquiry’s 4-D (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2008), guiding questions and semi-structured interview questions for data collection were developed. These questions were trialled in a pilot study for their appropriateness and further modifications were made before formal interviews were conducted. The approaches adopted and the steps taken for the research design were as follows.

**Reflective Journal and Memoing**

Memoing from the researcher’s reflective journal incorporated into the study (Punch, 2005) was used as an alternative to autoethnography and case study. This approach safely avoided the issue of breaching anonymity without precluding the researcher’s contribution from her personal experience as a key stakeholder. The journal consisted of the researcher’s recollections of her experiences as a student support staff/counsellor for secondary school students. Questions, thoughts and recurring issues were listed in a side-bar on the document for memo writing.

Birks, Chapman and Francis (2008) suggest that unlike research within a positivist paradigm, the “interplay between the researcher and data is crucial to the generation of knowledge that reflects the breadth and depth of human experience” (p. 69) in qualitative research. Glaser (as cited in Birks et al., 2008) “implores the researcher to consider memo writing a priority to ensure retention of ideas that may otherwise be lost” (p. 69) however insignificant these ideas may seem initially. Birks et
al. (2008) effectively sum up the functions of memoing using the mnemonic MEMO: Mapping research activities; Extracting meaning from the data; Maintaining momentum; Opening communication. This technique can be employed at any stage of the research, to clarify thinking, to provide a mechanism for voicing assumptions and subjective perspectives of the topic (Birks et al., 2008). According to Charmaz (2006), memos can be produced in many ways, and the best way to memoing is by doing “what works best for you” (p. 80). The functions of MEMO benefitted this study from the initial stage of writing memos from the reflective journal, right through to the final stages of the analytical process.

At the conclusion of this exercise, a number of themes were developed to be considered for specific areas of focus for this study. These themes were: ethos of care in Muslim schools; support for students through counselling; culturally appropriate counselling; helping students with transition; and, role and quality of counsellor in Muslim schools. These themes would continue to be used to interact with the data generated from participants as the study unfolded.

**Appreciative Inquiry**

Developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva in 1987, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework contributed to organisational change and development with its focus on positive personal and organisational attributes in contrast with the traditional problem-oriented approaches (Dematteo & Reeves, 2011). For close to three decades, this social constructionist approach has gained much popularity in a wide range of organisation settings (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004) including educational institutions in the recent ten years or so (Stetson & Miller, 2003).

The AI framework (Cooperrider et al., 2008) with its deliberate attention to positive experiences was thought to be most likely to circumvent any potential sensitivities surrounding the topic of counselling in Muslim schools. It had the advantage of keeping the study within the premises of a qualitative perspectival study from a symbolic interactionist research paradigm without presuming specific instrumental strategies towards the end of this research. The practicality of conducting an AI research not initiated by the leadership of the schools, however, soon became a cause for reconsideration. Unless participants were highly motivated to put in the time and work cooperatively throughout the various phases of the inquiry with the researcher, difficulties in completing the data collection were predicted. To ensure that the study could be completed in a timely manner, it was decided that instead of conducting a full AI research of the topic, the AI framework would still be valuable to
this study if the framework was used to develop the guiding questions and the associated semi-structured interview questions.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was achieved by conducting semi-structured interviews individually or, depending on their availability and preference, in small groups of two or three participants. Participants were approached for an interview of 60-90 minutes. Face to face interviews were recorded on a digital note-taker with participants’ written consent (for those under 18 years of age parental consents were also obtained). Due to participants’ time constraints, some interviews had to be fast-tracked to complete within 30 minutes, while some others were happy to continue the discussion beyond the scheduled time. Input from the pilot study participants provided rich data and in-depth information, and hence was incorporated into the pool of data generated subsequently. Guiding questions using the AI-framework helped to sequence and balance the tone of the interviews. This section describes the interview guide developed for collection of data, recruitment and sampling of participants for this study.

**Pilot Study**

The semi-structured interview questions were trialled in a pilot study of stakeholders in Perth. Input from stakeholders in the pilot study helped to modify the interview questions to be used in other sites as proposed. The initially developed semi-structured interview guide trialled in the pilot study - Interview Guide_pilot is attached to this thesis in Appendix 1.

The pilot study comprised five interviews with a total of seven participants, of which one was a group interview with three participants. The pilot study was beneficial to the study in a number of ways. Firstly, it indicated that participants had a broader view and expectation on counselling more from the perspective of the school’s duty of care as a whole; in some cases, participants had richer and extraordinary experiences to share more than envisaged by the initial interview questions. Their discussions made it necessary to expand the scope of this study from counselling to wellbeing support that included, but was not limited to, school counselling services. The title of the study was thus modified to accommodate for participants’ perspectives on a more holistic concept of counselling. Secondly, the wording and content of interview questions required simplifying. Thirdly, considering the primary focus of interviews was on participants’ perspectives, the AI’s positive approach was thus incorporated but not given centre-stage. Modifications to the interview question guide for the semi-structured interviews were also made accordingly for participants’ to share their experiences, both the
positive and the not so positive, trusting how the guiding questions to inform the course of the interview. For example, instead of directly asking “what is the best of current counselling practices in the school with which you have association?”, participants were asked to describe “what is currently in place to support student wellbeing in your associated schools; and what were some of your best experiences?” The modified questions enabled the participants to express liberally their experiences and thoughts to gradually draw their focus on the subject to end on a more positive and constructive note.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The interview consisted of two parts. The first part collected participants’ background information and their associations with Muslim schools in writing for follow up purposes if required (Appendix 2). The second part consisted of a set of semi-structured interview questions as an interview guide used by the researcher. Due to the scarcity in existing research specifically in the area of counselling and wellbeing support practices in Muslim schools in a Western context, this research held a strong exploratory position.

**Guiding questions using AI’s 4-D framework.** Three guiding questions modified from the pilot study were used to steer the interview. These were:

1. What was in place to support student wellbeing in the participant-associated schools; and what were some of their best experiences? (Discovery)
2. What would be the ideal for supporting students’ Social and Emotional wellbeing? (Dream)
3. How could that be achieved? (Design)
4. The fourth “D” – Destiny was addressed in the form of theoretical propositions upon final analyses of themes developed from the previous three guiding questions.

**Semi-structured interview guide.** Five key themes derived from the reflective journal and memoing were used to develop the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. These themes were: ethos of care; student wellbeing and counselling; culturally appropriate school counselling; role and quality of counsellors for Muslim students; and transitioning support for students A total of 15 modified questions were asked in the interviews with three questions addressing each of the five focus areas, in the sequence of the three guiding questions.
Focus area 1: Ethos of care.
1.1 How would you describe the ethos of care in your faith and how is this implemented in your school? What were your best experiences/memories in this area?
1.2 Given your understanding of the ethos of care, what would you like to see implemented in your schools?
1.3 How can this be achieved?

Focus area 2: Student wellbeing and counselling.
2.1 What were your experiences with counselling and wellbeing support services in the school with which you had association?
2.2 What would you like to see implemented in support of students’ social/ emotional wellbeing in your school?
2.3 How can these be materialised?

Focus area 3: Culturally appropriate counselling.
3.1 Please describe the most culturally appropriate counselling and student wellbeing support services in your school.
3.2 What should ideally be in place for a culturally appropriate school counselling program?
3.3 How can this become a reality in Muslim schools?

Focus area 4: Role and quality of counsellor for Muslim students.
4.1 Please describe the role school counsellors currently play in a Muslim school.
4.2 What roles should the counsellors in Muslim schools play?
4.3 What qualities and experiences should the counsellors for Muslim students have?

Focus area 5: Transitioning support.
5.1 What are some of the transitioning programs at your associated school to support students in their secondary schooling?
5.2 What ideally should the school offer to help students make these transitions smoothly?
5.3 How can these be achieved?

Participants in group interviews were requested to fill in an interview summary sheet (Appendix 3) at the end of the interviews to reaffirm key points from their discussions, and also to provide them with an opportunity to share any information they were not comfortable to share in the group. Due to the seeming openness of group dynamics during the discussion, it was understandable that most participants save one
(PSP5) did not consider it necessary to fill in the interview summary sheet when offered.

**Recruitment of Participants**

This study involved members of the Australian Muslim school communities, with a focus on stakeholders of counselling and wellbeing support services for secondary school students in Muslim schools. Data were collected from major cities in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia in which close to 90% of Muslims reside.

Attempts had been made to contact school principals and counsellors via emails and telephone calls to support this study. When only a handful of them responded through this channel, the researcher effectively adopted a snowball recruitment strategy using personal networks to access youth groups, community organisations, and local mosque congregations.

Table 1

*Avenues of recruitment with indication of participants’ main roles in their associated school communities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories/Roles</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Muslim schools NSW/VIC/ WA</th>
<th>Youth groups NSW/VIC/ WA</th>
<th>Muslim organisations NSW/VIC/ WA</th>
<th>Other social networks NSW/VIC/ WA</th>
<th>Main roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Providers</strong></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welfare Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumers</strong></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ex-student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>Interested community member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 56 participants including the seven participants in the pilot interviews contributed to this study bringing their experiences from 18 schools across three states. For organisational purposes, stakeholders had been differentiated in terms of their roles as service providers, consumers and interested stakeholders. Service providers included school principals, school imams/chaplains, counsellors, school psychologists, teachers and welfare teachers/workers. Consumers included secondary level students, ex-students (who did not graduate from their associated schools) and graduates from Muslim schools and their parents. Many stakeholders offered insights from multiple perspectives due to their involvement with the school in more than one role. Two interested stakeholders, both with extensive experience in educational settings but not directly associated with the Muslim schools, contributed to this study due to their interest in the subject.

**Sampling**

Participants were sampled for diversity to reflect the varied composition of Muslim communities in Australia. Diversity in participants’ ethnic backgrounds, gender and involvement in school counselling services were some of the sampling considerations. Those who expressed interest in the research were given details of the study in writing for their understanding of what was to be involved in the interview process and for what purpose. Confidentiality issues were explained in the introductory letters, to be elaborated under the section of Ethical Considerations in this chapter.

This study employed *purposive sampling* as a strategy for its exploratory investigation. Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental sampling, is valuable in a “highly specific and difficult to reach population” (Neuman, 2011, p. 267) as the aim of the current study is not for finding the average or typical cases. It is useful for selecting participants who are particularly informative to arrive at a deeper understanding of the topic under research (Neuman, 2011).

**Data Analysis**

**Memoing as an Analytical Tool**

Punch (2005) describes memoing as “pausing, in qualitative analysis especially, to write down ideas about the data as they occur during coding and analysis” (p. 292). Although memoing is closely associated with grounded theory, all qualitative researches can be enhanced by memoing (Birks et al., 2008). Birks et al. (2008) acclaim the facility of memoing through which the researcher is enabled to “engage with the data to a depth that would otherwise be difficult to achieve” (p. 69). Punch (2005) considers memoing a “more creative-speculative part of the developing analysis” which can be
effectively balanced by “the systematic and disciplined part of the analysis” of coding (p. 202). Writing interpretive memos on the emerging themes is “the best way of avoiding a formless mass of unanalysable data at the end of one’s study” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 161). Most importantly, memos are “the vehicles that transport the researcher from the concrete to the conceptual” (Birks et al., 2008, p. 71). Researcher bias will be minimised by memos of the researcher’s reflexive experiences.

Coding

The transcribed data were qualitatively coded into conceptual categories for the development of themes or concepts. Neuman (2011, pp. 510-511) quotes Miles and Huberman when explaining the process of coding in generating theories:

- Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to “chunks” of varying size – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting.

- Strauss (as cited in Neuman, 2011) describes three levels of coding: open, axial and selective. Open coding examines the data and condenses them into “preliminary analytic categories or codes” (Neuman, 2011, p. 511). Codes under the five focus areas are presented under the broad categories of ethos of care and spiritual wellbeing and student overall wellbeing inclusive of academic, whole school, holistic and transitioning wellbeing. Examples of open codes and preliminary categories are attached in Appendices 4 and 5. In axial coding more attention is given to the coded themes than the data; new ideas are noted if and when they emerge but, the primary focus is on reviewing and examining the initial codes (Neuman, 2011). During this phase of coding, questions on causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes are asked (Neuman, 2011).

Theorising

The final pass through the data involves selective coding where the researcher reorganises specific emergent themes or concepts to identify a number of core ideas, conferring with literature, to form the theoretical propositions. A sample of how the axial coding paradigm led to the selective coding and development of Proposition 1 is attached in Appendix 6.

In addition to the analytic findings from the stakeholders’ perspectives, literature on Islamic traditions, Western literature on wellbeing and values education, policies on this subject at federal and state levels, as well as relevant documents from Islamic schools were used to develop theories and principles for counselling and wellbeing
support practice in Australian Muslim schools. The discovery phase dealt with stakeholders’ perspectives on what their experiences had been, what were considered to be the best practices of counselling, structures and implementation of these practices in their schools, the benefits, the logistics, the appropriateness, and ease of access, to perspectives regarding how students have been most adequately cared for in the absence of such services in their schools. In the dream and design phases, a more positive, focused and constructive direction revealed what the role of a counsellor for Muslim students should entail, what participants would like to see school counselling and wellbeing support services offer, and how these could be achieved. Destiny, as the last phase, aimed to “sustain the developments and innovations of the inquiry process and to nurture a collective sense of destiny” (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004, p. 1019).

Emergent themes were developed into seven theoretical propositions. Multiple perspectives gained from the stakeholders were selected, compared, contrasted and interpreted to develop the destiny – i.e. theoretical propositions in Chapter Eight, the discussion chapter of this thesis. A flow chart illustrating the process is presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Theoretical proposition development flow chart](image)
Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully attended to in this study from the beginning. During the planning stage, the study underwent a thorough selection process for the most viable and ethically sound research methods and strategies as discussed earlier in this chapter. These included where and how participants could be accessed, how best to frame the interview questions that minimised discomfort to participants but still yielded most constructive outcomes at the same time, as well as being mindful that participants’ cultural sensitivities were respected.

Identities of the participants were kept confidential by assigning codes for recording purposes initially, and later for presentation appeal, pseudonyms were assigned, such as those used for the vignettes in Chapter Four. Countries of origin, when required, were only located within broad geographic identifications, such as “an African country”, or “a country from the Southeast Asia”. No schools were identified by their names throughout the study; only the states in which they were situated were named.

All participants took part in this study voluntarily. Each was given an introductory information letter according to their main role at their associated school (see Appendices 7, 8 and 9) explaining the aim of the study, its significance, what was expected of the participants, the risks and benefits involved and confidentiality issues. Principals of schools were informed through a separate letter if they were willing to support the research by allowing the researcher access to their staff and students without participating in the study personally (Appendix 10). Written consent was obtained from every participant. Additional consent was obtained from parents of students under the age of 18 years in the same form (Appendix 11).

A great number of interviews took place in the schools with which participants were associated through support given by their respective service providers. Some interviews were conducted at other venues at participants’ requests, such as participants’ place of residence, community centres, and cafes and so on. Meeting places outside the school with students under 18 years were determined with mutual agreement of the parents and the researcher. Participating minors in dependent or unequal relationships were offered to be interviewed in absence of those in authority over them to ensure their viewpoints were given space to be expressed freely, unless they opted to participate together as a group.


Limitations of the study

A number of limitations to this study have been noted and are addressed herewith. In-depth interviews have a tendency to research bias (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Researcher bias had been attended to by trialling the initial interview guide and questions in a pilot study and then by reviewing and modifying them as more data became available. Participant bias was pre-empted by gathering perspectives from stakeholders playing different roles within the school community. In addition, adopting the AI framework to develop the guiding research questions and interview questions also helped to address this bias.

The second limitation concerning in-depth interviews is their tendency to be quite time-consuming (Boyce & Neale, 2006). This had been factored in during the planning stage to set realistic objectives within a sensible timeframe for this study to be completed in a timely manner.

For the study’s internal validity (Punch, 2005), summary sheets filled in by group participants were checked against the interview transcripts. Follow up communications were carried out via electronic mails and telephone calls when necessary, to ensure trustworthiness of data and to fend credibility to the findings.

Lastly, in terms of the study’s external validity (Punch, 2005) the researcher acknowledges that findings from this research were not anticipated for their generalisability. O’Donoghue (2007) suggests that “no claim can be made for the ‘generalisability’ of interpretivist theories, including those developed in symbolic interactionist studies ...” (p. 65). The purpose of this study was to generate understandings of an area in education about which its knowledge was yet to be developed. Sampling considerations of participants’ particular associations with the research area were chosen to gain in-depth understandings of the subject. Findings were considered to offer valuable and insightful information rather than for their generalisability. As Charmaz (as cited in Cresswell, 2006) explains, in adopting an emerging design, the researcher is more interested in “views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies than gathering facts or describing acts” and hence any conclusions developed are “suggestive, incomplete and inconclusive” (Cresswell, 2006, p. 439). However, readers may find the theory from this study resonating with their own experience, or “a natural basis for generalisation” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 65), thus allowing the theory to have “reader or user generalisability” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 66).
Summary

This chapter described in detail the rationale behind the methods and design employed for the current study. Due to a lack of empirical research on counselling services in Muslim schools in a Western context, qualitative approaches were thought most appropriate for this study. To address the general research question: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling and wellbeing support services in Australian Muslim schools?* the researcher conducted a perspectival study within an interpretivist symbolic interactionist paradigm. A reflective journal of the researcher’s personal experience as an insider and memos from this journal formed the skeleton for the study’s initial semi-structured interview questions. The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework was used to steer the guiding questions. These questions were tested in a pilot study and further reviewed and modified. Key stakeholders of Muslim school communities were recruited to contribute to the subject of school counselling from NSW, VIC and WA, the three states with the highest Muslim populations in Australia. Participant recruitment, data collection and analysis were achieved using Grounded Theory strategies. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study were addressed.

Following from this chapter is the analytical findings of the study in Chapters Four to Eight. Chapter Four presents the contextual background of Australian Muslim schools and introduces the participants who contributed to this study, followed by an illustration in the form of vignettes of a range of counselling and wellbeing support services in three schools. Chapters Five to Seven present findings arranged in order of AI’s first three of the 4-D framework: Discovery, Dream and Design. Chapter Eight presents the fourth D – Destiny in the form of seven theoretical propositions addressing what ‘is’ and what ‘can be’ of counselling and wellbeing support services in Australian Muslim schools. Chapter Nine recaps the study’s aim and rationale, the research methods and design, and concludes with a summary of the findings, the significance, implications and parameters of the study.
CHAPTER 4 – CONTEXT OF STUDY:
PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED SCHOOLS

According to the 2011 census figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics the Australian Muslim population had increased by 69% over the previous five years totalling 476,300 as compared to 340,389 in 2006, accounting for 2.2% of the total Australian population (ABS, 2013). Islam is the second most common non-Christian religion in Australia after Buddhism. Close to 50% of the Muslim population were aged 25 years or younger. It is likely that Australian Muslims remain a relatively young population from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds with 61.5% of its total population born overseas (ABS, 2013) from more than 70 countries (Chelebi, 2008).

In 2013 there were more than 3.5 million students in Australian Schools, with 2.3 million students attending Government schools, 700,000 at Catholic schools and 500,000 at non-government schools (ABS, 2013). In the previous ten years, non-government schools saw a 31% increase in number of enrolments. Since the establishment of the first two Muslim schools in 1983, there are approximately 35 Islamic schools around Australia in 2014 (Islamic Schools Council of Australia, 2012). This thesis is based on a study of the perspectives of 56 participants and 18 of their associated Muslim schools in Australia. The word ‘association’ had been used in reference to these schools because participants took part in this perspectival study independently of the schools from which they drew their experiences. Participants’ roles in their associated schools ranged from service providers to consumers, or both. Many participants wore more than one hat in these roles. Two participants contributed to this study as independent community members who had an interest in the topic.

This chapter describes the context of this study in two main parts. The first part provides a profile on participant-associated schools and the background of participants, as well as an overview of the student wellbeing support services; the second part of the chapter presents vignettes of three schools, designated as Muslim College, Mu’min College and Muhsin College. The vignettes of the former two schools are displayed in the form of monologues adapted from transcripts of participants from each school. The various programs throughout an academic year are taken to sketch the student wellbeing support services at Muhsin College. The vignettes illustrate the range of current practices of counselling and wellbeing support services in the participant-associated Muslim schools.
Profile of Schools

A total of 18 participant-associated schools catering for majority Muslim students were represented in this study by 56 participants in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. All of the schools were non-government schools. Most of these schools catered for students from pre-primary to year 12 with some exceptions that catered only up to Year 10. A number of schools had histories of establishment for 25 years or longer. Many had only been in operation within the previous five years at the time interviews for this study took place in 2012. Two schools had participants bringing their experiences spanning a period of approximately 20 years, thus availing this study with an historical perspective of progress in their schools’ student counselling and wellbeing support services. One school was no longer in operation at the time the interviews took place, and another school had amalgamated with a longer established school; but nevertheless, participants had drawn their experiences from these schools, hence were included in this study. Out of the 18 schools, five operate on two or more campuses.

Financially all 18 schools were sustained through school fees and government funding. Many schools also relied on donations, fundraising campaigns or school fetes for extra funds. Schools were funded according to the Socio-Economic Status (SES) scores of Average Government School Recurrent Costs (AGSRC) index (ISCA, 2012). Included among the 56 participants were a number of participants who either had been associated in the past, or were associated at the time the interview took place, with schools established by an international foundation that operated under the philosophy of the Imam Fethullah Gulen (Hassim & Cole-Adams, 2011) across major cities in Australia. This unique group of schools was religiously motivated but not registered as ‘Islamic schools’ although the overwhelming majority of their students were Muslims of Turkish and Middle Eastern descents. According to a participant from one such school, these schools adopted an educational framework that catered for students from all backgrounds within an Australian context to receive Islamic morals and values.

Segregation of classes for certain grades between boys and girls was implemented in most schools. Some schools introduced this practice from Year 5, while others started in the first year of high school and followed through until students completed year 10. Most schools held co-ed classes in senior secondary years (years 11 and 12) for practical reasons, as well as due to the belief that students at these levels were more mature, and therefore able to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in
a co-ed class setting. In rare cases, schools divided boys and girls into separate sections of the same campus, or completely on different sites.

All of the 18 schools in this study followed a curriculum from the curriculum council of their respective state, plus Arabic and Islamic Studies. One school offered a curriculum that met the International Baccalaureate requirements while one other school was said to have a larger focus on Islamic studies.

Anonymity of the schools in this thesis was achieved by assigning code names from C to T with their profile features described only in approximate or generic terms, without revealing the state in which they were located. New campuses to schools that were under the same administration had been assigned a number next to the allocated letter for the main campus, for example C, C1 and C2. Some participants also referred to Muslim schools in which they had previous experiences. A letter code was also assigned to each of these schools. Some participants chose to conceal the names of the schools they worked at and therefore the background information of these schools had been rendered inaccessible. Pseudonyms had been designated to the schools and participants referred to in the vignettes presented later in this chapter.

The following section of Part 1 of this chapter introduces the participants who contributed to this study and an overview of student support services in Australian Muslim schools. Viewpoints of participants on the phenomena of student wellbeing support bear greater significance than facts and figures pertaining to these schools can provide. Consequently, school information charted into tables is aimed only at providing readers with a contextual view and not for displaying exact statistics of these schools.

Participants

The 56 participants interviewed over 41 sessions contributed their perspectives either individually or in small groups of two or three people. One participant who had worked with Muslim students overseas as a tertiary educator offered her input in writing. All participants except one were, or had been at some stage in the past, associated with at least one Australian Muslim school. The exception had many years of teaching experience in a number of top ranking non-Muslim non-government secondary schools of the state she resided in. This participant’s input was considered valuable in view of what non-government Muslim schools might aspire towards to better support their students. All except two participants were Muslims. Table 2 accounts for participants and their multiple roles in their associated Muslim schools.
Table 2 Participants’ multiple roles in their school communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym assigned</th>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Imam</th>
<th>Counselor</th>
<th>Welfare</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ex- student</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Interested participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>P27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad</td>
<td>P33</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>PSP5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>P16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alia</td>
<td>P37</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>P38</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>PSP6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atiqah</td>
<td>P30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badiah</td>
<td>P39</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilal</td>
<td>P54</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buraydah</td>
<td>PSP7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>P11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elham</td>
<td>P12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahima</td>
<td>P18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fariah</td>
<td>P28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habiba</td>
<td>P34</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasanah</td>
<td>P51</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassan</td>
<td>P10</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huda</td>
<td>P44</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibrahim</td>
<td>P25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idris</td>
<td>P36</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iman</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamila</td>
<td>P43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jannah</td>
<td>P42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazaa</td>
<td>P49</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey</td>
<td>P52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>P55</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadija</td>
<td>P32</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalid</td>
<td>P29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leena</td>
<td>P13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madina</td>
<td>PSP1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahmud</td>
<td>P23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malika</td>
<td>P21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>P56</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>P17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustafa</td>
<td>P9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>PSP2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noor</td>
<td>P31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuria</td>
<td>P15</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehab</td>
<td>P26</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleha</td>
<td>P48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>P53</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana</td>
<td>P40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>P19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaakirah</td>
<td>P22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shamsa</td>
<td>P14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifaa</td>
<td>P45</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulaiman</td>
<td>P50</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumaya</td>
<td>PSP3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talha</td>
<td>P24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasneem</td>
<td>P41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waled</td>
<td>P47</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmeen</td>
<td>P20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zainab</td>
<td>PSP4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuriyati</td>
<td>P46</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main roles - double ticks: 56  1  3  10  4  9  -  -  5  14  4  4  2
Many participants wore different hats at different times in their associations with the schools. Some have contributed to this study bringing experiences from more than one Muslim school.

The gender and roles of the participants in this study are outlined in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Roles and gender of participants](image)

The diversity of participants’ cultural heritages was reflected in the many backgrounds they themselves or their parents had come from. This diversity is represented in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Representation of participants’ cultural backgrounds](image)

Overview of Muslim Schools’ Student Counselling and Wellbeing Support Services

Two-thirds into the data collection phase, the researcher developed a rating scale from information provided by earlier participants; which was given to subsequent participants for rating their school’s student wellbeing support and counselling service. A total of 12 participants associated with seven schools provided their own ratings.
Using the same scale, the researcher rated another eight schools that had information relevant for this exercise for a visual display of where the schools were at with their student wellbeing support services. Confirmation of accuracy in the school ratings is only possible if and when a comprehensive measurement tool becomes available.

Adequacy ratings for participant-associated schools’ counselling and wellbeing support service are represented in Figure 4, after a brief description of measures used in the scale.

Scale descriptors:
1. **Very inadequate** [No formal counselling service, except individual goodwill]
2. **Inadequate** [One part time welfare/counsellor (with or without formal qualification in psychology or counselling) for a student population of 1000 or more]
3. **Somewhat adequate** [One full time counsellor for no less than 500 but no more than 1000 students, mainly aimed at improving students’ academic performance]
4. **Adequate** [Full time and part-time gender-matched counselling services, welfare programs, policies and procedures in place for students who need professional support for their emotional and mental health issues, adequate professional support for school counsellors]
5. **Very adequate** [All provisions identified in level 4, plus holistic approaches in terms of staff development programs to equip teachers and staff with skills to detect early signs of mental health problems, well developed welfare programs, extracurricular programs to develop students’ non-academic talents, orientation programs for new students, community partnership programs etc.]

![Figure 4. Adequacy ratings for participant-associated schools’ counselling and wellbeing support service](image)
From the ratings exercise, the researcher was able to present data on student wellbeing support and counselling services of 15 out of 18 schools. Since this study is a perspectival study on student wellbeing support service, and not a case study, schools without a rating due to insufficient information have no consequences for the outcome of the study. Schools on the lower end of the scale, positioned at level 1 or 2, were mostly established in the previous five years; one of these schools, School D, was no longer in operation. It was quite possible that counselling/student wellbeing support in these newer schools had not been of high priority at this stage. A comparison between the information on the Index for Community Social Educational Advantage (ICSEA) and data on Language Background Other Than English students who sat NAPLAN in that year (LBOTE%), was made against information provided by participants on their school’s counselling/welfare service in Table 3.

The ICSEA is a scale developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to represent levels of educational advantage for students in each school. A combination of variables such as information on student enrolment records regarding parents’ occupation, their school education and non-school education achieved and their language backgrounds are taken into account when developing the ICSEA value. Census data is used as indirect data to supplement direct information from student records for this scale. Other variables include school characteristics in terms of its remoteness, percentages of indigenous and LBOTE students (ACARA, 2011a). Values of ICSEA range from 500 (indicating schools with students from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds) to 1300 (schools with students from very advantaged backgrounds), with a mean of 1000 (ACARA, 2011a). On the School Profile page on the My School website (ACARA, 2012), distribution of student backgrounds is presented across four quarters, bottom, two middle and top quarters. This distribution provides contextual information about the socio-educational composition of the students at their school.

Information collected from participants, the school profiles for 2012 on the ACARA’s My School website (ACARA, 2012) and where available, from the individual schools’ websites, have been summarised in Table 3.

The following section of this chapter samples three schools referred to by the pseudonyms Muslim College (School C), Mu’min College (School E) and Muhsin College (School N) to show the range of counselling and student wellbeing support services in practice.
Table 3
Comparison between student support services in participant-associated schools against the 2012 ICSEA and LBOTE%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Catering for</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>ICSEA¹</th>
<th>LBOTE%²</th>
<th>Student Support Services</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 x 0.6 (M) Year Coordinators</td>
<td>Counselling position made redundant in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>K-10</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>K-10</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>1058</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>&lt; 80</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>2333</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1 x 0.6 (F) Welfare Coordinators (M &amp; F)</td>
<td>F/T Counselling in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>1397</td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>INKP*</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>INKP</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1 x F/T (F) + 1 x 0.4 (M) Welfare Teachers + Coordinators</td>
<td>Established. Counselling &amp; Welfare Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1 x F/T Year Coordinators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>K-10</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Primary only INKP</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>K-10</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>1021</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>INKP INKP</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>PP-12</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>INKP INKP</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>~2000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1: F/T (F)</td>
<td>1: Welfare Coordinator</td>
<td>School name withheld by participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>PP-12</td>
<td>1112</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2 x F/T (F); 1 x F/T (M) Coordinators; Career Counsellor</td>
<td>Established Counselling &amp; Welfare Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>PP-12</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>PP-12</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>1011</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1 x F/T (M) + 2 x 0.8 (F) Coordinators</td>
<td>Established Counselling &amp; Welfare Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1 x F/T (F) + 1 x P/T (M) Speech Path/Career Counsellor</td>
<td>Boys only college. Established counselling team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>PP-9</td>
<td>70+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Occasional support from main campus</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>PP-9</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1015</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>PP-12</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>INKP INKP</td>
<td>INKP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ICSEA – Index for Community Social Educational Advantage (ICSEA=Social Educational Advantage + Remoteness + %Indigenous + Disadvantage LBOTE)(ACARA, 2012)
2. LBOTE% - Language Background Other Than English (either student, or parents speak a language other than English at home) students who sat NAPLAN in that year (ACARA, 2012)
*INKP: Information not know to participants
Part 2

Part 2 of this chapter presents vignettes of three schools. Focus on individual school sites was not intended in this study from the outset; hence the adoption of recruitment strategy of purposive sampling. The presentation of vignettes was intended to demonstrate the range of counselling and student wellbeing support services in participant-associated schools. Therefore the sample size of each school depicted is irrelevant. The three schools in this section depict the range of student wellbeing support services in operation from the inadequately developed, to the mid-range, to the adequately developed among the participant-associated schools. Vignettes of the three schools are presented through selected excerpts of the voices of the stakeholders from each school.

Most schools that scored a two or lower on the ratings scale depicted in Figure 4 were relatively new establishments of between four to 10 years. Muslim College (School C) and Mu’min College (School E), however, had longer periods of establishment that provided an overall historical development of their counselling services. Muslim College had 10 participants whose associations with this school spanned over a period of approximately 20 years. Mu’min College having been assigned a mid-range position had a wealth of information provided by 22 participants that also contributed collectively to 20 years of the school’s history to this study. Schools H, N and Q self-rated their schools’ student wellbeing support and counselling services between four and four and a half on the ratings scale. Muhsin College (School N), although represented by only two participants, was chosen for this section for its comprehensiveness and age appropriateness of counselling service and holistic wellbeing programs which no other schools of similar demographics could compare. Schools H and Q were not taken for this section due to the ambiguity in their not being registered as Islamic schools. Nevertheless, participants’ perspectives from these schools were not precluded from this study because of their inclusion by the Islamic Schools Association of Australia (ISSA, 2012); and the student bodies were made up of an overwhelming majority of Muslims.

Muslim College

School background. Muslim College was established in the 1980s. Like many Muslim schools, Muslim College was constantly faced with challenges of juggling between providing quality education and meeting the demands of a fast growing Muslim community in the state in which it was situated. In just under three decades of its establishment, Muslim College had expanded from 50+ to 2000+ students on three
campuses. All three campuses were managed under one administration with the main campus *Muslim College* (School C) catering for 1000+ students from K to 12 in 2012, staffed by 85 teaching and 48 non-teaching personnel (ACARA, 2012). It had an ICSEA value just below the mean of 1000 in 2012, and it relied on 73% of its finances from Australian and state government recurrent funding and close to 16% from student tuition fees (ACARA, 2012). The main campus of *Muslim College* offered co-education from P (pre-primary) to year 12 and introduced segregated classes in lower secondary classes.

In 2011, *Muslim College* was situated within the 75th percentile of all schools in the High School Certificate Ranking of its state (the specific term for tertiary entry exam used by the state has been withheld for anonymity of the school). The school’s 2011 NAPLAN results (ACARA, 2011b) demonstrated one or more areas of basic skills in all year levels (year 3, 5, 7 and 9) performing below or substantially below the average national bench marks.

**Participants.** The 10 participants who contributed to knowledge about *Muslim College* has been represented by the numbers 1 to 10 in Table 4. The roles in which these participants played in the Muslim school communities have been indicated in the last column on the right of the table. For participants who played more than one role in *Muslim College*, their main roles in this study are set in bold type. Similarly, participants who had associations with more than one Muslim school, their specific narratives of *Muslim College* have been bolded along their timeline.

**Table 4**  
*Participants and their association history with Muslim College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>'11</th>
<th>'12</th>
<th>Roles in Muslim schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>welfare, volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>counsellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student, teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student C, staff C, staff D, parent L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher, counsellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student R, teacher C and C1, teacher R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following is a snapshot of the perspectives of stakeholders on student wellbeing support and counselling services at Muslim College using participants’ original voices to tell their story in a chronological order.

Vignette.

Madina used a symbolic phrase to describe her memory of care the school demonstrated. Referring to the fire and smoke, and the water damage to the classroom floor as a result of an incident when a petrol bomb was thrown into the College, Madina recalled,

... all they had done was remove the furniture and put a carpet over the wet soggy floor. The teacher of that classroom refused to take her students into the classroom until there was a safety check of electricity, plugs and fans etc. etc. She taught her students out under the trees for a week until the classroom was fixed; one or two weeks after that she was sacked for insubordination.

Zainab, as she recounted her experiences as a new student in the school, identified that the school had this energy about it which didn’t sit right with me…

... I find a lot of security in a school environment, and yet, ironically it was the Muslim school that really destabilised me…

... do you have drama, and do you have art, and do you have debating? And they said no, we don’t have all those things. And I just found some stairs and I sat down and I just bawled my eyes out and no one really knew why. I had ambitions … and I just thought how am I going to get anywhere in this school? … for the next 2 weeks, I became more and more depressed, and I started to really unravel every single day…. I ended up keeping to myself. I became very depressed to the point where I started talking about suicide. I felt that my life was crashing, my life was ending, the world as I knew it was crashing down around me.

Now what did the school do?

Well, they thought I was quite troublesome, and it was quite inconvenient, I remember the principal yelling at me in front of a bunch of youth and students telling me to basically just to get over it, and to just stop all these tears. Which obviously made me feel even more devastated and their response to me made me fall more deeply into depression.

... I literally just shut off from everyone…. I was a rebel in my own way, I was kind of like a religious rebel, but that didn’t work.
... then in year 10, I tried to fail all of my subjects in term 4, just to throw it back in their faces and to get their attention, but the worst I did was getting a D.... I skipped a lot of class, I was absent from school, again no one called, no one offered me counselling sessions...

...throughout all those years... of ups and downs, all those times I have tried to cry out for help, and I wanted counselling, they never offered it. Fairly, no one ever picked up.

So I know from personal experience being a student that the counselling services offered by that Muslim school were either quite minimal, or non-existent.

Sumaya, a student two years junior to Zainab, shared some positive experiences she had with school counselling:

... in one period, when I was in year nine, or year ten, there was a good but short lived experience of good Muslim counsellors. That was the only time we had the experience of the potential of good counselling...

... there was information provided, like brochures from other organisations. By having these brochures available, it showed that the counsellors trusted what non-Muslims had to say about counselling, and this was a good model for interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, instead of... information from, let’s say Saudi Arabia, and how does that relate to you, to like, me?

... other positives like the skills that the counsellors had, they were just nice people, who made you feel comfortable ... instead of telling you off, or having that hierarchical power trip relationship.

... the only time, I remember, when a Muslim counsellor taught us the 7 Habits, that was a really good session. That was quite short lived.

Recalling an incident in 2011, Hasanah felt that certain things were just put under a carpet, not addressed.

... we had some issues ... which was taken as a disciplinary issue but... it was more psychological and she needed counselling but it was not offered internally, not within the school.... I know I addressed that concern to the principal at that time numerous times but no help was actually given. This happened only last year.

... I would rate their counselling a one, there was no counselling at all.

Mimi, also a teacher, who joined the college in 2012 held the view that, “Kids at Muslim schools require more support than other kids”. Mimi explained,
... I’m saying this due to the number and nature of the students’ backgrounds.  
... I feel there needs to be an ESL service for girls and boys, a special needs place where they can come and talk to relevant people, people who are qualified for the job.  
... on the one hand there are very specific issues which are endemic to them. And then on the other hand they are like all the other kids. They’re like Australian kids, kids all over the world.  
... we do have a counsellor. I think it needs to be a bit more spread out. Not just one person, like a department kind of thing, a team of people, who are interested, who have the relevant qualifications, can help the students unwind, issues of identity, their issues of belonging, and their issues of where they want to go from here, providing them with an alternative platform, to be able to express themselves and explore themselves.  
... some who are autistic, and some who have special needs.  
... it leaves the teacher, the teachers can’t do it either, so the students get neglected, they repeat year after year without ever getting anywhere.  
Bilal observed that, “It’s the resilience of the students itself that gets them through what they’re going through”. He elaborated further,  
... they have a school counsellor, but that is going to be made redundant next year.  
... this is a sign of that inadequacy of understanding the need for students to have a structure in place that provides social, emotional, psychological and mental health support for the students.  
... there’s so much resistance, from the top, from the staff members, in regards to the actual role.  
... they find their own methods, and their own ways of coping, their friends, internet, fighting, whatever, but from the school side, I don’t think there’s anything put in place to support student wellbeing on a holistic level. No one is saying that counselling is the only way, but it is part of a huge picture, which now is taken out, which creates an even bigger gap.  
Almost all of the participants associated with Muslim College wished there was better wellbeing support given to students. It appears that some positive changes took place sporadically over the past 20 years but none of these initiatives lasted long enough to become a viable service.
The following introduction and vignette on *Mu’min College* portray a different scenario in student wellbeing support and counselling service. The vignette is presented in chronological order from participants’ experiences. This was possible because of the large number of participants associated with this school and their cumulative experiences that went as far back as the early 1990s.

**Mu’min College**

**School background.** *Mu’min College* (School E) also had a history of over 20 years since its establishment. In 2012 *Mu’min College* had three campuses with the main campus catering for 2300+ students from K to 12, staffed by 161 teaching and 16 non-teaching personnel (ACARA, 2012). It had an ICSEA value of 1067, and it relied for 82% of its finances from Australian and state government recurrent funding and 16% from student tuition fees (ACARA, 2012). *Mu’min College* offers co-education from Kindergarten to year 12 and introduces segregated classes from upper primary right through till year 11 and most classes in year 12. Designated areas and separate recess and lunch times were being put in place at the time when interviews for this study took place.

In 2011, *Mu’min College* was situated within the fifth percentile of Year 12 academic performance ranking of its state (specific term for tertiary entry exam used by the state is withheld for anonymity of the school). The school’s 2011 NAPLAN results (ACARA, 2011b) demonstrated all year levels (year 3, 5, 7 and 9) performing above or substantially above the average national benchmarks in all areas assessed. Entry to this school was competitive subject to each child having satisfactorily passed an interview with the school.

**Participants.** The 21 participants associated with *Mu’min College* had been represented by numbers 1 to 21 in Table 5. One participant who was a teacher in a government high school participated as a graduate from *Mu’min College*. Another graduate participated as a service provider but drew on her previous experience as a student at this college from time to time. Staff members included the school chaplain/imam, a female welfare coordinator, who both had teaching responsibilities, and two school counsellors, one of whom participated in the interview while she was on leave. No teachers were available to take part in the interviews. For participants who played more than one role in *Mu’min College*, their main roles in this study are set in bold type. Similarly, participants who had associations with more than one Muslim school, their specific narratives of *Mu’min College* have been bolded along their timeline.
Table 5
*Participants and their association history with Mu’min College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010 ’11 ’12</th>
<th>Roles in Muslim schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student, <strong>counsellor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student public, <strong>student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>counsellor</strong>, parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher/imam, <strong>chaplain</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student public, <strong>student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student K, <strong>student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student public, <strong>student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher, welfare coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parent K, <strong>parent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>student</strong>, teacher public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following vignette is arranged in a chronological order, using quotes taken from interview transcripts of participants from *Mu’min College*.

**Vignette.**

Jannah, a teacher at a government high school, recalled her experiences as a student at *Mu’min College* in the early days, *“We begged to get out of that school, we were depressed, we were anxious, we were … in pain.”*

*… as far as the [Muslim] schools are concerned, it is just a numbers game: where they end up on a table (ranking) at the end of the year.*
... for students who are not performing so well, they were referred to as the dumb class.

... if you are not getting the results, you got kicked out, or you repeat it.

...there is that ignorance that we can’t go to public schools because of “haram”. My mum was like that, she refused to send us to a public school.

... when I went into university; I got the shock of my life.

... When I went to Mu’min College ... I never felt cared for. I went through high school with all the anxieties, stress and pressure, there was no support.

... the school counsellor only came in the year after I left high school.

... there was only the welfare coordinator.... Now looking back, she was for disciplinary rather than wellbeing.

... things have started to change, even though we are nowhere near where it is supposed to be.

Farah, the relieving school counsellor, witnessed the coming of a school counsellor when she was in Year 10. Comparing her experience as a student from the mid-1990s to mid-2000s to what was available at the time this study took place, Farah reflected,

... things have changed a lot since I’ve been here six years ago ... we never used to have anything... A lot of changes, like Iftars (community breaking fast in Ramadan), Eid festivals, I think ... holding these activities yearly... I think that supported the kids in a lot of ways because they come to the school and they have fun as opposed to learning, learning, learning.

... one thing I find is that kids hold onto every single word that you say ... the words you choose have to be very positive.

Nuria, the school counsellor on leave, had been in her position for 10 years, said, “before me there was a counsellor who was not a Muslim… she was here for about a month or so ...”. Nuria continued,

...the students found it very hard because she did not understand our culture. Problem with girls, they don’t have someone to go to... especially at that age they’re growing up they need a lot of support.

... it’s up to myself and the [welfare] coordinator to discuss issues about hygiene and communication with boys.

... I think there is a need for a male counsellor on staff to take care of the boys.

... the principal has hired more support staff both in the primary and the high school.
Rehab, the high school welfare coordinator for girls believed that the extracurricular activities for secondary school students had improved at the College in terms of interfaith and intercultural activities:

... our schools’ a part of an interfaith dialogue between Muslims, Christians and Jews. We always take at least three students with us.
... we have schools coming to our schools to visit...
... lots and lots of sporting activities ...
... to segregate them at this age, they’re teenagers, but also academically they perform better...
...they are prepared for university...

Mahmud, a male student in Year 11, said, ... we don’t have a [male] counsellor just for counselling, pretty much he [welfare coordinator] is a coordinator, he does everything...
... in terms of anyone else we can speak to, no, not even the principal, you can’t even say Hi to him without him giving you the death stare.

Shamsa, a female student in Year 12, identified the intent for streaming: ...
I understand the principal wants us to do the high scaling subjects....

Leena, another Year 12 female student, revealed,
This [streaming of classes] creates isolation. Sometimes there’s a bit of bias in terms of intelligence.

On the other hand, Sarah (female student in Year 12), having experienced remedial classes in the past, appreciated the support she received from the teachers:
... one good thing, students in lower ability classes get extra help.

Dana, however, even as one of the top students at Mu’min College, did not agree with the school’s approach to streaming. She likened it to:
... a dog eat dog kind of world. I heard someone in the office say it’s survival of the fittest, not a good sense for a school to have. There’s no encouragement of non-Maths, Science, English related things I find.

Elham, another female high achiever in Year 12, agreed with Dana on the school’s bias towards certain subjects. She said,
...when career options come, they are kind of saying Science, Science and Science, but where are the Arts degrees and ...? It’s inscribed in the school spirit, it’s a cultural mentality.
Hassan, a Year 12 male student, understood that:

...**the bullying is almost non-existent in this school.** You don’t feel there are people who need help that often. They are so supported you feel like this is your second home.

Fahima (a Year 12 female student), on the contrary, held a totally different opinion on the issue with bullying:

...**problems in lower classes, you get bullied.** So much pressure on students and school work...

Habiba, a parent, held that bullying did not only affect the girls but also some of the boys:

...my sister’s son, who is in [public] high school, he gets bullied by other boys in the school. He is now seeing a psychologist. But at least in that public school, they help them. **In the Muslim school the counsellor works three days a week, and there’s no male counsellor for the boys.**

In terms of counselling service at the school, students had mostly positive comments about this aspect of care.

Mustafa, a Year 12 male student shared,

...a friend of mine ... consulted with the school counsellor, and he has regular sessions with her. **She can help him out and guide him to overcome the problem.**

Fahima appreciated the visibility of the school psychologist:

...I like how the counsellor always comes out of her office during recess and lunch to talk to the girls, walks around...

There was an exception. Shaakirah (a Year 10 female student), on a family death, was told to see the counsellor and her experience had not exactly been positive. Shaakirah shared:

...I hadn’t been feeling bad before I talked to her [counsellor]. **But when I talked to her it got worse.** The school chaplain... I’d go to him for anything.

Ibrahim, a father of three children, one of whom had been diagnosed with a form of learning disability, observed,

... when you talk about support services, the teachers need to be trained as well.

**If you go to the school, you hear shouting of the teachers,** maybe because of the population of the students, there’s behaviour issues. You go to a normal Australian school they don’t shout at their children. **That’s very old fashioned and not very Islamic.**
Habiba identified the pressure to which her children were subjected at Mu’min College:

... we don’t see our children. Even Saturday and Sunday they have ... too much homework. *When will they learn their religion? When will they learn how to talk, about life?*

... in this Islamic school, there is a teacher, who says to the children, “You are animals, you are monkeys, you are ...” too much! They talk to children like this!

... the previous high school girls’ coordinator, she has left. She was strong but she always smiled.

Much of the information revealed by participants from Mu’min College indicated an approach of exerting high pressure in order for students to perform academically, for their success in future. Compared to Muslim College, Mu’min College had consistently invested resources into employing qualified counsellors for over a decade, and more recently special education assistant to support their students. Positive accounts of caring staff, measures taken by the school, and students who felt well supported gave a range of examples and personal experiences of what was perceived as adequate support. Yet the undertone of this care still revolved around students’ academic performance to maintain the school’s ranking status, and as long as the ranking status was maintained, the community would continue to give their support. Ironically, consumers who fed into this system were not all at ease with this approach and some wished that things were different in terms of Islamic studies, the approach and the objective of the institution, and student wellbeing support services, to name a few. Detailed analysis of consumers’ ‘dream’ will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

The third school in this presentation is Muhsin College, which was placed on the higher end of the rating scale by two key stakeholders.

**Muhsin College**

**School background.** Established in the mid 1990s, Muhsin College was the youngest amongst the three schools presented in Part 2 of this chapter. Situated in a low socio-economic area, with an ICSEA value lower than both Muslim and Mu’min Colleges, the school relied for 81% of its finances on Australian and state government recurrent funding and 12% on student tuition fees (ACARA, 2012). Muhsin College offered co-education from pre-primary to year 12. There were 1100+ students enrolled at Muhsin College in 2012, staffed by 108 teaching and 51 non-teaching personnel (ACARA, 2012).
In 2011, *Muhsin College* was situated just above the 50th percentile of year 12 academic performance ranking of all schools in the state in which it was located (specific term for tertiary entry exam used by the state had been withheld for anonymity of the school). This information was backed by the school’s 2011 NAPLAN results (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011a) demonstrating all year levels (year 3, 5, 7 and 9) scoring close to or above average national benchmarks in most areas assessed.

**Participants.** Unlike the previous two colleges illustrated in this chapter, where greater numbers of participants had taken part in the interviews, two participants represented *Muhsin College* in this study. Nevertheless, as key stakeholders, both participants made important contributions to this study through their comprehensive information. Other sources of information on *Muhsin College* had been obtained through the school newsletter, website, photographs taken on student work displays during the researcher’s visits to the school and informal conversations through personal contact with a student and her parent, who declined to partake in an interview.

*Muhsin College*’s principal, Huda, had been the only stakeholder in her position to partake in the interview for this study. Huda, with 18 years of experience as an educator, had spent a considerable number of years in *Muhsin College*, first as a teacher, then as the principal in the primary section, prior to her appointment as the high school principal just over a year prior to the interview. Huda reflected:

> Over the years we’ve become a lot more wise and we’re realising the difference that it’s just an issue that we can no longer ignore; that unless we address those social emotional needs then it’s almost useless sort of wanting to address the academic needs because if that’s not right, then it’s so saddening to know that there could be a child that has such great potential but given the fact there’s those underlying issues that we’re unable to address that could have overcome their difficulties.

The second key stakeholder from *Muhsin College*, Shifaa, was the head of the counselling department and school psychologist. Shifaa, a registered psychologist, joined *Muhsin College* as the school counsellor around the mid 2000s. About five years later she left to work overseas for three years until over a year ago when she returned to *Muhsin College*. Shifaa was the current student counsellor, the coordinator of the school’s counselling department as well as the Personal and Social Development coordinator (PSD).
The information Huda and Shifaa brought to this study shed light on what could be possible for student wellbeing support service in Australian Muslim schools that catered for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds whose parents were first or second generation migrant Muslims of a lower socio-economic status.

**Vignette.** Instead of presenting the information in a chronological order as with the previous two schools, the vignette of *Muhsin College* will be presented in terms of programs and services that support student wellbeing throughout the academic year.

**Term one.**

An eight-week transition program with a focus on friendship was offered to all year 7 students.

Year 9 students through an excursion would meet the year 7s and became the ‘go-to’ people in high school for queries and informal peer support. Mentoring the year 7s had a two-fold benefit for both year levels. While supporting the year 7s, the year 9 students gained leadership skills. The year 9s would make a Goody bag containing items that symbolised friendship, forgiveness and so on for the year 7 students.

**Term Two.**

In second term in 2012 the year 9 students organised a fun-filled Amazing Race for the year 7s that included riddles and obstacle courses that the staff enjoyed watching as much as students enjoyed participating.

Year 7 students continued with the theme about getting along and towards the second half of the final term they had created an illustrated story book with their team members.

Year 8 students focused on the anti-bullying theme. They also engaged in rock-climbing, which tied in well with the goal setting theme they did in year 8 PSD classes.

**Term Three.**

From term three year 9 students worked on the theme of responsibility where they engaged in different activities and raised funds for various causes.

Organised by another department in *Muhsin College*, Year 9 students also participated in regular meetings with students from other schools to have interfaith dialogues, exchanged ideas and views on different topics.

Other than the different themes for years 7 to 9 students, the PSD also include career guidance and study skills.
Term Four.

Year 7s in their teams would be reading their illustrated books on friendship to the Grade 4 students.

Year 8s’ hard work on a play surrounding the theme of Bullying was performed in front of grades 5 and 6.

For the first time at Muhsin College in 2011, the year 12 students had been asked to take part in an exit survey to share with the school what they felt had better prepared them to face the world right after high school. In 2012, the school organised a first alumnus get-together, inviting graduates from the previous year to come back and share their experiences in order for the school to better support future year 12 students.

Both Huda and Shifaa mentioned a program on cyber bullying they had organised for their students in 2012. In addition to this, much effort had been put into Bullying Week, built into both the PSD program and other subjects across various year levels. Shifaa coordinated with subject teachers, the Arts teacher, and parent bodies to educate students according to their cognitive and developmental needs. A number of teaching activities had been incorporated into learning outputs such as plays, art exhibition, Nasheeds (Islamic ballads) and presentations from speakers both within and outside the school. Students were made aware of the school’s anti-bullying policy, bystander effect and underlying issues associated with bullying. Another whole school prevention program, aimed at engaging students of all year levels, was Mental Health Week where information was disseminated through pamphlets, video clips and class discussions. Student learning outcomes were expressed through art.

Shifaa felt that the student wellbeing support services had been built and developed over many years to be where they were at this stage. However, having leadership support in allocating regular class time for the PSD program had seen greater improvement in providing on-going, regular education and preventative programs to students in the lower secondary years. This had given the school counsellors the freedom to run their sessions without feeling that they were encroaching on subject teachers’ teaching time. Although students still needed one-on-one counselling sessions for individual cases, Shifaa believed that:

If you can deal with these issues through prevention programs, then you don’t have to deal with as many [one-on-one sessions]… In terms of time allocation, we have more staff now in our department… there’s more time allocated, we can run longer programs. We have discussions back then… admin things, health issues,
preventive issues, they are willing to give up that one period per week throughout the year.

Summary

A significant amount of information enriched this study by 56 participants playing various roles in 18 schools catering for student bodies of Muslims from the three major cities where close to 90% of Australian Muslims resided. Perspectives of participants reveal the various stages in the development of student wellbeing support services in Muslim schools in Australia. The vignettes of student wellbeing support services at the three schools, Muslim College, Mu’min College and Muhsin College, provided a range of snapshots of practices in Australian Muslim schools. The first two schools with larger numbers of participants enabled the vignettes to be presented in a chronological manner over the span of the schools’ history while participants from the third school offered comprehensive programs to be displayed in order of terms within an academic year. The qualitative analysis of data collected from all participants will be organised in order of the AI framework in Chapters Five to Eight to follow.
CHAPTER 5 – DISCOVERY: WHAT IS IN PRACTICE?

This chapter attempts to address the first of four guiding questions: *What was in place to support students’ wellbeing in the participant-associated schools; and what were some of their best experiences?* The content for the most part of this chapter is expository. Semi-structured interview questions helped to discover *what is/had been in place and what stakeholders’ concerns are*. Details of what has been discovered within Australian Muslim schools specifically in the area of student wellbeing support services from stakeholders’ personal experiences and viewpoints will be presented, and where available, best practice will be highlighted. Appreciative Inquiry’s positive approach played an important role in eliciting participants’ responses, which as it happened, were not always positive. Participants shared their understanding of the ethos of care from an Islamic perspective. They also articulated the extent to which this ethos had been implemented in Muslim schools. A range of existing counselling services reflected the efforts some of the schools had made towards supporting student wellbeing. Some of the descriptions indicated a definite progression in this area in certain schools over the years compared to when they were first established.

The discourse of wellbeing began in 1948 when the World Health Organisation first defined health as “not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” but “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing” (World Health Organisation, 1946, p. 100). Since then, some seven decades on, the discourse on wellbeing has expanded. Rand (2011) lists six dimensions of wellness to include physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and occupational wellbeing. To Rand’s list, Chobdee (n.d.) added the dimension of environmental wellness (wellbeing) to include factors that contribute to a person’s wellbeing such as the cultural environment one is in, and environmental health, security and safety factors. This study focuses on the spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing support for secondary school students in Australian Muslim schools. Academic support has also been discussed, due to education being the principal business of schools. To stay true to the data generated, participants’ disclosures of both positive and negative viewpoints/experiences are organised in this chapter in four parts. Part 1 deals with ethos of care and spiritual wellbeing support. Part 2 examines academic support, which is followed by Part 3, social and emotional wellbeing support. Part 4 presents counselling services in participant-associated Muslim schools.
Part 1: Ethos of Care and Spiritual Wellbeing Support in Participant-associated Schools

In response to the interview questions: How would you describe the ethos of care in your faith and how is this implemented in your school? What were your best experiences/memories in this area? participants interpreted the ethos of care in Islam from the practices and values standpoint, and the support for students’ spiritual wellbeing in terms of the unique religious education and facilities provided by Muslim schools. Participants’ responses were diverse, and could be categorised under focus and practice. The focus of care specific to Muslim schools pertained primarily to imparting knowledge while the practice of care concentrated on students’ ritual development; presented in brief in the first and second sections. A third section of Part 1 examines participants’ views on support for students’ spiritual wellbeing in their associated Muslim schools.

Focus: Imparting Knowledge

Islamic studies classes are a component unique to Muslim schools where Islamic knowledge, values and rituals are passed onto the younger Muslim generation. From among the twenty-seven current and former students, fifteen acknowledged one or more aspects of what the Muslim schools had to offer in terms of imparting basic knowledge of the religion, at least for students in primary and lower secondary levels. Examples given by these students included rituals of how to perform the formal prayer (salat), the correct way of reciting the Qur’an (for students who began their schooling in Muslim schools in early primary years) and some knowledge associated with obligatory duties.

Participants demonstrated understanding of the ethos of care from an Islamic perspective. It is remarkable to note how some of the students in this study demonstrated sound understanding in this regard and at times articulated levels of awareness similar to that of the adult participants.

Practice: Ritual Development

To support students with their practice, every participant-associated school provided ablution and prayer facilities for the daily after-midday-prayer in congregation. Students were taught the values of fasting and charity, to fulfil their obligations as an individual towards God first and foremost, but also what these obligatory duties meant in terms of creating a compassionate and caring society. Every year, Ramadan timetable would be adjusted for the entire school to finish an hour earlier. Some schools organised Eid festivals for their students and families.
Examples abound during these congregations in the local mosques where the imam would announce events happening in community members’ lives so that donations, prayers, well wishings and so on could take place collectively. Ali, for instance, in his role as the school imam/chaplain had implemented this practice at his school.

Support for Spiritual Wellbeing

A few examples of school mottos that reflect the community elders’ aspirations for their younger generations’ faith preservation and education are quoted here: *Islamic Values and Academic Excellence for Success in this Life and the Hereafter; Knowledge is Light and Work is worship; Academia-Discipline-Religion-A way of life; Faith, Knowledge, Practice;* and *Advance through Knowledge.* When asked about their spiritual wellbeing, participants appeared to use the terms religion and spirituality interchangeably. For example, terms such as Islam as a way of life, living by core values, performing prayers, the alignment between knowledge and action, character building and so on reflect a close link between spirituality and religiosity.

Pargament (2013) holds that spirituality is not synonymous with religion. People involve themselves in religion because they are motivated by a yearning for “something sacred in their lives”. Paragament (2013) defines religion as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” and argues that “spirituality is the core function of religion” (p. 272).

Participants held a broad range of perspectives on spiritual support provided by the schools in which they had experiences. Spiritual development and religious education had taken centre stage through most discussions with participants. Their perspectives will be subdivided under Spiritual Support and Religious Curriculum and Pedagogy.

**Spiritual support.** This category discusses schools’ efforts in providing students with learning opportunities to develop their spiritual wellbeing through religious scholars, Islamic studies, spiritual upliftment, and routines.

**Religious scholars.** Religious scholars with the highest qualifications were usually appointed to be the school imams (religious leader) who usually also headed the Islamic studies department of the schools, overseeing a number of religion teachers and the Islamic studies curriculum. A small number of schools funded by the National School Chaplaincy Program had their school imams bear the title of chaplains as well. During data collection, the researcher of this study interviewed two school imam/chaplains (Ali and Idris), four Islamic studies teachers (Farah, Zuriyati, Waleed...
and Saleha), and one school counsellor who was previously an Islamic studies teacher for ten years (Bilal). Unlike the male religion teachers, many female religion teachers did not have formal religious studies qualifications from education institutions specialising in Islamic Theology and Sciences. The majority of Islamic studies teachers did not have formal teaching qualifications from Australia. All seven stakeholders had indicated that they went the extra mile to support their students. Examples of the two school imams illustrate this discovery.

Ali provided examples of his support as a religious leader, “If someone gets sick, or passes away, or in the hospital, they [students] ask me to make dua (supplications) in public in the mosque [at school] after Dhuhr (after midday) prayer.”

**Islamic studies.** Idris, the school chaplain/imam of another Muslim school, commented on how Islamic studies supported students’ spiritual wellbeing, “We also have wholesome approach towards values in relation to our teachings, so teachers do embody these values in their own selves; we also try to apply within the system so that they get the support.”

Students appeared to appreciate advice and explanations given by service providers who were able to help them find answers to their personal questions or contemporary issues by relating the matter at hand from an Islamic viewpoint in a non-judgmental way. Students expressed their love and respect towards imams, teachers or counsellors who were able to provide support in this manner.

**Spiritual upliftment.** It seemed that the goal of achieving competitive results in year 12 caused some schools to exert greater pressure than others right from the first year in high school and continued this approach throughout the entire six years for high school students. Students in different year levels at one of these high-pressure schools wished to have opportunities that gave them some spiritual upliftment to balance out the high academic pressure. Mustapha (a year 12 male student) was among a handful of exceptions. He found his school provided adequate spiritual wellbeing support. When referring to prayer facilities provided by the school, Mustapha commented:

> I think when you do something right in front of Allah, the right thing will happen to you.... Every day I put my head on the floor to pray, I feel relieved. You feel like you get to escape from all your worries, it helps you a lot. I couldn’t have done it myself, credit to my parents, the sheikh in the school.

Elham, a female student in year 12, recalled how Islamic lessons helped to lift her spirits, “We’ve had times when we feel so down, really upset, when things pile up or you’re tired. But after you’ve had a spiritual uplifting, say Islamic studies, suddenly
your emotions fly up, your social status also flies up.” Dana, another a female student said, “These are some of the best things being in a Muslim school, you all have this thing in common. Whenever you went to this interesting lecture or something, everyone’s really interested to know.”

**Routines.** Amira, an ex-student from another Muslim school, only realised the values learnt through the routine assembly of reciting Qur’anic verses and supplications after having left her school a few years later. In contrast, Sumaya, a graduate from the same school, who returned years later as a qualified teacher, found reliving the experience of morning recitation disturbing as memories of this compulsory routine came flooding back to her. Sumaya remembered “being made to stand in line and just recite the Qur’an and dua (supplications), and ... it was a lot. Even if we didn’t understand or didn’t really care, you still had to do it... I never learnt how to recite or speak Arabic, or read Qur’an unfortunately.” Sumaya explained that she did not come from a practising family and thus found the Islam she learnt from that school “wasn’t very good.” She felt “ripped off” from not learning the Qur’an in Arabic, basic history of Islam or Islamic values. Sumaya felt unmotivated and unsupported at her school because from her perspective the routines were forced upon her and felt mechanical. It was not until she went to university that her Islamic spiritual development really began.

The content and methods in which Islamic studies were imparted to support students’ spiritual wellbeing are discussed in the following section.

**Religious pedagogy.** Some parents and students voiced their opinions on the religious pedagogy within their associated schools. Most participants referred to the Islamic studies and the actions of the adults at the Muslim schools as sources from which they drew to develop as a Muslim. Two parents who were not happy with certain aspects of the school rationalised their decision for keeping their children in Muslim schools as essentially due to the all-Muslim environment these schools provided. Some students sought to supplement Islamic teachings from other sources outside the schools. Yet for other parents, a Muslim school was seen as the one-stop shop they relied upon to meet all of the academic, social and religious needs of their children. This section has been divided into three operational aspects of Islamic studies offered by Muslim schools for a closer examination: Content, Time Allocation and Pedagogy.

**Content.** Participants held divergent views on the content of Islamic lessons in their associated Muslim schools.

**Satisfactory.** Farah, a counsellor and ex-student of a Muslim school, believed that the daily and weekly Islamic studies classes provided students with the knowledge
on principles of Islam, the core values of the religion, concepts of monotheism and so on. Yasmeen, a female student in year 10, compared her experiences from public schools up until year eight to the Islamic studies classes she received since transferring to the Muslim school: “The school does bring out a lot of Islam, treating others kindly, not mix too much with boys and girls.”

**Sex education.** Ibrahim, a parent, believed that the school his children attended had not fulfilled the trust of parents who opted to send their children to Muslim schools. He elucidated that adolescent students required specific instructions on many aspects of religious practice when they reached puberty, such as personal hygiene, not only for health reasons, but more so for ritual cleansing to achieve spiritual benefits. He also considered it necessary for high school students to receive sex education from the Islamic perspective. Madina (student welfare staff and volunteer) and Zainab (graduate and employee of a Muslim school) raised similar concerns regarding Muslim students’ lack of age appropriate sex education from an Islamic perspective. They reasoned that many parents were either not educated in this regard or found the subject uncomfortable and culturally inappropriate to discuss with their children. Islamic sex education seemed a subject that parents felt that Muslim schools needed to pay some serious attention to within the Islamic curriculum in an open society.

**Skills preparation.** Another contextually relevant area within the content knowledge of Islamic studies on students’ skill preparation for interacting with members of the wider community after leaving high school had been addressed in the school where Idris was school chaplain/imam. He explained that some of the topics covered in year 11 at his school in the Islamic curriculum included interactive, interfaith dialogues, discussion of articles from newspaper, skills such as communication, including identifying and avoiding communication blockers and so on. The sister school of this school in a different state adopted the same curriculum. Unfortunately this aspect of Islamic education was not adequately covered in most Muslim schools. Iman, a counsellor, also underscored the importance of educating students to view life situations from a spiritual perspective, with the aim of helping them make the connection between Islamic values and their relevance in real life.

**Intellectual rigour.** Zainab, an ex-student, who later returned to work at her old school, was involved in developing the Islamic studies program at one stage and considered that the Islamic studies program in that school as “basically defunct”. She held the opinion that Islam had a lot of intellectual diversity and richness but students had not been given opportunities to explore much of it.
Needless to say, Muslim schools play a pivotal role in selecting the most appropriate and relevant content to enhance students’ Muslim identity as well as enriching students’ spirituality. It appears that the Muslim schools in Australia do not have a standardised, well thought out curriculum for Islamic studies. Each school is left up to their own devices to impart Islamic knowledge of their choosing to their students. Curriculum development is often done by staff members without Australian teaching qualifications who were trained in Islamic institutions overseas. Adopting textbooks from countries with little contextual relevance to Australia is not uncommon in these schools. Islam as a way of life cannot be taught as an ideology in isolation from its implementation in a believer’s everyday life. A small number of graduates from the student group wished the content was more connected to their daily living, which would better equip them to interact with the wider, non-Muslim community with better understanding and confidence.

**Time allocation.**

*Insufficient.* Common to all Muslim schools was the progressive reduction in time allocated for Islamic studies as the students got older for the sake of meeting the increasing demands of the education curriculum. Some schools offered one or maximum two hours of Islamic Studies per week to the year 11 students. Year 12 students in most schools did not have Islamic Studies at all. Although acknowledging the challenge school management had in balancing all subjects in year 11 and 12 within the timetable, many stakeholders from the consumers group alluded to an undertone of dissatisfaction towards both the quality and quantity of Islamic lessons offered by their schools.

Elham, a year 12 female student, commented, “We only get one hour a week, my friend who is in another course gets none. You wonder: are academic[s] suddenly more important than religion?” Some students, for example, Fahima and Sarah (Year 12 students), sought to supplement their Islamic education from classes or religion teachers outside the school before they became busy with year 12 work.

*Priority.* From the service providers’ perspective, Islamic Studies was not the only subject competing for a share in the timetable. Year 12 students were essentially *untouchable* for anything other than their examinable subjects. Iman (counsellor) pointed out, “Seniors, you can’t touch them because they’re studying, academic, you can’t go near them.” As some students revealed, subjects such as Physical Education, Sports, Language and Arts had also been progressively eliminated from the timetable as they got older.
Lacking seriousness. While it might be easy to assume that those at the management level had not given priority to students’ Islamic education when they had structured the timetable, other issues could also have contributed to the progressive reduction of Islamic studies from the timetable. A general *laissez-faire* attitude from both parents and students, for example, had been indicated by some participants. Aisha, a second year university student who attended a Muslim school until year 10, recalled her impression of her school, “Just because there is a prayer room doesn’t mean the environment is Islamic. Some parents don’t even care about their prayers”. Students’ attitude towards this subject, and possibly towards learning in general, had been reflected by Zuriyati, an Islamic studies teacher for junior secondary students:

I was told most of the kids ... parents provide their children with all these gadgets, iphone, ipod, the kids are always listening, headphones under the scarf, they are looking at you but when you ask them a question they don’t respond, you know something’s going on.

It is apparent that while the consumers, students and parents in this study may have desired more time allocated to Islamic studies for spiritual development, the student body and their parents as a whole, may hold divergent views towards Islamic studies. School management has many factors to consider and decides how much and where time can be best utilised. Discussed next is the third party in this triad, the teachers, and their pedagogical strategies in both student behaviour management and delivery of the subject.

Pedagogy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines pedagogy as “the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept” ("Pedagogy", n.d.). One of the most discussed aspects of Muslim students’ religious education in Muslim schools is the delivery methods of the teachers. Broadly speaking, discussions included discipline, motivation, teachers’ skills in engaging students in the subject matter, and teachers themselves as role models, as demonstrated below.

Discipline. Tasneem shared her experience as a secondary Muslim school student and thought that the school was “more about the curriculum, too much discipline on the students, we weren’t being taught properly about Islam…”

Farah and Khalid had to transfer their five children, one after another, into public schools because they found their children unhappy in the two Islamic schools in which they were enrolled. Discussions with other parents who had children experiencing similar dissatisfaction led Farah and Khalid to the conclusion that even though the schools had good intentions in their emphasis on religious education, they
were let down by their own over-enthusiasm in the form of enforcing Islamic rules that it was actually doing a disservice to students’ spiritual development. Khalid explained, “They’re trying to apply every single Islamic rule they have on young children. They’re trying to enforce things on children that adults can’t even do.”

Motivation. In a similar vein, Amani, an ex-welfare coordinator of a Muslim school, criticised the negativity associated with Islamic lessons, “They have the idea about the Deen [religion/Islamic way of life] that everything is haram [prohibited], haram. Everything is wrong, everything you do is wrong.”

Pedagogical skills. Tasneem recalled her foundation years in a Muslim primary school she went to,

... it is important that from a young age to be implemented, not just about the rules but stories, the child loves to learn about it. It’s spiritual, it’s beautiful, they enjoy to learn about it.

Leena and Shamsa, two female students shared their fond memories of a teacher who used to infuse her lessons with Islamic values as well as living by example through her interactions with her students. A number of other participants associated with the same school, among them a parent and two staff members, all mentioned about and held this teacher in very high regard. She was described as someone who was knowledgeable, open and willing to answer any questions students had about the religion. Students looked up to her. As Leena explained,

She puts it into your head.... I’m so glad we had her as a part our lives, she showed us a lot of things, I’m very grateful. After she left, we had an Islamic studies teacher, she was umm... out of touch... she couldn’t relate to us. She couldn’t answer the questions, she just says it’s haram (forbidden).”

Amani, an ex-welfare coordinator remarked, “People in Muslim schools with their good intentions don’t have the tools/expertise to deal with the students in a productive and efficient manner. They care but don’t know how to show care. The care given to the students from my perspective is not appropriate.”

In terms of behaviour management in class, Aisha, an ex-student, thought that the school she went to was “too comfortable, too relaxed, and lacked a sense of professionalism both from the teachers and the students”. She explained, “Teachers walk into the classroom, every one continues chatting.... Disruptive students need to be removed from the class so that students who potentially can achieve get the opportunity to learn.”
Zainab, who assisted in the Islamic studies department of a Muslim school, commented about the program:

It was pretty dull...I know that the Islamic studies teachers, some of them ... try to do their best, absolutely, I would say the responsibility lies on the head of the department and they’re probably not doing as much as they should. A lot more could be done without compromising the integrity of the Islamic studies program, and still making it a program of substance, but these need to be more holistic, it’s just sad, uninspiring.

Shaakirah, a year 10 student, aptly summed up the pedagogical skills of the Islamic studies teachers at her school, “If you want to help them, don’t come in a very harsh way.... The school is providing the lessons but not helping students to appreciate and understand it.”

Zainab believed that the key to effectively supporting young Muslims spiritually was by approaching them at their level. Having been involved in the development and delivery of a community initiated Islamic inspirational leadership program for year 11 students at her old school, Zainab came to the following conclusion:

You’ve got to have an Islamic studies program that engages these young minds, and be aware of the culture that they are in, the social networking, the whole facebook, the twitter, my space culture, the whole we have iphones, and ipads, real digital this and that, be aware of the issues that they are facing, relate Islam to real world events and experiences, make it relevant to them.

Skills aside, students are looking for adults to model their identity as Muslims. Participants’ experiences on this topic are presented next.

Teachers as role models. Sumaya, an ex-student, was particularly disappointed by the lack of role models at her school: “I didn’t see their actions, or any other Islamic teachings being implemented.” She recalled an occasion when she was delighted by a lesson in which one of the two counsellors at her school integrated Islamic values with a Western framework on personal development.

Nadia, an ex-counsellor, illustrated an example of an Islamic studies teacher at the school she worked previously:

I know of an Islamic teacher at the school, and instead of going to the class to the students on time, he would call the students to come to his office so he can teach them there... or he will be there late, or not go at all. So where is the implementation of being truthful and being on time and be doing what Islam says?
Habiba (a parent) asked, “Why is it here always knowledge and no manners? My sister-in-law’s children attend a public school in the area, you should see how they deal with the kids. WHY, WHY, WHY? Even the principal, you walk pass him he doesn’t say Salam.”

Ibrahim, a parent with two of his young children at a Muslim school, shared his experience,

If you go to the school, you hear shouting ... the teachers who are doing the shouting and assaulting, it’s the Qur’an teachers. My son in year two was physically assaulted by the teacher; he got grabbed by the collar... that’s battering basically. They need a lot of change.

In summary, Islamic studies is one subject that sets Muslim schools apart from non-Muslim schools and hence is instrumental in the development of students’ spiritual wellbeing. While the education system in Australia does provide ample opportunity for young Muslims to gain skills and learn shared values such as justice and responsibility, it does not provide the lens to view the morals and values Muslims live by from a spiritual perspective. Spiritual wellbeing support from the perspective of stakeholders is closely associated with the structure of Islamic studies curriculum, which includes: staffing and time allocation, as well as content relevance for Muslim youth; the religion teachers’ pedagogical skills; and how Muslim teachers model their spirituality in their daily interactions with students. Students at this impressionable age compare and contrast religious teachings against actions of the people around them. Those who walk their talk are well respected by all. School imams/chaplains play an important role in providing spiritual support primarily for students, but also for their families. Religion teachers who are not familiar with Australian culture and do not have the necessary teaching qualifications are considered less effective in supporting students’ spiritual development. It is believed that an Islamic school plays a critical role in educating the younger Muslim generations about Islamic values in addition to imparting academic knowledge. In Madina’s (an ex-welfare staff and volunteer) words, “we need to instil the dignity of Islam in them ... to convey to these young people, and to build up their confidence and give them the Qur’an in the right hand and the skill of life in the other.”

Australian Muslim schools are motivated by this sense of responsibility.

The next segment of this chapter is a discussion on participants’ perspectives of how Muslim schools support their students’ academic wellbeing.
Part 2: Academic Support in Participant-associated Schools

Educational service is a term used by Eid (2008) to mean the core business of a given education institution. This term by association can be likened to a trade, whereby the school offers a service to meet the needs of its customers (parents and students). Eid (2008) in his dissertation categorises governorship of Islamic schools in Western Australia into external and internal influences. These two categories of governorship are similarly applicable to Islamic schools in other states around Australia. Both the external and internal bodies influence decisions on education service delivery policies. Eligibility for government funding is dependent upon whether a school meets the registration criteria set out by the funding bodies of the State in which the school is located. Internally, the schools are governed by a hierarchy from directors/founders of the schools in some cases, to boards of trustees, to the executors of policies, namely, principals, coordinators, heads of learning areas, and teachers. Part 2 of this chapter is divided into five sections: provision of information and resources; teacher efficacy; streaming; academic hyper-focus; and career and pathway bias.

Provision of Information and Resources

On academic support, Zainab acknowledged her principal for giving her much needed guidance. As a high achieving student, eldest of four from a very low socio-economic, single parent family, Zainab was grateful for having gained a much-needed scholarship offered by a top university of the State in which she resided. Commenting on this, Zainab remarked, “...so because of his efforts, I was able to receive that, otherwise I would have no clue on how to access these services, especially if you are of a second generation to migrant parents, your parents would not have a clue about what’s on offer at the university.”

Mustapha, a year 12 male student said, “I as a student feel I am being cared for in many aspects. For our studies, our school provides us with a lot of resources compared to other schools. I am very grateful for that.”

Teacher Efficacy

Participants from different schools shared their views on academic support in terms of teachers’ efficacy. Khalid, a parent, observed that most teaching staff at her daughter’s school were Australian qualified Muslim teachers, and some were very good teachers; but the strictness and an overall lack of humanistic consideration towards students’ needs from the management eventually drove him and his wife to transfer their daughter to a public school.
Sumaya, a qualified teacher and a graduate from a Muslim school, left after teaching just two terms at her old school due to an overall sub-standard treatment she witnessed first-hand in terms of pay, working hours, professional development or simply fair treatment towards the Muslim teachers. She revealed that some non-Muslim teachers told her the reason why they stayed on in that school was because,

the conditions are better than other schools... that the school doesn’t have as high standards as other private schools, so they can get away with more, lower standards of teaching, they are easier... they [the administration] don’t check what they teach, they get more leeway to do their own thing, they were more independent from the administration.

This, however, had not appeared to be a common occurrence. Within the same school were teachers (Muslim and non-Muslim) who from time to time had offered extra classes during school holidays, according to Nadia (ex-counsellor). Other schools offered tutoring classes during the school term, or remedial classes on weekends, or revision classes close to examination times.

One of the schools offered a very supportive tutoring program. Alia, the school counsellor at this school, explained that these optional tutoring classes were offered to students in high school, one year level per day once a week. These classes usually lasted for two hours plus half an hour of dinner followed by another half an hour of casual discussions between volunteer mentors and students. Teachers and volunteer mentors supervised the students. Mentors were mostly graduates from the same school who were university students pursuing an education degree. This was by far the best tutoring support identified by the researcher in this study.

Streaming

Some participants spoke about streaming of students in their schools. Fariah, a teacher of a school that did not stream their students said,

they found that quite a few smarter kids and weaker kids will balance each other out...there aren’t any kids with disabilities but probably learning disabilities, they are a little bit slow, we do sit with them one side, according to their ability, slowly, making them understand what I teach.

The majority of students in this study with their varied academic abilities were not in favour of streaming on the basis of students’ academic performance. However, a student who was streamed to a lower ability class at one stage during high school actually appreciated the extra academic support she received. Rehab, a welfare coordinator for high school female students, explained that students in remedial classes
at her school were very well supported and would be given more experienced and better qualified teachers. She said, “...the classes are smaller, and they do get teachers who have that experience who can help them a little bit more, where there’s a teacher-centred or strong teacher guidance.” This teacher-centred approach however, in Adam’s view, was not limited to remedial classes only. He said, “From the minute we enter the school they spoon feed us. I can’t say that’s good or bad. Because I’ve been in this school for so long, I can see what the school has been doing.”

**Academic Hyper-focus**

A number of participants from the consumer category complained about the academic workload and pressure they had experienced at their school. In the previous year, Habiba (a parent) received a call from the school counsellor one day to inform her that her daughter in year 11 broke down in class because she could not cope. Furthermore Habiba’s second daughter in year 8 at a different Muslim school had to see a counsellor for having developed symptoms of anxiety after she started high school. Habiba attributed this to the pressure exerted on students by that school because they wanted students to produce high enough marks to be amongst the State’s top ranking schools in academic performance. To illustrate the extent of this pressure, Habiba described, “In year 9 they do year 10’s work, in year 10 they do year 11’s work. No one does this. They keep pushing, pushing, pushing. They finished the Mathematics book in one term, then they do work online... when will they learn their religion?”

Other participants when commenting on the approach of academic hyper-focus adopted by their schools felt that the gradual elimination of some subjects from the curriculum could have caused imbalance to students’ overall wellbeing. Iman, a school counsellor, commented on the imbalance she had noticed among students she worked with at her school: “My most frustration is there’s so much academic work but the common sense is not really there for them [students].” Amani, an ex-welfare coordinator commented, “The students … knowing nothing about this world. They’re not equipped at all, in any sense…. They’re not making the correct choices, all these choices may have an impact for the rest of their lives.” Shifaa, head of counselling department of one Muslim school, highlighted some involvement of year 12 students in the school’s Anti-Bullying campaign, but not in other programs. The flip side to this phenomenon could also be interpreted as the extent to which the school stressed academic outcomes for students towards their final and critical years of high school.
Career and Pathway Bias

Besides the tremendous amount of stress on academic performance in some schools, there appears also to be a culture of bias towards certain professions. Zainab, for example, wished that her school offered more creative, Arts and Humanities subjects that could cater for students like herself who were less inclined towards Science and Mathematics. Likewise, Elham, a year 12 student, also wondered what it would be like for her had the option of Arts subjects been made available at her school. Echoing Elham’s view, Dana, also a year 12 student, shared,

There’s so much focus within this school for students to fit into a certain pattern, like a cookie cutter, you are expected to... it’s like a triangle form of job [options]... engineer, lawyer and doctor. There’s no cultivation of your own personal gift. If someone say wasn’t mathematically inclined, but was rather really good in painting, it would probably just be... ‘oh, that’s not important, you’ll never get anything from that’... I recently discovered a passion for graphic design and exploring in films, it’s sad that I don’t exactly have an outlet for that in the studies that are offered in this school.

Similar criticisms of the community’s culture of over-emphasising tertiary education to achieve what Dana called the “triangle-shaped” career options were brought up by other participants. Rehab, the welfare coordinator at her school, tried to encourage students to explore broader spectrums of career choice:

I have to point out to them... that there are lots of different pathways.... I know it’s very hard this culture of university, university, university which is not a bad thing to overachieve, but you also have to be honest with yourself, be realistic, be honest with what you can achieve, look at what you want, so there’s a little bit of self empowerment.

To sum up, schools being education institutions, there is no question about putting academic performance as a highest priority; that said, some schools appear to have been somewhat extreme in the means they adopt to achieve that end goal. A culture of academic hyper-focus has been found in a number of sought-after Muslim schools. This competitive zeal from the school leadership has at times been carried out at the expense of other dimensions of students’ wellbeing; so much so that even when narrowed down to purely academic care, this care has lost sight of what is best for the overall wellbeing of the students in favour of the ranking of the school. On the other hand, schools having a strong academic focus are commendable for investing resources generously towards hiring experienced and highly qualified teachers and providing
plenty of resource materials to their students. Streaming of classes is common in some of these schools. While many students did not perceive streaming favourably due to its psychological effects on students, one student found the extra support in remedial classes helpful from her personal experience. A high proportion of teacher-directed learning and controlled subject selection seem common among some schools. For whatever reason it may be, there exists an exaltation of certain professional lines through the pathway of university degrees by the school and community at large, possibly due to the financial reward and social status associated with them. One participant had illustrated people’s blatant denigration of certain career choices that were considered unworthy for students to explore.

Given the challenges involved in sustaining an independent education institution with very limited financial support from the community in most schools, the various symptoms of malfunctioning in academic support described by participants may benefit from a thorough review of Muslim schools introspectively within the Muslim school communities. For the time being, one can conclude that despite the divergent views regarding the academic support given by the Muslim schools, these schools, for better or for worse, are providing a service that the Muslim communities in Australia are striving to utilise. That only a handful of dissatisfied participants in this study had actually left their schools, while the remaining participants continued to engage with the Muslim schools despite their disquieting concerns, speaks volumes in terms of the need for these schools to improve. What participants wish to see happening in this regard will be discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Following Spiritual Wellbeing and Academic Support, part three discusses the social and emotional support in participant-associated Muslim Schools.

**Part 3: Support for Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Participant-associated Schools**

This part of the chapter presents the range of issues identified in relation to students’ social and emotional wellbeing, organised under two sections: the extent of student needs at a glance; and the range of issues in relation to students’ social and emotional wellbeing support.

**Extent of Student Needs at a Glance**

Close to 100% of enrolments in Australian Muslim schools are children with parents or grandparents who migrated to Australia at some time since the 1970s. Unrest in many parts of the world where Muslims are in the majority has brought a fraction of them from different countries to Australia on refugee or humanitarian visas in the recent
decades. Many newly arrived Australian Muslim adults are grappling with issues of survival, guilt and anxiety; and in some cases, trauma and loss in periods prior to and post settlement. Australian Muslim schools in certain areas are bursting at their seams to accommodate the increase in demand for schooling the children of this influx of newly arrived families. Some examples include Schools R1, J, and C. R1, a new campus of a well-established School R, is located in one of the settlement areas for refugees and people on humanitarian entry visas. In 2012, one participant from R1 estimated that 30% of its enrolments were children of new arrivals to Australia on the above-mentioned visa categories. School J in just four years has grown from 70+ to almost 800 students. Participants estimated that in School C, a school established for close to 30 years, 40% of its enrolments were children of parents from refugee and humanitarian entry backgrounds. A parent, Khalid commented on the impact of this growth within some Muslim schools: “They’re losing control, they’re losing the plot.”

There were a few exceptions, especially among schools that catered for slightly better established members of the community. Sulaiman, a male teacher at School Q (boys only campus), for example, noticed the improvement in student support services at his school in recent years. Sulaiman recalled,

There are a few counsellors at the school dealing with emotional, social and mental wellbeing of the students. As far as I am aware this may have been well established around four or five years ago. Whereas before that this probably was not that a strong ethic at the school…. I feel the pastoral care at this school is very strong, regular and very active…it caters for their social wellbeing… spiritual wellbeing with an Islamic aspect to it, and it also catsers towards their academic wellbeing.

Examples of the pastoral care at School Q given by Sulaiman included tutoring programs, camps and excursions. As the school is part of a large national and international organisation, Sulaiman believed that similar programs offered at Q would likely be implemented in other schools within the same organisation around Australia, if not across the world. This was confirmed by interviews conducted with counsellors from School H, one of the sister schools of Q that Sulaiman had referred to, but located in a different state.

One other school, School I, having recognised the need to help students make the transition from primary to high school, had been running camps for all year seven students at the start of first year high school for four years. This allowed teachers and students an opportunity to get to know each other and for bonding purposes between
students. These camps were contracted to a company where age appropriate programs and activities, gender specific instructors, and halal food were provided. Unique to School I was the school organised Umrah trip for year 10 boys led by the school imam and other religion teachers. For many logistical reasons, girls attended a different camp.

The next section presents more specific aspects of support for students’ social and emotional wellbeing.

Issues in Relation to Students’ Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Most participants considered social and emotional wellbeing to be closely related to each other. Although all dimensions of wellbeing are interrelated, when asked to discuss social and emotional aspects of wellbeing, most participants spoke about the two dimensions together, as they believed that one dimension could affect the other. Examples and discussions shared are grouped under the subheadings of: school atmosphere; isolation; social skills; and Muslim identity; the other side of the coin; and examples of support.

School atmosphere. As mentioned previously under Academic Support, some schools streamed their students according to their academic performance throughout their schooling years, so much so that students who had attended the same school for 13 years would often only know people in their own class, but not their peers in the same year at their school (Leena), let alone students from other year levels.

Students from other schools (e.g. Aisha, Buraydah), however, felt that the Muslim schools they went to enhanced their social wellbeing because everyone had similar religious beliefs and practices. For example, the dietary guidelines, the daily prayers, the yearly fasting and the religious celebrations were collectively practiced within their schools. These students felt a sense of normality and found observing these routine practices easy. Peer relations were extended to families and many felt a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community.

Isolation. Socialisation outside the school and Muslim community was one aspect about which students, ex-students and graduates thought that more could be done by the school. A number of ex-students who graduated a decade or more before the interviews took place in 2012 spoke of experiencing “culture shock” during their transition from an all-Muslim school to university. They found it confronting coming

---

4 Umrah is an Arabic term for pilgrimage performed any time outside the specified Hajj period during the 12th Islamic lunar month. It consists of the same main rituals such as donning the Ihram (two pieces of unsewn cloth for men), and observing the rules of Ihram, circumambulating the Ka’bah, the Sa’i (walking between the Mountains of Safa and Marwah). Unlike Hajj being an obligatory duty once in a lifetime for those who are physically, mentally and financially able, Umrah is voluntary.
from a segregated, conservative school to a mixed, open environment where everyone was free to dress, talk, question and think in whichever way they liked.

Jannah, a graduate from a Muslim school and currently a teacher at a public high school, spoke about her first encounters at university:

You meet gay people, you meet people totally out of the tree, you meet transgender. You just go, whoa, how do I deal with this? You get no skills to deal with life as a Muslim.... How do you interact, talk to people? ... you just have no idea.

Likewise, Zainab, an ex-student also said she had a “reverse culture” shock when she first went to university. She had to take the rest of the semester off six weeks into her first year, because she found “it was just really overwhelming, there was such a sheer difference, from a very sheltered isolated Muslim-only environment.”

**Social skills.** It appears that little had changed in some Muslim schools as far as developing students’ social skills are concerned. A number of students interviewed felt unprepared and apprehensive about life after high school.

Leena (a Year 12 female student) had her concerns over establishing friendships with her non-Muslim peers. She said,

We don’t feel we are prepared for uni life or work later on…. The problem is making friends and staying friends. You could ask someone for directions. Making friends with people not from the same background, or same religion as you. We’re in this environment; everyone is from ethnic backgrounds and all Muslims.

Shamsa, another Year 12 female student, said, “…we don’t have the opportunity to interact with other people. We don’t even know how to make friends properly.”

Habiba said that her daughter in Year 12 had been anxious about catching public transport alone for the first time for a school-organised excursion to visit a university. She had to ask her cousin to accompany her. Habiba acknowledged that the school had in a way *forced* her daughter to step out of her comfort zone. This, however, did not appear to be a common phenomenon among most students interviewed. Over-protectiveness from a cultural perspective, especially with girls, could have played a significant role in some children’s lack of readiness to face the world.

It appeared that, socially, boys in this study felt better prepared than girls to interact with people in the mainstream. Many boys in this study had networks of friends outside the school through sports clubs or other activities; one mentioned helping out with customers in his father’s business; while another student said he
worked on the weekends. Mahmud, a Year 11 male student mentioned meeting up frequently with friends “outside” for footy, watching movies and taking up evening courses where he got to meet and learn new things from different people. Talha, a Year 9 male student, commented on his peers’ social life, “Maybe some kids they just stay home and study study study all day. A couple of the kids they avoid everybody else.”

Hassan, a Year 12 male student felt he was prepared socially for life after high school. He said, “I think I’m prepared because school isn’t the only part of my life. Outside school, I go to cinemas, I interact with other people. Sometimes I would go out together in groups with my friends.”

Mustapha, a Year 12 male student, elaborated on what he perceived as preparation for social interactions with the opposite gender he gained from his school,

In Year 12, the school doesn’t mind the students [male and female] sharing the same library, for example. They make it a non-issue. We sometimes have mixed classes…. They try to make you realise that next year there’ll be a lot of people, different religion, different race, different idea, different thoughts. We have to try and stay on the right path, and make sure we don’t go astray… we shouldn’t fall for the wrong things. There’s gonna be haram everywhere especially this day and age.

Muslim identity. Thinking about responding to questions from non-Muslims regarding her identity and faith as a Muslim, Sarah (a Year 12 female student) revealed, “I don’t think I’m adequately prepared. I wouldn’t know how to answer their questions.” Dana, another Year 12 female student, however, felt that each person was responsible for seeking to understand his or her own faith. She remarked:

In terms of our religion and to answer the questions we will be asked out there, I think it’s really important as a critical thinker, to ask yourself those questions first. Because if you are considered as a blind follower, you’re never going to get anywhere, regardless of what creed you’re following, you always have to think about why I’m doing this…. People usually get so stuck in their comfort zone. I’m speaking personally first of all, and I think it’s really important to inform yourself of your religion first and foremost, and to solidify your faith.

This seemed to correspond closely with the discussion on Islamic curriculum for Muslim students in a Western society earlier in this chapter.

The other side of the coin. Jamila, a teacher at a Muslim school, also shared her difficult but reversed schooling situation to some students in this study. Jamila recalled the challenges of growing up in a racist public school environment as a Muslim
youth, and how in hindsight the experience helped to build resilience in her to interact with the Australian society. She recalled:

I thought I wish I had that welfare, that counselling for me. I felt as a student, that I needed to prove myself that I needed to prove that I was normal. I wanted to fit in, that was so much harder back in my time, but I was privileged because I went through the public system, I learnt how to deal with these pressures. When I went to uni, I was so comfortable at uni... because I had built immunity.

Jamila’s experiences speak for many. As Sumaya (a graduate) had mentioned, many Muslim youth as a minority group in Australia “do face identity crisis”. In a speech presented at a youth group event (Candemir, 2012), 16-year-old Semra shared her struggles dealing with peer pressure as a Muslim girl through the public school system:

At times we feel pressured to ‘go with the flow’ and at others you just want to swim against the current of what’s considered to be the ‘social norm.’ We feel as if our parents don’t understand or even care. You snuggle up in bed at night and let your tears escape freely, trickling down your cheeks pooling up in your ears, as you stare at your ceiling, recapping the days events and even at times questioning yourself why me? (Para 1)

In trying desperately to ‘fit in’ at school, Semra found herself slipping deeper and deeper into a world she described as “blackness, there were holes and dips and mountains and monsters”. At the age of 15, Semra had a mental breakdown from the guilt she carried for going against her faith, family and what she believed to be the right path for her. Faith gave her strength and helped her reconnect with her mother emotionally.

Jannah’s words as a teacher struggling to support Muslim students in the mainstream clearly resonate with Muslim youth like Semra:

I’m struggling at the moment with the Muslim boys at our school. Because they are Muslim boys, they need that extra support. That’s the reason why I became a teacher. To make a change, our kids in public schools need someone there. They need to be supported some way. I think the current support services at the public school are very adequate, like the various programs, equity programs that help the students feel that they belong. But how the students respond and react to that is a different matter. Some Muslim parents sat through, but other parents don’t want their children to participate in them.
It is beyond the scope of this study to research wellbeing support services for Muslim students in mainstream schools; however, examples like those of Jamila, Semra and the boys at Jannah’s school demonstrate the challenges Muslim youth have to face in Australian society, whether they attend Muslim schools or otherwise. Parents and community members who prefer Muslim schools over government schools for their children may have intended well to shield their children from such difficult experiences. At best, they probably only managed to delay this identity crisis, but they could not shelter their children from ever facing the challenges in the real world in terms of their ethnicity, their religious identity and their cultural heritage. According to Jannah, parents can either facilitate the process in strengthening Muslim youth identity, or in many cases, inadvertently become obstacles in this process. Participants also believed that Muslim schools definitely could play a part in this process, as well as creating opportunities to facilitate interactions between Muslim students and their peers in the mainstream schools. As it happened, some schools were taking the initiative to address some of these concerns. Examples are demonstrated as follows.

**Examples of support.** Teachers at School H were encouraged to take on extra duties as welfare teachers as an investment for the hereafter. As Alia (the school counsellor) explained, “...having that mentality that you’re doing stuff for the hereafter, this is what keeps us going, the welfare teachers.” Welfare teachers at School H since the beginning of 2012 had organised over 10 clubs during lunch break. Examples of these clubs included dancing, calligraphy, pottery, debating, drama and so on. Alia elaborated that these clubs created a space for students from all year levels to socialise through learning something of interest together. For the boys at School H, Ahmad, the male counsellor, mentioned lunch time religious clubs headed by religious values teachers where the boys were welcome to join. They would read through some religious books and discuss certain topics during their club meetings. The clubs also aimed to get students more involved and active during lunch time at least once a week.

Similar initiatives had taken place in School N whereby entertainment clubs ran board games and scarf knitting/designing in the library on alternate days for boys and girls respectively. Shifaa (school counsellor) elucidated that these clubs were open to all students, but the ones who would benefit more were those students who were otherwise likely to spend their lunch time alone.

Many schools involved their students in interfaith dialogues and programs with students from other faith schools. Shifaa mentioned regular interfaith dialogues happening in recent years where students from her school would meet with students
from schools of different religions to exchange ideas, views and topics. Ahmad (male counsellor at School N) recalled a program in the past that allowed students from different faith schools to interact with one another. Students met and talked about the difficulties they had, interacted with each other, and got to know one another. Ahmad believed that programs of this nature were of great importance and wished more could be facilitated on a regular basis. Sumaya (graduate and teacher) and Rehab (welfare coordinator) from different states also spoke about the interfaith programs their schools had taken part in. According to Rehab, the school she was at had been a part of an interfaith dialogue between Christian and Jewish schools for many years. Each time the school would send at least three students to participate. Sumaya complained that at her school it was always only a handful of selected students who had this kind of experience.

The real issue worth paying attention to here is not whether Muslim children should socialise with their peers in the mainstream, rather when best to expose them to those real life situations; and who and how best to guide and support them in developing the social and emotional skills wearing their multiple layers of identities: as Australians, as Muslims and for most, as children of migrant parents/grandparents with different ethnic backgrounds. Participants in this study expressed that many parents were themselves in need of support and education in providing adequate help in their children’s identity development. Furthermore, participants unanimously agreed that Muslim youth in the West required specific support through guidance and counselling due to the unique situation they were in. This brings the discussion in the next part of the chapter to Counselling services in Muslim schools.

**Part 4. Counselling Services in Participant-associated Schools**

Like any adolescents, Muslim youth were not immune to challenges related to transitioning from childhood to adulthood. The impact of this turbulent phase was compounded by identity issues associated with their ethnicity and as children of parents with migrant backgrounds. On top of all that, dark clouds of Islamophobia in the recent one and a half decades had definitely taken these challenges to a whole new level for Muslim youth growing up in the West in this climate. As a Muslim teenager, Semra (Candemir, 2012) felt the brunt of these difficulties as a Muslim girl who battled within herself to fit in with her peers in a Western secular school environment. Highlighting some of these issues, she remarked, “Living in the 21st century is a struggle for most youth, but more importantly us Muslim girls. Identity, reputation and religion are 3 factors we struggle to uphold in our day-to-day life.” (Candemir, 2012).
Schools’ wellbeing support and counselling services were discussed in Chapter Four in general terms and an adequacy rating of the services for 15 out of the 18 participant-associated schools was presented in Figure 4. Out of the 15 schools, 10 (Schools C, E, H, I, J, M, N, P, Q and R1) had been confirmed to have some form of counselling services provided to students, some only recently, while others for just over a decade ago. Discussions in this part of the chapter will focus on the existing counselling services in these 10 schools in three sections. Section one presents school communities’ attitudes toward and expectations of school counselling; section two provides an exposition of the range of issues counsellors encounter; and the final section looks at the structure of counselling service in the schools, which includes staffing, access and support for counsellors.

**School Communities’ Expectations and Attitudes toward Counselling**

As far as some participants were aware, it was only around a decade ago that a number of the earlier established Muslim schools had begun providing counselling services to their students. Financial issues aside, attitudes and expectations of the school community, including those in leadership, with regards to counselling may help explain why this was one area that was slow in its coming. This section will be discussed under three categories: Expectations; Attitudes; and, Misconceptions.

**Expectations.** A number of counsellors from Muslim schools, both in the earlier years in the 2000s and in recent years, had mentioned a number of expectations with regard to the role of a counsellor. These consisted of expectations for counsellors to deal with behaviour management, as a problem solver, or at times unclear expectations of this role, and counsellors’ responses to these expectations.

*Behaviour management.* Nadia, an ex-counsellor, spoke about the school’s expectations of her when she worked at a Muslim school in the early 2000s:

They hoped for us to try and understand the bad behaviour of the girls, why it goes to that extent, and try to understand them, and try to explain to them that that is our way of life as Muslims from the Qur’an and Sunnah, and hoping that the children will respond and things will become better.

It took Nadia and her colleague quite some time to gain the trust of their students as a result of this expectation.

*Problem solving.* Some teachers expected a counsellor to ‘fix’ students’ issues in one or two sessions. This indicates a lack of awareness of what counselling entailed and how it worked among some teaching staff. Iman, a newly appointed counsellor at
one school in 2012, described how she dealt with people’s expectations of what a counsellor should do:

To some extent they expect me to discipline them, like “fix his anger” or “fix his bad habit”… there is that expectation that “you need to straighten them up” or “say what we’re trying to say but with your skills”.

**Role confusion.** According to Fariah, a teacher in one of the newer schools, a psychologist had been employed to work only with primary students. As for high school students, Fariah said, “the deputy principal took it upon himself to counsel the girls”. However, Fariah added that this deputy was “fairly biased. He needs to run his school a certain way. He doesn’t let the girls express much.”

**Responses.** Some counsellors managed to break through this deep-rooted expectation and role confusion through sheer persistence and hard work. Salma spoke of her successful story as a first and only counsellor at her school in the previous seven years:

They didn’t have counsellors at that stage. Me coming in trying to create a department and trying to carve out this role I found initially very difficult. I felt this uncertainty about what I was doing and what was to be my role. I think probably from some unrealistic expectations, or assuming that I was there to fix student behaviours. I found over time that we’ve become very well established and very warmly received department from my perspective.

Khadija, who remembered her short-lived employment at her school, shared her response:

I was employed by the school as a counsellor, but I was given the disciplinarian role. I tried to talk to them that this was not part of my role…. They wanted discipline. Coming to the counsellor meant that you are in deep trouble. It’s a step before expulsion, suspension, or whatever…. There wasn’t that care and that’s why I didn’t stay long at that school.

**Attitudes.** A number of attitudes within the school communities have been attributed to factors that affected counselling services in the participant-associated schools. These are resistance, misconceptions and value given to school counselling.

**Resistance.**

**Insecurity.** Bilal spoke of resistance he experienced from some teaching staff with an attitude of “what’s a counsellor doing in our school? We don’t need a counsellor. We can deal with our kids in our classroom”. He explained that this resistance could have come from one of two or a combination of both underlying issues.
Firstly, he suspected some teachers were “fearful of being exposed to their weaknesses in their classroom”.

**Distrust.** Another cause for resistance is the perception that counselling and psychological frameworks are un-Islamic. Bilal explained, “counsellors are perceived to have the secular philosophy and strategies etc. it doesn’t resonate with the Muslim public.” Both causes could be the result of a lack of understanding of what counselling was all about.

** Outsider.** Elham (female student in year 12) thought that pride was what was stopping people in her culture from seeking professional help. She said people from her culture had this mentality that one should never complain about their problems to an outsider. They would rather brush it aside and move on. She said:

You find that people who brush it off are the ones who need it most. Then you think of their history and they’ve been through like, say from my background, my culture, the wars that had been going on a couple of years back, and all the problems that have been placed on them, it’s hard for them to accept the fact that they do need help.

**Misconceptions.**

**Confusion.** It had been indicated that little was understood about counselling within the Muslim community. There appeared to be some confusion between mediation, counselling and Islamic advice. Counselling was often perceived negatively and had been closely associated with psychiatric intervention. A mere suggestion for someone to seek counselling could become a deterrent for that person ever to deal with his/her issue at hand by seeking the help of a professional.

**Stigma.** Stigmatisation of mental illness is common in some cultures according to many participants. The common stigma surrounding counselling included craziness, weakness in faith, and people incapable of solving their own problems.

Salma (female counsellor) remembered the initial response people had towards her when she began working at her school, “I just felt like there was just almost different reactions and disdain, or aversion and this notion of ‘oh counselling are for crazy people.’”

**Weakness.** A number of participants mentioned that people had the mindset that experiencing psychological or mental illnesses meant that the sufferers’ faith was in a weak state. Jannah, a high school teacher in the public system and graduate of a Muslim school remarked, “Stigma with mental health is changing in the mainstream but so ingrained culturally [it’s] seen as a weakness of Iman [faith].” One of the
counsellors, Jazaa, cautioned that this mindset was detrimental to those who were grappling with mental illnesses, and that their spirituality could at times be the last thread that kept them from total despair. To be judged as having weakness in their faith could mean that their only hope of improving their condition was taken away from them.

_Censure._ Adam, a male year 12 student from an Asian background, shared some perceptions he had come across regarding people seeking help through professional counselling. He said:

... the social notion of like ‘What? Don’t you know people are attacking our religion? You got to focus on Islam before you focus on your own problems!’ … I wish I could say this to every Muslim who oppose counselling services that those Muslims [Prophet’s companions] didn’t have counselling services back then because they didn’t need it because they had the Prophet, he had all the answers, he was wise, he was trustworthy and if they had any problems they’d go talk to him.

_Value given to school counselling._ There were varying degrees of understanding, and thus differing degrees of willingness to consider the place of counselling in schools.

_Oblivion._ Waleed, an Islamic studies teacher who had taught in two different Muslim schools compared his experiences at those two schools, S and R. He commented, “At School S, they never even brought up the issues of counselling. There wasn’t any sort of interest in it. Compare to School R, although they don’t have the structure… but they have the thought at the interview, they’re speaking about this, their minds working in that way.”

Looking at the positive side, Jazaa, a school psychologist said, “It’s getting better, but we still have a long way to go.”

_Concern._ A noticeable difference was obvious when attention to student wellbeing was given from upper level school leadership. Huda, the principal of one of the highest rated schools in terms of wellbeing support described in Chapter Four, summed up the responses she received from students and parents with regard to the various programs initiated by the counselling department at her school as:

Always been positive. Because you’re really addressing those needs, the social and emotional needs…. I think we’ve become a lot more aware over the years ourselves, perhaps we were earlier to realise and appreciate; those social and emotional needs really do come first.
School leaders like Huda, and the support given by the school’s board of directors, reflected the value they gave to counselling and wellbeing support. The programs and willingness to invest time and resources indicate their commitment to make student wellbeing and counselling services an integral part to students’ academic wellbeing. However, schools leaders holding such views in this study were rare.

From the illustrations presented so far, it is quite obvious that much needs to be done to inform, to correct and to change the perceptions of members of the Muslim community with regards to counselling. Just because there is evidence of resistance within the community, it does not mean the issues requiring professional attention are any less. Although not a prime focus of this study, some presenting issues encountered by the counsellors are thought worth a mention at this point. Examples of some of the issues dealt with by counsellors at Muslim schools are presented next.

**Examples of Issues for which Students Seek Counsel**

Extending from the stigma the school community members had, many of those who needed professional help for psychological and mental illnesses would be suffering in silence. Jannah once advised the mother of her student to take him for professional help because she suspected that he presented symptoms of schizophrenia. The mother totally dismissed the possibility. Diagnosis later confirmed Jannah’s suspicion. Other mental health issues mentioned by school counsellors included depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, attentional disorders, eating disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Anxieties associated with domestic violence, parenting, custody and identity issues or too much pressure from schoolwork were not uncommon. Grief and loss, family member’s illnesses, parental discord, were also examples of issues that students across all cultures might face. Situations that required counsellors to report to their state’s child protection authorities also existed. Social isolation, low self-esteem and relationship problems were also issues counsellors had encountered. Others included lack of management and organisational skills, learning disabilities, friendship and many questions students had regarding religious practices in a non-Muslim society. This indicated that Muslim students, regardless of the types of schools they attended, required support as much as students in the mainstream, if not more. Next in the final section of Part 4 is a discussion on what is currently in place in Muslim schools in terms of counselling service structure.
Structure

A number of participants commented on the lack of structure for counselling in the schools they worked at due to it still being a fairly new feature within these schools. This section is divided into staffing, access and support for counsellors.

Staffing. Participants who were aware of the school counselling services were pleased that the school employed Muslim counsellors. They believed that counsellors played an important role in supporting Muslim students’ identity development if they themselves were able to relate to issues faced by Muslim youth and their families. The real challenge to staffing in this area seemed to lie in the community’s attitude towards the profession of psychology and counselling.

Jeffrey, a non-Muslim middle school coordinator at a Muslim school, was under the impression that “getting qualified Muslim counsellors who are appropriate to work at schools is not an easy task and should be addressed as an area of some concern for Muslim schools.” Jeffrey, with his 40 years experience as an educator in mainstream schools, believed that counselling in Muslim schools was an area where extra personnel could be well used. He had noticed cultural aspects that suggested a definite need for more counselling services than what was currently provided. In particular, Jeffrey was concerned about anger management and domestic violence issues with some students and their families. He held that these confronting but critical issues needed to be addressed with appropriate training and education for teachers if the Muslim schools hoped to successfully marry Islamic culture into the Australian system.

A number of professionally trained counsellors and psychologists in this study were second and third generation migrants in Australia. It appeared that although Jeffrey’s concerns were valid, the situation was gradually improving over time as the communities grew. This was particularly true for the eastern states where the Muslim populations were larger and had longer settlement periods than Western Australia. The adequacy of staffing in light of the ratio of counsellors and other wellbeing support staff to the range and extent of presenting issues of students at Muslim schools will require detailed and extensive data collection from counsellors for more in-depth research.

Access. Access to the school counselling service was affected by awareness of the existence of the service, concerns with confidentiality issues and its perceived adequacy. Counsellors who were aware of these concerns had put some strategies in place to encourage students to access their service.

Awareness. Not all participants in this study were aware of their school’s counselling service. In fact many community members’ general reaction to this study
had been, “Does counselling exist in Muslim schools?” This lack of awareness of whether counselling service existed in Muslim schools could be attributed to two factors: firstly, inadequate communication. Counsellors were not always introduced to the student body and staff, let alone parents, when they first joined the schools. Many pioneering counsellors at some schools were left to their own devices to make themselves known, to build trust and to develop procedures and policies in this area. The second factor is that perceptions of the role of counsellors by school leaders determine the qualifications and qualities of the counsellors employed. Some counsellors being put in this position did not have the appropriate counselling qualifications; they were hired more for discipline than for wellbeing support. If they did not actively participate or initiate opportunities to establish contact with students, students and teaching staff would not know what their role was. Moreover, some counsellors did not appear to be very personable. As a consequence to this role confusion and inappropriate expectations for what a counsellor should do, students tended to steer away from those “counsellors” who were seen as yet another staff member in the school who was there to “tell them off” (Sumaya).

Counsellors who were proactive made themselves visible during recess and lunch by introducing themselves to the students and often initiated conversations with students during such times. Others made an effort to be present at programs and activities. Two counsellors were communicating with students through posting up notes in classes or writing in school newsletters providing health and wellbeing tips. For senior students, they would help them manage stress through notes on relaxation, exercises, or humorous quotes.

A number of counsellors also actively initiated or participated in fundraising activities, whole school competitions, or events for Muslim festivals where they could interact with students to raise awareness of their service and build rapport with them. Alia, a female school counsellor, for example, took on a welfare teacher’s role to run a dancing class for the girls’ extra-curricular club during lunchtime.

Confidentiality. When students were asked to speak about what would encourage them to access counselling services at school, one of the often-mentioned concerns was the issue of confidentiality. The vast majority of students felt that this aspect of the service had been kept professional. Only one student recalled an incidence many years before where another student’s secret had been divulged to her mother. For this reason, Salma found it very taxing on her to work in isolation without the opportunity to debrief with a colleague trained in psychology or counselling. The small
school community with its members fairly close to each other made it more critical to limit what a counsellor could disclose to the school management. This is where support for the counsellors is indispensable; an issue to be discussed further towards the end of this section.

Farah, along with a number of other counsellors interviewed, shared her way of keeping students’ visits discreet by asking the administration staff to send a note to the teacher to release the student to the front office. This way, students were spared from having to explain to their teachers as to why or who in the office they were asked to see. Salma cautiously avoided singling out students she counselled when they were with other students in the playground.

Interestingly, confidentiality was not as great a concern for boys as it was for girls at Salma’s school. Salma was surprised to notice how open the boys had been with their male counsellor since he joined the counselling department when they were with their peers in the playground. They were obviously quite comfortable with the male counsellor and, perhaps also depending on the issues the boys saw the counsellor for, they appeared to be more open than the girls. Another male counsellor, Ahmad, said that most issues the boys at his school saw him for were related to academic, organisational, time management and homework matters. Idris mentioned a boy in year 12 seeking counsel due to family problems. Impressed by Idris’ fairness and Islamic approach, this student requested Idris to speak to his parents with very pleasing results.

**Adequacy of service.** Although grateful for his school counsellor’s support and advice, Adam (student in year 12) felt the effectiveness of the counselling he received was affected by the limited availability of the counsellor who was at the time working only three days per week. Based on similar comments in this regard from other counsellors and students, this was common. In most of these cases, the schools were prepared to employ the counsellors full-time but the counsellors were unable to offer more time due to study or family commitments. Nadia worked in tandem with her colleague but over time students found their preference and wished they could both be available for every school day of the week.

Bilal brought up a topic on perceived effectiveness of counselling. Due to a general lack of awareness of what counselling entailed, some community members, including some teachers at his school, could not understand how someone would need more than two sessions to have a problem solved by the counsellor. Rather than recognising counselling as a process of assisted change that required the client’s cooperation over a period of on-going support in many cases, some of them would
render the service ineffective when no immediate improvement was observed after one or two sessions of counselling.

Another experience shared by a small number of participants was that in the past counsellors had been employed on the basis of their religiosity in the eyes of the management, but were sometimes not familiar with Australian culture. They were seen as too strict and unapproachable for students growing up in a Western society still grappling with identity issues. They were described as “not in touch”, “lacked understanding”, or “un-relatable”. For this reason, Amani’s (female ex-welfare coordinator) advocacy for more counsellors at her school of 2000+ students was declined because from her principal’s perspective the demand for more service was not justified by the number of students utilising the service.

**Support for counsellors.** Support for school counsellors varied depending on the school in which they worked. Those who were well-supported felt that their role was valued when they were invited to take part in the process of managing student progress with higher-level management such as welfare or year level coordinators and principals.

For seven years, Salma worked tirelessly as the sole counsellor for a student body which grew steadily to over 1200 enrolments from Pre-primary to year 12. Salma was on the verge of burnout at the end of 2011. Staff at Human Resources pleaded on her behalf to employ another counsellor. Having realised the need, the school eventually employed two more counsellors making counselling a viable department that was headed by Salma.

The school that Sulaiman worked at had a team of four welfare support staff to look after students’ various wellbeing needs. Huda, a principal, also decided in addition to existing staff in the counselling department, to employ a male counsellor whose role was to support high school male students as well as providing career counselling for students from year 8 and older.

Shifaa was fortunate enough to be supported in developing various aspects of student counselling and had progressively built the service into a well-respected and significant department at her school. Ahmad and Alia, counsellors at a school with a strong ethos of student welfare and pastoral care for high school students, did not have to spend their energy battling with erroneous expectations people had for school counsellors.

Other forms of support including collegial support and professional support are briefly discussed next.
**Collegial support.** A lack of awareness of what counselling was about meant that students who needed counselling might never benefit from the service unless students sought help on their own initiative or unless they were picked up by a handful of clued-in teachers. Bilal shared,

I haven’t received too many referrals from a lot of Muslim teachers, I think based on the culture… and there’d be non-Muslim teachers, mostly females… Caucasian, good Christians who have been associated with counselling in their view. Sadly the other teachers were oblivious of the symptoms of what the child is going through…

Some counsellors mentioned occasional non-compliance from teachers in allowing their students to attend follow up sessions with them. This was avoided by organising to see these students during recess and lunch; or at times work around the timetable so that they did not have to take leave from the same teacher every week.

Iman found talking to the students’ year level coordinators at her school quite helpful. Mimi, a teacher, also spoke highly of the year coordinators at her school whom she felt were very supportive of students’ and teachers’ needs. Nadia’s involvement with her school in the early 2000s relied mainly on the support of the Islamic studies teachers who recognised the value in the programs she and her colleague offered to students.

**Professional support.** Considering counselling being a new concept within some of the Muslim schools, it was not surprising that many of these counsellors were not adequately supported professionally by the school management. Opportunities for professional development were rare. Most of the counsellors were very aware that their role was seen by the school leaders as dispensable. One school had indeed made the role of counsellor redundant at the end of 2012 despite that close to 40% of the school enrolments were new arrivals with a range of special needs and learning difficulties, and a good fraction from the remaining students being children of migrants from low socio-economic backgrounds.

A number of counsellors were in the final stages of gaining their qualifications as registered psychologists and therefore had regular support from their supervisors independent of the schools. Those who had at least one colleague working in the counselling department appreciated the professional support they could give to each other. It took one counsellor some persuasion before she was granted permission to source her own support from professionals outside her school in order to make her service sustainable. It appears that some school leaders in the upper management had
little idea of what is involved in the area of counselling and how best to support the counsellors even if they recognised the need to provide counselling to their students.

**Summary**

This chapter displayed an array of past and existing practices pertaining to wellbeing support services in Australian Muslim schools from the perspectives and experiences of stakeholder categories of service providers and consumers. Researchers on wellbeing have conceptualised varying dimensions of wellbeing, which in essence embodies the positive state or equilibrium of body-mind-spirit.

Part 1 of this chapter presented participants’ understandings of care from an Islamic viewpoint and how the school supported students’ spiritual wellbeing.

Part 2 looked at practices in Muslim schools that aimed at developing and supporting students’ academic wellbeing. It seems that all Muslim schools had, to a large extent, provided what they could and, for most schools, progressive improvements in providing adequate support for students to receive quality education had been made. Academically, some schools had adopted a hyper-focus approach to attain high rankings within the state. Some participants had felt that this hyper-focus had compromised other dimensions of their wellbeing, such as students’ social and emotional wellbeing. A culturally influenced career bias has also created an imbalance in the subjects schools offered and the guidance they gave students for tertiary studies. At the same time, schools that were determined to attain higher rankings provided ample resources and employed highly qualified teaching staff to support their students.

Part 3 examined student’s social and emotional support. Many students in this study felt unprepared socially to meet the world beyond an all-Muslim school environment; girls more so than boys. Some schools made efforts to create opportunities for their students to interact with students from other faith schools. The shared view from students was that programs involving large number of students were rare. The initiatives usually only involved a handful of students and, in some schools, it was often the same students who were given the opportunity to experience such interactions. Some counsellors were concerned with students’ lack of maturity and common sense; even though these students were intelligent, they lacked the opportunity to develop their skills other than academic. Some schools made efforts in providing more comprehensive pastoral care and welfare systems through tutoring programs, extra-curricular activities, school camps and excursions.

Part 4 dealt with counselling services in participant-associated schools. As a relatively foreign concept to many cultural Muslims, counselling was a newly
introduced service within the past decade in many Muslim schools. Experiences of existing and past counsellors indicated that this was a service that required much advocacy, education and trust building within the Muslim school communities, including school leaders and teachers. Given the demography and background of Muslim students, not many Muslim schools had given counselling enough recognition to allow this service to benefit students in need. Likewise, counsellors often had much to struggle through in these schools before they could do what they were meant to do. However, there were a handful of schools that had well established counselling departments, which due to support and values given by upper management, had become an important process in supporting students.

This concludes the discovery of what had been and what currently exists in Muslim schools concerning student wellbeing support services. Perspectives in light of what participants believe should be happening in an ideal situation will be presented in Chapter Six, Dream: What’s the Ideal?
CHAPTER 6 - DREAM: WHAT’S THE IDEAL?

This chapter shifts its focus from that of the previous chapter - Discovery of what is/has been in place in supporting student wellbeing at Australian Muslim schools - to exploring participants’ ideas on what they wish to see happening in this area. This is a purposeful approach in accordance with the second phase of the Appreciative Inquiry’s 4-D cycle: Dream, to direct participants’ attention from the existing counselling and wellbeing support services in their schools to what they wish to see in place in a positive light. Data collection at this level resembled a brainstorming exercise that encouraged participants to express their ideas on what they hoped to see happening in support of students’ wellbeing.

Participants were invited to visualise and describe what they hoped to have in place with specific focus on: (a) ideals for implementing Islamic ethos of care; (b) ideals for student wellbeing support; (c) culturally appropriate counselling; (d) roles, qualities and skills of an ideal counsellor; and, (e) ideals for smooth transitioning. Emergent themes from key stakeholders directly involved with school counselling were extracted. Suggestions from other participants, such as teachers and parents, were then examined and new themes were added to the initial pool of themes for analysis to address the second guiding question: What would be the ideal for supporting students’ Social and Emotional wellbeing? This chapter will thematically unfold the interpretations of the dream organised under the five focus areas and conclude with a dream statement collated from these themes.

Focus 1: Ideals for Implementing Islamic Ethos of Care

Participants’ responses to the semi-structured interview questions under the first theme revealed their strong desires to see Muslim schools putting in to action what they aspired to offer Islamically in essence. Participants dreamed to see Muslim schools founded on Islamic principles to reflect the Islamic spirit through a school culture of compassion, care and fairness. In other words, a great number of participants wanted to see a Muslim school culture that truly reflected the ethos of care, as understood from an Islamic perspective.

What most participants hoped to see was a school that implemented Islam not only in its visible form, but which also reflected its spirit internally. Participants wished that their associated Muslim schools would address the disparity between their initial intent and the directions they were heading towards. Participants from those schools with a strong focus on secular education wished to see a re-alignment between the intentions that their schools continued to espouse and, in contrast, the importance they
gave to academic success over and above everything else. In some instances, participants wanted their school’s over-zealous enforcement of Islamic rules to match the prevailing Islamic spirit and ethos of compassion, gentleness and care. In still some other schools, participants hoped to see the top-down autocratic communication style modified so that students could be equipped with skills to function and contribute in a democratic society. In other words, participants wished to see a school culture that re-aligns its actions with objectives, approach and attitude with the mission and vision towards which their schools aspired.

**Goals**

Many participants indicated a phenomenon of dissonance between what they would like Islamic schools to be giving more importance to and what was actually being emphasised in their schools. Some participants perceived that Muslim schools were not operating as they had initially intended. Participants felt that in some schools, too much emphasis on academic achievement had left on the wayside the noble intent of imparting Islamic values to the younger generations. Some parents and students wished their schools continued to allocate adequate amount of time to let the senior students learn and discuss religious matters to balance out the almost insurmountable workload they had to trawl through solely for the sake of getting the highest scores in examinations. Adam, a Year 12 student, gave an example of this paradox he saw in the school-initiated after school tuition classes. Students like him who lived far away had to miss their late afternoon prayers when attending these tuition classes as no prayer time was factored in for these classes. In other words, they wished to see congruity between what Islamic knowledge was imparted and what was actually being practised.

**Approach**

An interested community member, Noor, who opted to share her views in writing, mentioned a “mismatch between the school atmosphere and its teachings (especially related to faith)” and wished to see the needs of students being addressed in a more “understanding and sympathetic manner”.

**Humanistic.** Parents such as Khalid and Fariah, in trying to make sense of what was happening in the Muslim schools their children had previously attended, believed that these schools needed to look at students’ needs from a humanistic perspective. Khalid compared the few Muslim schools his children had attended to the public schools they went to subsequently and concluded that his children thrived in environments where all students were given a fair go, spoken to with respect and treated with good manners. Sumaya, an ex-student, also felt that some Muslims had placed the
humanistic approach found in Prophet Muhammad’s teachings in a “blind spot”. She said, “They [the companions] would come to him [Prophet Muhammad] with any human issues they had. If we try and pretend that none of that exists it’s very unrealistic.” Amani disapproved of a tendency in some teachers taking a prohibitionist approach when imparting Islamic teachings to the young.

**Process focused.** In what his children had described as “jail-like”, “oppressive” measures in these schools for the sake of discipline, Khalid considered their approach inappropriate for children’s developmental capacity. While Khalid chose to give the benefit of the doubt to the service providers’ noble intentions at some Muslim schools, he identified their approach as detrimental to nurturing Muslim children’s religious spirit. Khalid said,

Sometimes we are trying to apply 50 years of grown up [to do] list to a 15 year old…. Whereas in non-Muslim schools…they try to deal with the human aspect… the values which we have is far superior, but we are not able to apply those values.

**Modelling values.** Sumaya, Habiba (parent) and Nadia (ex-counsellor) were among participants who wanted to see more adult Muslims conducting themselves as role models for Muslim youth so that the true essence of Islam became meaningful for the younger generation. Habiba asked the question, “Why do many teachers tell me when they go to other schools [public schools]… they enter the classes, the children are very quiet, very respectful? Is it from the house [home] or from the school?”

A great number of participants held that those in school leadership positions should set the tone for the rest of the school. According to Bilal, an experienced Islamic studies teacher of 10 years and a qualified counsellor in recent years, wanted to see the existing leadership implement Islamic consultative manners in their decision-making. He commented, “The admin at the moment seems to be autocratic. The domineering ‘this is what I want, this is what can happen’… this is one of the changes they need to make.”

**Attitude**

**Positive.** Badieh, a mother of three teenage boys and a teacher having experiences in a number of schools, wanted Muslim schools to adopt a positive attitude in their school culture. Badieh considered positive attitude an essential factor in bringing the best out of children. She wanted to see a school that nurtured young Muslims in a positive and motivating environment. The key approaches that Badieh strongly believed in were gentleness and positivity in dealing with children, especially
when it came to developing their spirituality. Badieh remarked, “By having that positive relationship with your child, you can have him run a mile and back and he’ll ace it.”

When commenting on having a positive attitude as a Muslim, Jazaa, a school psychologist remarked:

The positive psychology stream…one of the things that has been proven to make people happier… is to … take a moment to say what are the three good things that happened to me today and to be grateful for those things… that’s what Islam says anyway.

**Happy.** In line with Badieh’s dream, Sana shared her experience as a parent who searched for a happy school atmosphere after deciding to transfer her daughter to a public school from a Muslim school that was “too strict”. She recalled:

Before I put my daughter in that school… I went to three other schools to see which one I was comfortable with. As soon as I walked into this school, I felt that the kids in the school, the playground, it was welcoming… The principal said to me, ‘we try to create a happy atmosphere for the children’.

During the interview, Sana’s daughter, Tasneem, shared her happy memories for being accepted by all the non-Muslim teachers and students in that “happy” school despite being the only girl wearing hijab back then. In particular, Tasneem was grateful for having a positive, encouraging and happy teacher for her years 11 and 12 English. Tasneem believed that this teacher brought out her creativity in writing that had been lying dormant all through her junior years. As Sana proudly added, “She (Tasneem) had a lot of good teachers… she had such high scores for [university entrance exam].”

Participants considered this re-alignment of Muslim schools’ goals, approach and attitude with Islamic principles a prerequisite before their other dreams of providing better services to support student wellbeing could be realised. As Sumaya had reflected, “The school has to do the right thing from the beginning.” Hinged upon the condition of having this re-alignment materialised first and foremost, participants responded to the remaining interview questions under the theme of *Dream* with hope. Participants’ ideals for student wellbeing support services are discussed next.
Focus 2: Ideals for Student Wellbeing Support

Almost all participants acknowledged the importance of their schools giving importance to the wellbeing of students. Some wanted these services to be a mandatory part of their schools. The exceptions were participants from schools that already had a strong student welfare and pastoral care service in place. The various description were categorised as: care, direction and change.

Care

Three elements of care include: early intervention, specific student-centred care, and duty of care.

Early intervention. Huda, the principal of a Muslim college, envisaged a decrease in the demand for curative measures with increased preventive measures of student wellbeing support. Huda wanted to see “whatever those issues are, are nipped in the bud at an early age.” Karen offered her comparison from her experiences as a teacher in both public and a number of elite independent faith schools (non-Muslim). Karen observed that Year coordinators at one of the top schools she worked at were selected on the basis of their gentle qualities, exceptional people skills and their ability to speak honestly and openly with students and colleagues, in addition to their teaching skills and experiences. She witnessed how skillfully some of these year coordinators handled conflicts between students and teachers before matters were allowed to fester.

Specific student-centred care. Mimi, a teacher, when comparing student support services available at her old public high school, felt that the Muslim school she was teaching at was in dire need of a Special Needs Centre and a centre for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. She estimated that 40% of the student population at the school had learning issues that required specialist attention due to a wide range of contributing factors related to their backgrounds. Mimi observed a lack of respect from some male students in certain culture groups towards female teachers. She hoped to see well-thought out strategies being put in place through education to change this attitude. Jannah, a teacher at a public school, also mentioned similar attitudes from some of the Muslim boys she taught.

Duty of care. Salma, head of counselling and welfare department of School P, spoke about a fear factor within the community, specifically in cases of abuse that required reporting to authorities responsible for child protection: “I know there’s been an impression in the community that you don’t mention anything, you’re going to risk children being taken away from home, you break up families, you don’t do that to your fellow Muslim family…” She would like to see the community become more educated
on the impact of parenting on children’s psychological issues. Salma wanted to send
the message to the community that abusive behaviour at home, however rare the cases
might be, was not to be tolerated. She said this was necessary to be “part of standing up
for our kids”.

**Direction**

The direction for the ideal wellbeing support consists of values education, whole
school approach and holistic wellbeing for students.

**Values education.** Hasanah, an ex-student and teacher with experiences in two
different Muslim schools, said, “I think … a subject like Character education
development … needs to be in the curriculum as well and not just like a filler.”

Regarding students’ Muslim character, Nadia remarked, “… so they should be
solid Muslims… I don’t see the effect of long years in the Muslim school making them
that solid… It has to be in everything.”

**Whole school.** Jeffrey, a middle school coordinator articulated his desired
vision in supporting students’ wellbeing as, “put [putting] our values in action across
the whole campus so that we can see ourselves, not just a school, but also as a
community and as a family.” Shifaa, the head of counselling department at School N,
would like to see more programs on social and emotional education integrated into
other subjects, towards a whole school approach to better support students.

**Holistic.** Bilal wished to see teachers educated on the importance of students’
social and emotional wellbeing so that they could better support school counsellors and
be equipped with skills to identify signs in students who were in need of support in the
various dimensions of wellbeing. Current and ex-students and graduates such as
Elham, Leena, Adam, Tasneem, Sumaya, Zainab and Amira, among others,
remembered those teachers who were particularly kind and how well they connected
with students. From these participants’ perspectives, teachers who “cared” played a
vital role in supporting students’ overall wellbeing.

**Change**

**Stigma of mental illness.** Part and parcel of the ideal support service that
participants wanted to have is the correction of a culturally entrenched habit of denial,
shame and taboo surrounding mental health or psychological issues. Madina, an ex-
welfare staff and volunteer commented, “I think there is a lot of taboos around mental
illness, there is a lot of shame connected to mental illnesses.” The practice of having
issues “brushed under the carpet” (Hasanah), “swept under the carpet” (Madina,
Sumaya and Zainab), or “covered up” (Fariah) was something in which participants
wanted to see a positive change. Madina, along with a number of other participants, would like to see the Muslim community as a whole become better educated “about the varying degrees of mental illness, and the support that is there for the people who are suffering from any form of mental illness” and she hoped to see this education process initiated by the Muslim schools.

**Target group.** Attempts at involving parents to collectively support students’ wellbeing were either being planned or implemented in some schools. This was something desired by participants whose schools had not taken action in this respect.

Adam, a male student, said that school-organised education programs for parents could potentially bring rippling effects to many others in the community. He remarked, “Most of our parents in the school are intertwined, family, friends…. If they talk about seminars or what’s been happening at seminars, that’d be great.”

From the participants’ shared viewpoints, a holistic and collective effort from school leaders who looked at student needs holistically and from a student-centred perspective involved having specialists well placed in schools that needed their skills most. Their ideal also included support from well-informed teachers and parents who would help break through cultural barriers the community held towards seeking help from counsellors and other professionals for social, psychological and mental health issues. When it came to breaking cultural barriers in accessing counselling services, participants shared their dream on what a culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service should look like, which will be elaborated in the next section.

**Focus 3: Culturally Appropriate Counselling Service**

Participants discussed their ideal counselling services for Muslim adolescent students who were often caught in the midst of diverse cultural and religious interpretations within their schools, in addition to their parents’ culture of origin, level of education and commitment to religious practices. Their dreams included a professional team that not only supported youth directly, but also played the extended roles in advocacy for holistic wellbeing and education for the school community.

Some essential features of the counselling service discussed included assurance of confidentiality, minimum power distance and supply matching demand, presented as follows.

**Assurance of Confidentiality**

Given the size and connectedness of Muslim families within each school community in the three major cities under study, participants from both the service provider and student categories, namely the students and counsellors in particular,
wanted clear boundaries set for school administration and teaching staff to respect confidentiality of students seeking help from school counsellors. Despite their emphasis, the majority of students and counsellors considered this aspect of the service satisfactory on the whole.

Students held confidentiality to be a non-negotiable part of counselling unless the child’s safety was at risk, when the counsellor was bound by legal obligations to disclose the matter to higher authorities independent of the school. Students wanted assurance that whatever they discussed with the counsellor would stay with the counsellor. Atiqah, a female year 9 student who had just been transferred to a public school in the week when the interview with her took place, said, “[There was] No one we could establish a trusting relationship with or the space where you could talk openly without getting into trouble for that.” She felt that, had adequate counselling been offered to her at the Muslim school in which she was enrolled, it would probably have helped her stay in that school.

From the counsellors’ viewpoint, they did their best to safeguard students’ anonymity. A number of counsellors mentioned having to decline teachers’ queries about students they counselled. They wanted teaching and administration staff to refrain from asking the counsellor for information on students’ private matters disclosed to the counsellor in confidence.

**Minimum Power Distance**

Participants with insight into counselling, such as Sumaya, Iman, Fariah and Saleha, wanted the counsellor to be independent of any position of power within the school, as this might become a deterrent for students accessing the service. For example, Saleha, a teacher who had some training in counselling, had been asked at a new Muslim school if she would also do counselling, as the need for students to be supported through counselling became apparent. She said, “I cannot be a teacher and a counsellor [at the same time], I still believe that a counsellor should be someone they [students] can build their trust with, and different as an educator.”

**Supply Meeting Demand**

Participants’ wishes for adequate counselling services varied according to the situation of the schools with which they had associations. For example, participants from schools where no counselling was offered wanted to see this service given due importance and consideration, or at least to have some form of alternative measures in place to support students who needed counselling. Those participants whose schools had counsellors on a part-time basis wished the service were available to students full-
time. Schools with rapidly growing student numbers or having more than 1000 enrolments would like to have enough counsellors to cater for students’ demand for support through counselling. In some instances, although counselling services were available to students from new arrivals, refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, or low socio-economic status, more specialised counselling service was considered essential. These varying degrees of dreams reflected participants’ desire for adequate counselling service to be made available to students.

Focus 4: Roles, Qualities and Skills of a Culturally Appropriate Counsellor

This section explores participants’ perspectives on the roles they would like counsellors to play in Muslim schools and the professional qualities and skills they considered necessary for counsellors to fulfil their task.

Counsellor’s Roles

Participants expressed their opinions on the roles they would like the counsellors to play in Muslim schools. These roles are broadly divided into direct and indirect support for Muslim students’ spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing.

Direct support. Counsellors were considered to play an important supportive role when students were not progressing as well as they should, or in some cases, when a sudden lag in academic performance was noticed. Academic wellbeing aside, participants would also like counsellors to provide support in areas of students’ spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing.

Academic wellbeing. A number of service providers highlighted the connections between students’ overall wellbeing and their academic progress. They would like students showing signs of learning disabilities, experiencing psychological/mental health illnesses, or any underlying problems to be identified as early as possible and be given support by professionals trained to deal with these issues. Some participants also expected school counsellors to support students academically by working on developing their organisational, time management and study skills when necessary.

Participants acknowledged that the responsibility of providing a holistic wellbeing support service had to be shared by a team of staff. Some participants dreamed of this team of experts to support students’ diverse needs. They envisioned counsellors playing a role in assessing students with learning disabilities, special needs or mental health issues; and also making referrals to appropriate professionals for specialised attention when necessary. Sulaiman, a high school teacher, gave the example of the wellbeing support team at his school that resembled this dream:
There are a few counsellors [staff members] at the school dealing with emotional, social and mental wellbeing of the students…. One is a counsellor, dealing with emotional, depressions etcetera, dealing with student mindset. She is there on a full-time basis as a counsellor only. There is another one assistant to her, he’s also a teacher, part of his load is counselling while the other part is teaching. There’s a speech pathologist, I think she’s part-time. And there’s one more academic assistant [career counsellor] who now I think is full-time…. There are two males and two females, a four-member team on the boys’ site only…. I guess the school has chosen Muslims to deal with the emotional issues and the ones dealing with the academic are not Muslims at the moment.

**Spiritual wellbeing.** Many students would ideally like to have a counsellor who was open and approachable to help them come to terms with their identity issues as young Muslims in a secular environment. As discussed previously under Cultural Connectedness of the Muslim counsellor, students wished to have someone who would allow them the time and a safe space to ask questions related to their religion. They wanted to seek answers from someone who had been through similar challenges and they wanted to be sure that this counsellor would listen to them without condemning them.

In an ideal situation, students would appreciate counsellors who could help them cope with their issues through the wisdom found in Islamic teachings. Farah, shared her view on the benefit of a counsellor who could connect with students spiritually by providing counsel from her religious knowledge. She said,

> For example, if a kid is going through hardship, [I tell them] *Inna ma’al ‘usri yusra* [Qu’ran 94:5], with every hardship there is relief. And kids love that. When they’re told stuff like that, “wow, is this true?” “This is not something we are aware of!”, and even dua’ [supplications] that they can say for studying, they really love it because it’s something they can all share and draw upon.

**Social wellbeing.** Some participants would like Muslim schools to play a role in equipping students with some essential social skills such as communication with their peers in the mainstream, and knowing what to expect and how to conduct themselves beyond the confines of their school and home environments. Mona, a high school teacher commented in this regard:

> These kids they don’t know how to behave. Every time I take them out on excursion, I always dread it… They really exhibit uncivilised behaviour. It’s a big worry…. I think the students’ mentality, they don’t know how to deal with
other people, I don’t think they have the skills to deal with other students in the mainstream schools. If I had a say in the matter, I would definitely organise something for the students to interact through sports.

Mimi spoke about how Muslim schools could be the only avenue through which some of her students from very low socio-economic backgrounds would get exposure to the outside world; their parents were often unable to introduce them to a variety of experiences that would help develop their necessary social and life skills, as Mimi explained:

They’re [parents] either too busy or they don’t understand, they don’t have the ability to understand, a lot of them don’t know English. I gave the class a task: describe the cuisines in Perth; (a) they didn’t know what cuisine meant, (b) they hadn’t been anywhere… It just shows the monetary aspect of things. They cannot afford it.

**Emotional wellbeing.** Madina, an ex-welfare staff member and volunteer at a Muslim school between the late 1980s and early 1990s, had the experience of young students confiding in her for emotional support. Madina said that this was because they “really didn’t have anybody they felt they could go to, or could trust.” Nuria, a school counsellor, shared similar experiences. She found that adolescent girls in the first three years of high school were among those who needed the most support. She said, “I’m like an older sister to them. Emotionally, give them the time, not judging them…. A lot of mothers don’t talk to their daughters about certain issues.” What Nuria, along with other counsellors in this study, would like, was to be given time to run more programs on themes such as body image, self-esteem and friendship issues common to many students, which would also help to reduce the need for one-on-one counselling.

Many of the counsellors had recognised the need for girls to receive emotional support more than boys, due to the complexities of finding their identity between the culturally influenced expectations on them as girls, as females in the Australian society and as Muslim girls Islamically. Farah, a school counsellor, wished she could run self-esteem workshops for all students in different year levels and to have follow up sessions with them instead of just focusing on the year 7 students at the beginning of the year.

The need for emotional support for adolescent boys in anger management was mentioned by two participants. Jeffrey, a middle school coordinator of a newly established school that catered for large numbers of recent arrivals, wished that adequate support through counselling would help some boys address their anger issues. Mimi, a high school teacher, hoped there would be long term plans to help address some
of the issues that she believed to be closely correlated with some deep-seated cultural and upbringing factors.

**Indirect support.** In addition to their direct involvement with students, a number of participants would like the counsellors to play a role in advocacy, consultation and education to effect a shift in perspective on student wellbeing among school community members.

**Advocacy.** Apart from working with individual students, participants would like the school counsellors to advocate for their role to the Muslim school community to include administrative personnel, teaching staff and parents. Participants dreamed of a time when students who were in need of support in the various dimensions of wellbeing could be detected early and be given the necessary attention before their conditions became worse. Farah, a school counsellor, said, “Early intervention is the key, proven better improved outcome later in life”.

Some participants believed that this could not come about unless the school community was informed about what counselling services entailed and what procedures were involved, and felt comfortable enough to bring their concerns to the attention of a counsellor. Huda, a principal, was supportive of counsellors who advocated for their profession to bring awareness to the school community to facilitate a whole school approach, in order to improve student wellbeing support at every level. The majority of participants hoped that the Muslim school community on the whole could become more accepting of counselling as an essential part of student wellbeing support.

**Consultation.** Counsellors and welfare staff desired to work collaboratively with teachers to develop students’ social and emotional wellbeing and life skills, and to address issues of isolation experienced by students in Muslim schools, which they believed would help reduce a whole host of academic, behavioural and emotional problems.

Specifically, some school counsellors in this study wished to be involved in student development at a management level. They were of the opinion that, as part of a holistic wellbeing support service, referral to the school counsellor to work with students at risk should be a mandatory part of the process early on, before any major decisions concerning these students were made. In cases where an individual student’s enrolment was being reviewed due to concerns with that student’s behaviour and/or academic progress, the student management team, such as teachers, year level coordinators, deputy principals and principals should also include the school counsellor for consultation, because of their insightful knowledge of certain students and their
background issues. Shifaa and Salma were among very few school counsellors who had been recognised and included in consultations of such nature at their schools.

**Community education.** In addition to advocacy and consultation, participants would like the school counsellors to play a role in educating the community, particularly parents, who in many cases were unfamiliar with the culture and services of the new country to which they had migrated. Furthermore, counsellors in this study frequently came across students using the service because of conflicts at home. Idris, a school imam/chaplin said, “Parenting style is problematic…kids raised through democratic style in school, autocratic structure at home...parents put pressure on the child… widens the generation gap which is harmful for the family.”

**Counsellor’s Qualities and Skills**

Participants shared their views on the ideal qualities of a counsellor in terms of their professionalism, skills and personal dispositions. Their input also presented degrees of essentiality.

**Essential.**

**Professionalism.** Participants would like all counsellors to be qualified from the Australian education system, due to the professional standards upheld by the professional bodies for practitioners. Major considerations included counsellors’ commitment to ethics pertaining to confidential matters, their knowledge in the profession, effective communication and interpersonal skills, and their ability to suspend judgment whenever they were confronted with ideas that conflicted with values they personally held true.

According to Sumaya, a graduate, considered it essential that students were “heard in a professional way which was not dictated by the ethos of the school”.

Atiqah, a female year 9 student, said, “They should have a proper counsellor. They [school’s higher management] shouldn’t make them [students] tell.”

**Non-judgmental.**

From some counsellors’ perspectives, the ability to suspend personal judgment when students’ values conflicted with their own was a challenging but highly desirable skill to have when it came to counselling Muslim youth. Farah, a school counsellor, shared her thoughts on this,

I can’t sit and preach Islam to the child without the child mentioning it first, or wanting to talk about it…. They are worried they might be judged. If someone comes in here and says “I don’t believe in God”, the first thing they are going to
be thinking about is “will she think bad of me? She believes in God, I don’t believe in God, what is she going to think?”

Alia, another school counsellor, mentioned her approach in counselling teenage girls at her school,

I know it’s not right to mix the religion and counselling…. We have a lot of boyfriend issue…I generally talk about not the religion side…. They should think about before they step into it. We slightly touch on the religious side as well, because they have that in them, not too much though…. As a Muslim counsellor, I look out for them, watch them.

In a nutshell, the essential qualities Muslim students look for in a counsellor are: their skills and professionalism in their dealings with students; their ability to relate to Muslim youth growing up in a Western culture; and how they carry themselves as practicing Muslims. The outward expression of a counsellor’s religious affinity had a tendency to deter students from seeking help from them initially; but the counsellor’s judgmental, authoritarian attitude and approach were the actual deal breakers for students approaching them. Being religious, but being open and being prepared to withhold judgment seemed to bear great significance in gaining students’ trust. Other qualities of an ideal counsellor commonly described by participants included being friendly, approachable, understanding and compassionate towards people.

*Values compatibility.* The overwhelming majority of participants held a strong view that the counsellor for Muslim students had to be a Muslim, due to the power of influence this position held for adolescents. Those in the minority said that this was a preference, but not essential, depending on the types of issues to be addressed. They proposed that if a counsellor were approached to help students develop study-related skills such as organisation, time management, communication and so on, the counsellor’s counselling skills would outweigh his/her personal value system. However, all participants stressed the importance of having a Muslim counsellor for Muslim youths if the matters to be dealt with were related to offering guidance in life and advice on moral values, relationship, family and even behavioural issues.

Mona, a high school teacher who was also qualified in professional counselling, had a more stringent criterion for a counsellor for Muslim students. Mona wanted the counsellor to have the ability to “incorporate Islamic ethics, ethos… [because] there are some psychologists or counsellors I don’t approve of especially the ones who just use drugs or whatever [as treatment].” She added, “Somebody with a sound understanding of the Islamic values would be a very important criteria [criterion].” Mona wanted not
only a Muslim, but a practicing Muslim. Khadija, a social worker for the department of health in her state and an ex-counsellor for a Muslim school, held similar views. She reasoned, “I have seen Muslim counsellors, they write articles, encourage things that are un-Islamic belief. I can see why the community would go ‘no, you guys are all crazy’”.

Resonating with this concern, was a statement from Fahima, a year 12 female student, who said, “If I had a problem with my family, for example, if she’s [the counsellor] not a Muslim, she may influence me the wrong way.” Nuria, a school counsellor said, “Before me there was a counsellor who was not a Muslim, the students found it very hard because she did not understand our culture.”

Madina, an ex-welfare staff and volunteer suggested the possibility of having a non-Muslim counsellor on a team, with several other Muslim wellbeing support professionals to work collaboratively, which might hypothetically result in a positive outcome to all concerned. Madina said:

… I think this has to be done by a team of qualified skilled people…. But if you had a skilled qualified cross-cultural expert who is not a Muslim, they could also bring something to this…they could be part of a team, because I think they will bring their own unique insights as well, and not allow this to be worked in isolation.

**Connect/Relate ability.** The last but not least significant quality/skill of a counsellor is their ability to connect with students. As a graduate student of a Muslim school, Sumaya felt isolated from mainstream society all through her secondary schooling. Many student participants highlighted the importance of a counsellor who could understand Australian Muslim youth. They wanted empathy from a counsellor in what they were facing as young Muslims who were struggling to meet the multiple expectations of them from all directions. What they needed most in support was to get a good handle on living Islam in a secular society, from adults who would model to them how this could be done. They did not feel that non-Muslims could fully understand what this was like for them. Most of them wanted a Muslim to give them the support and guidance they needed. At the same time, they were apprehensive about a Muslim counsellor who was seen as “too religious” or who had come from a totally different society. In other words, their ideal counsellor would be a person who was not too orthodox outwardly but was inwardly spiritual, who had the wisdom and tolerance to allow them space and time to search and grow. In Sumaya’s words,

What we want is to start with the inside outward…and have that wisdom—if we look back in history, we had the model, of the appropriate care for people…Why
are we making ourselves better than the Prophet? Even people who drank alcohol, or not wearing the scarf, that he [The Prophet] would have them back. We’d hope that God would forgive. We don’t get that from other people. We don’t give that to other people.

Desired.

Gender and age match. Participants from both service provider and consumer categories held similar views with slight variations on the gender and age of the ideal counsellor for Muslim students. Some students associated counsellors’ non-judgmental quality/skill with their age. They perceived younger counsellors as likely to be more understanding, less judgmental, and easier taken as an older brother or sister by the students and hence less intimidating for them.

While a great number of participants showed a preference for counsellors of the same gender as the students, Bilal felt that this was a luxury not always afforded by Muslim schools. He considered the ability to connect and build trust with students to be a criterion that superseded the gender issue. He said that most students who came to see him were adolescent female students. Bilal acknowledged that his experience was unique because he was an Islamic scholar and had been known to students at that school many years before he ventured into counselling. However, if financial concern were taken out of the equation, the majority of participants would like to see the counsellor’s gender matching the gender of students, especially for adolescent Muslim students.

Being aware of the limited choice in practice, some participants suggested it would be appropriate to have a female counsellor counselling both female and male students; in this case, an older woman might be preferable.

Malika, a female student in year 10 thought that it would be better even for the boys to see a female school counsellor. In her opinion, boys might prefer to speak to a female on certain matters as she explained, “men are more ‘out there’, so a woman is probably easier to talk to…for any child, you’d go to your mum.” Adam was one male student who felt this way. Referring to his personal experience, Adam said, “For my own reasons I wouldn’t want to go to a sheikh, I’d want to speak to a female. Sometimes you need to speak to a person of the opposite sex.”

Age-wise, many participants preferred counsellors who were closer in age to the students, as they were likely to still remember, and therefore be empathetic towards, challenges Muslim youth had to encounter as adolescents. For example, Farah remembered a year 12 student commenting on her age when she first went to see her, “I
feel so much better, I thought you were so much older. You are young, I can relate to you more.”

Alia, a school counsellor, believed that younger counsellors had an advantage in building rapport with and gaining trust from students. She said, “The previous counsellor was older, a lot of them were a bit afraid to go and speak to her, thinking what she might think of them. These are what students have told me.”

That said, no participant considered age an essential criterion for an ideal counsellor. In fact a number of participants held positive views towards a number of counsellors/welfare coordinators who were well into their forties and fifties. For example, Sumaya (an ex-student), noted that the first counsellors she had experience with when she was still in high school in the early 2000s, were both in their forties at the time. She said,

Young people are so fragile…they want to be accepted and they want to be heard…they can see a good person just by the way they talk to them and look at them, like my memories of Sisters X and Y at that young age had always been positive and remained that way.

Similarly, a welfare coordinator at another school well respected by all for her religious knowledge, her manners and her openness to students’ queries, was also in her late forties.

As Alia had aptly pointed out, matching the gender and age of the counsellor for students was not the absolute criterion; rather, it was essential that the counsellor had the quality of being “understanding and trust[worthy]’ and advised that, “when you are out there, try to speak their language, come down to them, they can relate.”

**Insightfulness.** A quality that participants thought beneficial and already being demonstrated by a number of counsellors in this study was their insightfulness in helping them with their issues.

A helpful, although not essential part of knowing their job, according to some participants, was the counsellors’ insightful knowledge of the school in which they worked. Among the counsellors/chaplains interviewed, four were graduates from Muslim schools and six had spent more than five years working in their respective Muslim schools. Participants considered this an advantage in providing guidance and support for students. Ahmad, a school counsellor, reflected, “What’s more important is that I’m actually a graduate of this school. I know what the students are going through…its important to understand the type of culture the school embodies.”

Adam, a year 12 student, recalled,
The previous counsellor...she understands how this school works. If you ever needed help with your schoolwork, she could pull a few strings and ask teachers to be easy on this person. That goes the same for this [current] counsellor, she had graduated from this school, she actually knows how to help us.

**Demeanor.** Participants considered that counsellors’ approach and attitude could affect students’ acceptance of them. Some shared their concerns over people who appeared to be *too religious*. For example, Amani, an ex-welfare coordinator, described the counsellor at her school, “She was really religious … her expectations may be higher for them. The kids find her intimidating to even talk to her.”

Initially Alia, despite being young, felt a non-verbal barrier between her and her students. Alia shared,

…because of the way I dressed, because of my physical appearance. I wear the scarf, I wear the coat. I had a few students that come up to me and said, “Miss, we thought that you won’t be understanding because of how you’re dressed, we thought we’re not going to go tell her because she’s probably going to tell us that what we are doing is very wrong, Islamically, religiously.

As a logical consequence of young Muslims’ apprehension towards what was perceived as *outwardly religious* people, many participants spoke about the importance of this ideal counsellor’s understanding of the Australian society. Students wanted someone who was tolerant and wise to whom they could relate. They envisioned that if someone who had personally experienced the challenges of growing up in Australia in the not too distant past, they would most likely have the ability to connect with them.

The following section addresses participants’ ideals on some specific issues during two major phases of transitioning experienced by adolescents during their secondary schooling.

**Focus 5: Ideals for Smooth Transitioning**

Major transitions that occur in students’ school life were considered in this study. Participants were asked to share their perspectives on preparations schools facilitated for students during two phases of transition: from primary to high school and from high school to further studies or work force in the mainstream society.

**Adjustments in High School**

**Initial settlement.** Most of the schools with which participants associated were K-12 colleges where students’ transitioning from primary to high school took place on the same site. Despite being on familiar grounds, some students recalled being “lost” or “scared” at the beginning of their first year in high school. Most students would like to
have school-organised orientation to familiarise them with the high school routines, expectations, new subject requirements, and even a tour of the high school area which was previously “out-of-bounds” to them as primary students.

**Study skills.** A year 12 student, Shamsa, wished there were sessions on study skills at the beginning and throughout lower secondary school to help her cope effectively with the increasingly demanding workload. A small number of students who were enrolled as new students in a new Muslim secondary school depended upon their own network of friends from the previous schools they attended or friends they knew from outside the school for support to cope with the work. Yasmeen, coming from the public system and with no such networks when she enrolled in a Muslim school in year 9, appreciated the teachers and classmates who helped her catch up on her work.

**Personal development.** Counsellors and welfare coordinators hoped to be given support from the management to help students with their initial settlement in high school from primary. Counsellors would like to help adolescents gain awareness of the changes within and around them, and to assist them to develop skills to deal with the many changes typically occurring during this turbulent developmental phase. Examples given by some of the service providers were concerned with adolescents’ overall wellbeing and development. These included social skills, friendship issues, self-esteem, body image, bullying, cyber bullying, trust, emotional changes, mental health, physical changes and so on; and how these could impact their personal wellbeing and school performance. Next to be discussed is the preparation for transitioning into the world beyond high school.

**Preparation for Life after High School**

**Social and life skills.** An area of concern with transitioning is a perception held by most participants that students from Muslim schools lacked exposure and preparation for the world outside their sheltered and isolated enclave after graduation. Given the backgrounds of many parents, most participants believed that Muslim schools had an important role to play in preparing their students to develop certain social and life skills to face life after high school. Some suspected that many students had no other avenue to learn these skills. Since the majority of Muslim schools encouraged their students to aspire to tertiary education, some counsellors would like to see students better supported in career counselling, subject selection, and practical assistance such as filling in application forms, understanding the timetable at universities and adjusting to a routine very different from high school.
**Work experience.** A number of students wished the schools organised work experience in high school to allow them a glimpse of work life in the real world. These students would have liked to learn some of the necessary skills through extra-curricular activities that they felt they had missed out on. In terms of being comfortable with their Muslim identity in a non-Muslim society, many participants, especially females, wished there could be programs that allowed them to build the confidence and skills throughout their high school.

**Life as an Australian Muslim.** Iman, a school counsellor, wanted the school to allow her to provide what her students’ really wanted for themselves according to the feedback she had obtained from the senior students. She shared some of the students’ feedback:

A lot of them came up with “how do I be an Australian Muslim?” and “how do I live in this society that we live in?” I thought that was excellent… so I’m really going to tally up, because a lot of them wrote the same thing, that’s going to be my fighting force to try and get more things done for the seniors that are almost finishing.

Iman shared her thoughts further on Muslim youth’s identity, “I’m a big believer of being an Australian Muslim, so I don’t need to only be Australian and I don’t need to only be Muslim, I can very very well fit both into that.”

Teachers such as Mimi and Hasanah would like to see students being equipped through character education throughout high school as a long term investment for their success in life beyond high school. Jeffrey, an experienced educator, had a vision that Muslim students would “feel comfortable to be part of an Islamic society in an Australian context” through schools making an effort to “look at how we can be more successful and more effective with the resource we’ve got as well as continue to seek those people [counsellors]”.

**Acceptance by wider community.** Waleed, who spent part of his schooling in Australia and as an Islamic studies teacher with experiences in two Muslim schools, pointed out a divergent issue thought to affect students’ transition into the wider community. He commented,

…the role of being second generation youth, the different kinds of challenges that are there between belonging and feeling like an Australian citizen, and the wider society is not accepting you, or finding it difficult to accept you as an Australian citizen. On the one side you are trying to, on the other side you have
your country of origin and you have your parents’ ethics and etc. Students go through quite a bit of turmoil and this is something that needs to be looked at.

Waleed’s concern for bridging cultural differences and the importance of being accepted by the wider community is an issue that is not only related to the development of identity of Muslim youth in Australia, it is also an issue of promoting cooperation and support between people of different cultures. It is vital when educating young people in a multicultural nation like Australia. Shifaa shared efforts made by her school in breaking the barrier between Muslims and students in the mainstream. Other participants mentioned interfaith dialogues which also served the purpose of bridge building with students in other faith schools. Participants desired more activities or programs of such nature, involving all students instead of a select few to facilitate their transitioning.

**Summary**

This chapter presented, analysed and discussed participants’ ideal counselling and wellbeing support service for students in Muslim secondary schools. Thematically, this dream has been examined under five focus areas: (a) ideals for implementing Islamic ethos of care; (b) ideals for student wellbeing support service; (c) culturally appropriate counselling; (d) roles, qualities and skills of an ideal school counsellor; and, (e) ideals for smooth transitioning.

Interpretation of this dream can be summarised as: Firstly, participants dreamed of a whole school, student-centred, holistic wellbeing support service aimed at early intervention and prevention. The key factor behind realising this dream lies in aligning actions with the schools’ initial intention, through a humanistic approach and nurturing positive attitude. Secondly, a culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service should focus on a service with assurance of confidentiality, minimum power distance and supply that meets the demand, delivered by service providers who have the same value system, preferably gender matched and closer in age to the students, and who are emotionally and culturally connected with Australian Muslim youth. Thirdly, counsellors’ roles should include both supporting students directly with their academic, spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing, as well as indirectly through advocacy, consultation and education for a more holistic effect. Fourthly, three important qualities and skills of a counsellor include their professionalism, insightfulness and ability to suspend personal judgment when working with youth. Lastly, provision of adequate skill training for transitioning from primary into high school, and later for preparation for life after high school, is desirable not only for students’ holistic wellbeing, but also
for their finding their place and fitting in with the mainstream society. A summation of this interpretation of participants’ dreams is presented as one statement in Figure 5.

Interview questions in the *Dream* phase sparked renewed energy and hope, which gave participants the space to freely explore and put forward suggestions that came to mind. The following chapter, *Design*, will detail the practical suggestions, either from existing practices in participants’ associated schools, or participants’ experiences gained elsewhere, that Muslim schools might take into consideration when planning for services or incorporate into their curriculum to better support student wellbeing.

**The Dream**

A school which **aims at nurturing well-balanced Australian Muslim characters** by implementing a **student-centred, holistic, culturally appropriate, whole school** approach within a **positive school culture**, through a **process of education** extended to all members of the **school community**.

*Figure 5.* Participants’ dream of wellbeing support for students in Muslim schools
CHAPTER 7 – DESIGN: HOW CAN THE IDEALS BE ACHIEVED?

This chapter builds on the previous chapter, Dream, presenting participants’ positive experiences and suggestions of their ideals in more tangible terms to contribute to a design to materialise what they wish to have in school counselling and wellbeing support service. Analysing the five focus areas presented in Chapter Six, this chapter offers more concrete suggestions and measures proposed by participants to fulfil the third phase of the Appreciative Inquiry’s 4-D cycle, Design. The design incorporates features in the landscape of counselling and wellbeing support for secondary school Muslim students. It derives from an analysis of what has been discovered, what participants wish to have, what existing practices participants found effective, as well as programs and initiatives participants consider beneficial and necessary to be included in this landscape.

Semi-structured interview questions that generated data for this phase of the 4-D cycle were developed from the third guiding question as presented in Chapter Three. Following from the second guiding question: What would be the ideal for supporting students’ Social and Emotional wellbeing? This chapter presents analyses of themes to address the third guiding question: How could that (i.e. the ideal) be achieved? Participants contributed to the design of an ideal counselling and wellbeing support service for students attending Muslim schools by drawing on knowledge and examples from their experiences in the area of student wellbeing support. Data collected from their responses provided elements through which a culturally appropriate design could be made possible. Slight modifications have been made to the five focus areas outlined in the previous chapter in which the ideal wellbeing support service is combined with what is considered culturally appropriate counselling. This chapter offers designs for four focus areas in this landscape: (a) Implementing Islamic ethos of care; (b) Culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service; (c) Roles, qualities and skills of the counsellor; and, (d) Support for transitioning during secondary schooling.

Focus 1: Design to Implement the Islamic Ethos of Care

The design for this focus area involves Recognising, Organising and Utilising the human capital to better support student wellbeing. In Chapter Five, many participants through their associations with Muslim schools illustrated areas of inconsistencies between their existing focus and approach to student wellbeing and the Islamic teachings. The names and mission statements of the majority of Muslim/Islamic schools in Australia indeed reflect their intent to aim for both worldly
and spiritual successes. Participants’ dream to see school management to re-align with the Islamic ethos in supporting student wellbeing was elaborated in Chapter Six. However, this re-alignment will remain a dream, if those who hope for the situation to change do not actively work towards a change within the school culture in the way they view and approach this need in their students.

**Recognising**

When participants were asked to propose a design to address areas of inconsistencies affecting student wellbeing, the majority of them expected those in leadership to bring about this much-needed change to better support their students. From the viewpoint of human resource, individuals who potentially can be a part of the change should be identified.

*Concerned individuals.* Jannah, a public high school teacher who was also an ex-Muslim school student, for example, expressed her feelings of frustration over “attitude[s] … in our community that are not allowing change. I know there are some people, who have great ideas, but they are not going anywhere, there’s not enough of them, they don’t get support”. Although it is a given that those in positions of leadership have greater power to effect changes to improve the service for student wellbeing, some believe more can be done to initiate the change. Appreciative Inquiry’s strength lies in focusing on the positive aspects of a given situation and facilitating stakeholders to work their way up from there. The “attitude” mentioned by Jannah may be a fact; more worthy of attention are remarks such as “there are some people, who have great ideas”. It is possible that individuals with good ideas are not effecting change because their lone voices have not been heard; hence their potential remains dormant.

*Empathic individuals.* A small number of participants from among the service provider’s category proposed alternative approaches. From a teacher’s perspective, Badieh shared her knowledge that in some schools all teachers were required to be on duty during recess and lunch to watch the children. She believed that if teachers in Muslim schools adopted the same approach, and looked out for children’s behaviour and wellbeing “as if they’re your own children” and were not merely there to police the playground, it would make a big difference to the school atmosphere, and would be likely to bring about a happier, more nurturing school environment for the students.

*Willing individuals.* Sumaya and Adam, both from the consumer category, have acknowledged examples of good Samaritans they had witnessed in their schools. For example, Sumaya recalled people from the Muslim school community assisting her
family during her mother’s hospitalisation, which was an excellent example of crisis intervention by individuals acting out of compassion within the school and Muslim community. She said, “I think that was really positive, there was a lot of kindness there”. However, she also mentioned one of her peers at school struggling with family difficulties but no one offered any help. Recognising who the willing individuals are is among the suggested ways to kick-start a more comprehensive support service for students in Muslim schools.

Organising

Team work. Some participants proposed a well-coordinated team to effect change. Madina, for example, held that “it [a good support system] would be impossible for one person, or one counsellor, or whoever is put in place in the school”; rather, it had to be achieved by “a team of qualified skilled people that can work with the students and with the parents, and not in isolation”.

System change. Amani proposed a team involving not only Muslim schools but inclusive of concerned members of the Muslim community to make a change in the area of student wellbeing services. She suggested that a small number of very committed core people come together as a motivated team, and work towards improving the support service for students at Muslim schools. Elaborating on this idea, Amani said,

Sincere Nasiha [counsel], try that…. Give them ideas. Consultation on how to improve. More organised … a group that’s unified and work, and go to the school and offer that service, people will listen more. They also have to have a structure … a system that they develop, and that can work in all schools, it’s like a franchise that can be repeated. You work hard on the system once, it will take at least a year to five years, and continuously come back, evaluate and review it…. A lot of people just randomly give advice. Provide something better, and show them that it works, show them the paper work.

Utilising

Goodwill. Some participants proposed the starting point had to begin with believing in people’s innate desire to care. Amani, an ex-welfare coordinator, proposed an approach drawing on the teaching of Prophet Muhammad that “Religion is sincere counsel”. Amani said, “Everyone thinks they’re doing the right thing. Usually with good intention but don’t know how to do better…. Just having someone sincere to go and give them ideas”.
Mobilising key players. Badieh suggested changing individual’s perspectives on student wellbeing among key service providers, namely, the teachers.

Existing human resource. Madina proposed organising existing school personnel to bring their skills together to work in unison, whereas Amani’s design aims for a more systemic change drawing on community members who have the concern and skills to effect this change.

In summary, the design for this focus area consists of recognising the faith-inspired desire to do good among members of the Muslim school community, which can lead to the identification of compassionate, committed and skilled individuals who share similar concerns for student wellbeing to form an organised team. Once organised, in a concerted effort, this team can start a conversation that focuses on student wellbeing within the school community, to share experiences, to collect ideas, to document evidences on the extent of need, towards developing a solid support structure backed by research, and to develop a strategic plan based on Islamic ethos of care. Participants were hopeful that, with solid groundwork in place, it was only a matter of time before a sound student wellbeing support service becomes a reality within the Muslim school communities at all levels.

Focus 2: Design for Culturally Appropriate Student Wellbeing Support Service

In Chapter Six, participants’ dreams of what they wished to have as an ideal wellbeing support service for students at Muslim schools were summarised into three descriptors: student-centred, holistic and whole-school. Attitudes of members in the Muslim school communities are closely related to how likely it is the ideal service may become a reality.

Seen from the perspective of a service that is student-centred, holistic and whole school, the discussion for each descriptor here is two-fold: general and specific. The general aspects of a student-centred academic wellbeing concern remedial support, special education support and career guidance. The specific aspects take into consideration two unique academic needs of students from migrant, refugee and Muslim backgrounds, namely language support and their specific learning issues.

The general design aspect for holistic wellbeing concentrates on deeper issues to be addressed across the entire school community, whereas the specific design focus is on pedagogical issues within the Islamic Studies learning area and the standard of teaching.

The design for a whole school wellbeing support service underscores the need for a general approach through advocacy, education and maximising the effects of the
sheikh factor on one hand, and, specifically, professional development for teachers in the area of student wellbeing on the other hand.

To simplify and conceptualise participants’ diverse design ideas for this focus area, a matrix is presented in Table 6. Each descriptor is elaborated in detail in the discussions following the matrix.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic wellbeing support</td>
<td>• Remedial classes</td>
<td>• Language support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Special education support</td>
<td>• Specific education support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Career guidance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic wellbeing support</td>
<td>• Attitude change</td>
<td>• Re-establish the place of Islamic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commitment to change</td>
<td>• Teacher appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Muslim identity development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Role models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole school approach</td>
<td>All levels of the school community:</td>
<td>• Raising teacher awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advocacy</td>
<td>• Paradigm shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School community education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Optimising the sheikh factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Wellbeing Support**

Most participants held the opinion that secondary school Muslim students had unique learning needs in addition to needs common to adolescents during this phase of their development. General factors affecting students’ academic progress discussed by participants included learning gaps, learning disabilities, family problems and a lack of appropriate guidance in deciding on career goals. Specific needs included issues associated with cultural and religious expectations, pre-migration experiences affecting student learning, and pressures of adjusting and surviving in the host country. These factors interrelate with various dimensions of student wellbeing, and hence can affect their performance at school.

**General.** Although not a specific focus of the current study, a number of participants paid considerable attention to students’ academic wellbeing. The general aspects of a student-centred wellbeing support service include services that support students in their learning, special education and career guidance. Participant-associated
schools offer examples of good practice that could be adopted by other schools into their design, elaborated as follows.

**Remedial classes.** Efforts have been made in some Muslim schools to address students’ learning gaps by providing remedial classes, or revision classes during school holidays, or after school tuition sessions. Rehab, a welfare coordinator in one school, explained that students who needed extra academic support were placed in smaller classes, and were given “stronger teachers … that have little more training, or have the qualifications, or have that greater experience”.

Many students voiced their opinion that the trade off for this special care was students’ self-esteem. To address this concern, one student proposed to have subjects streamed to suit students’ different abilities, so that students attended classes for different subjects according to their performance in each individual subject and did not have to feel ‘stuck’ in “the dumb class” (Jannah) for an entire year.

Other suggestions by students included random placement and reshuffling of students each year. They believed that this way they would get to meet other students in the same year and teachers should address students’ different learning needs. In one of the newer schools this was exactly how students were allocated and the teachers were required to take care of students with a range of abilities.

**Special education support.** In a very small number of schools, trained special education assistants have been employed to support students with learning difficulties in primary school. However, most schools did not have this support for their students. As a result, students with learning disabilities did not always get adequate support in the early years of schooling, leaving ever widening gaps in their learning the older they got. Therefore trained special education teachers are an important feature in the design for student-centred support for the academic progress of students especially in the foundation years of their schooling.

**Career guidance.** Career guidance in most schools in this study was offered only to senior students in year 10 at the time of subject selection, and was sometimes provided by the school counsellor if available. Early introduction to career guidance for junior high school students was rare, but had been implemented by one school since 2012. An extra counsellor was employed with career guidance as part of her job description because the principal found that “every year there’s that sort of discussion to start early… for them to make informed choices for their future”. She explained further, “… the more we are able to inform them … the more we are able to get them to
know a little about the industry that’s out there so they make the right choices really does make a big difference for them.”

**Specific.** This section focuses on specific academic issues associated with newly arrived students from overseas. These issues do not apply to all schools unless they are situated within close proximity to settlement areas for newly arrived migrant families, especially in Sydney and Melbourne where more Muslim schools are available in a wider range of locations.

**Language support.** Common to most newly arrived migrant students from non-English speaking backgrounds is the language support they need when they first enroll in an Australian school. Mimi, an English language teacher in one of the Muslim schools said, “It’s very frustrating to see a child who can’t write A B C in year 10… There is a lack of skills.” The older the students, the more intensive support they need for learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Insufficient or lack of adequate ESL support prior to their joining the mainstream classes can further hinder student progress. Mimi pointed out that this situation “… is disempowering for the child as well as for the teacher.”

**Specific education support.**

*Address learning gaps.* Language aside, some of the newly arrived students in secondary schools have significant gaps in their schooling prior to coming to Australia as a consequence of years of disrupted schooling due to internal political or economic instability in their countries of origin. At times, there are students in their early teens who have hardly received any formal schooling prior to coming to Australia. Adjustment to a classroom setting, following routines in a school day, and even certain basic self-management and organisation skills all call for extra support for these students.

*Cultural liaison.* Cultural differences pose another challenge in communication between school and parents. In School L, due to a gradual increase in the percentage of enrolments of students from a particular culture, a university student in education from the same culture was employed to liaise between the school and the parents of these students. This resulted in better communication between teachers, parents and students, which in turn helped these new students to settle into this school.

*Specific support for recent arrivals.* In addition to challenges associated with English language, students from refugee backgrounds with disabilities require more specialised support for their academic progress. An example to demonstrate this point is the story of Fatima and Nora at one Muslim school. Fatima and Nora were two
sisters newly migrated to Australia who enrolled with the ambition of studying medicine after year 12. Both students had a sensory disability. This school enrolled both students knowing their disabilities without providing them with special education assistance. The language issue not only affected their progress in English as a subject itself, it negatively impacted on all other subjects as well. Towards the end of year 10, the sisters found out that their marks limited them in subject selection which kept them from realising their dream careers in medicine. They eventually saw the school counsellor who spoke the same language to explain the situation to them.

Exposition of narratives such as Fatima and Nora’s reveal issues to be addressed beyond the perimeters of school counselling and wellbeing support service. They point towards a deeper need for the school governing boards and decision-making teams to assume greater accountability towards every student enrolled in their school. As participants have shared, existing schools are, by and large, making efforts to address the general academic needs of students, even for students with disabilities, albeit in minimal ways. To what extent, if at all, Muslim schools take into consideration their capacity to adequately meet students’ specific education needs before enrolling every student remains unclear. Muslim schools, being among the first places of contact upon arrival for many new migrant Muslim families with school-aged children, play a crucial role in informing the parents not only of what the school can offer, but also in being honest about their limitations, so parents can make informed decisions about what is best for their children. Even then, some parents may still choose Muslim schools over other options for their children because of the Muslim environment these schools offer.

The follow section discusses design for holistic wellbeing support.

**Holistic Wellbeing Support**

Holistic wellbeing is multi-dimensional. Participants’ contributions to design suggestions for this section tended to focus more on a number of underlying issues in which they desired to see a change. Therefore, these issues will be expounded in a spirit of acknowledging those deep-rooted issues as part of the design process and constructive ideas derived from a combination of what participants’ desired or positive experiences shared. The discussions in this section under general and specific aspects are presented as follows.

**General.** There are four items for discussion under the general approach: attitude change, commitment to change, students’ identity development and role models.
Attitude change. A number of participants, in their roles as counsellors, teachers or parents, suggested that an awareness and understanding of students’ wellbeing was essential. Some participants held that holistic wellbeing with its multiple dimensions required integration between subjects built upon the principles and teachings of Islam. A small number of students did not consider the current Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) program as a learning area that effectively developed their holistic wellbeing. They said that students tended not to give this subject much importance as compared to other core subjects. One participant mentioned that boys in his class, due to their lack of maturity, often made fun of some of the topics discussed at junior secondary level. Students from a highly competitive school felt that their health and wellbeing was compromised due to the amount of homework and studies they had to cope with. To them, PDHPE looked fine in print but was not achievable in their situation. Students (both male and female) spoke about the lack of physical exercise in high school. Some even perceived their schools as valuing certain subjects to the extent of blind-siding students’ interests in learning areas ranked as the “soft sciences”, namely, arts and humanities subjects. Students believed that this phenomenon had a negative impact on their self-worth; they perceived that unless they were high achievers in the more “favoured” subjects, their interest in arts and humanities learning areas were of little value to the school or the community. Before a school can provide a holistic wellbeing support service to students, an attitude change in this respect is seen as a prerequisite.

Commitment to change. Following an attitude change in recognising that students need to develop as holistic beings, a most appropriate response to follow is committing time in the timetable to do something about it.

From the perspectives of counsellors and school psychologists in this study, while counselling services might have started out as a foreign concept to many members of the school communities, it had begun to gain acceptance after years of their perseverance and trust building. Analysis on how counselling services are gaining acceptance in Muslim school communities, albeit gradual, indicates that the essence of Islam in the counsellors themselves and in their approach has played a significant part in this process.

The gradual reduction in time allocated for Islamic Studies in high school, incidentally, was seen as a paradox within Muslim schools in terms of developing students’ knowledge and practice as Muslims in their everyday life. In one school, an attempt was made to develop an Islamic character education program by a team led by
an Islamic scholar. This was unfortunately discontinued before it came to fruition. A teacher at this school commented that had this curriculum been developed in full and implemented as a permanent feature in the design of a wellbeing service, it would have supported students more holistically. It appeared that schools’ commitment to and focus on academic achievement still superseded student wellbeing for students in their senior years.

Most counsellors in the schools in this study recognised the need to introduce programs for adolescent students in groups in addition to one-on-one counselling. Many topics addressing different aspects of student wellbeing were thought beneficial for all students, and counsellors held that the more the common issues were addressed collectively, and preventively, the less would be the need for curative counselling. An example of good practice in how wellbeing programs were introduced to students collectively can be found in vignette 3 of Chapter Four.

*Prioritise Muslim identity development.* Students spoke about challenges they faced in being Muslims in Australia. Most of the male students and a small number of the female students said that they felt confident and looked forward to life after high school. They commented that it was not so much their school, but their family and social contacts that had availed them of opportunities to interact with the “outside” world. A number of current students expressed that the Muslim school environment had provided them a safe enclave to practice Islam when they were growing up, but feared that they might not have adequate skills to navigate between the seemingly two very different worldviews: Islamic and Australian. Habiba, a mother of six children, frankly admitted that parents played a big part in sheltering their children from the wider community out of concern over their children being exposed to all things un-Islamic.

Earlier graduates in this study experienced difficulty initially in adjusting to a non-Muslim environment. Nabila, a current year 12 student, spoke about having to build confidence to wear her hijab in a suburb where few Muslims lived. Girls, more so than boys, spoke about limited opportunities for them to socialise outside their school and home settings.

Sumaya, an ex-student, and Iman, a school counsellor, were among many participants who spoke about identity issues faced by young Muslims. Both Sumaya and Iman were second generation Australian Muslims who grew up striving to be both Australians and Muslims. From Sumaya’s perspective, the school environment created isolation because little was offered to help her make the connection between life in an
all-Muslim school environment and life in the mainstream. As a young student then, Sumaya desperately wanted to know how she could be a part of the wider community. Iman, who was schooled in the public system, worked with students in a Muslim school. She found that her students struggled with many identity issues. Some students’ feedback shared by Iman resonated with Sumaya’s difficult experiences 10 years previously.

Helping students to develop confidence in their Muslim identity was thus a feature proposed by some participants in the design.

**Role models.** As discussed in the previous segment, Muslim students as a minority group in a non-Muslim society were much in need of support in knowing how to exist fluidly between their identities as an Australian and as a Muslim. Students with parents who migrated from collectivist societies carried with them parenting approaches not always applicable in an individualistic society like Australia. Those adults learnt to be Muslims naturally just by living in a Muslim-majority environment. Muslim youth, without a Muslim society to uphold a set of behaviour patterns expected of them by their parents, their ethnic and/or faith communities, nor with extended families to lend them assistance in this respect, are left to grapple with these identity issues on their own.

As a feature in the design to support Muslim students, a number of participants mentioned their associated schools inviting older graduates to interact with students. While migrant Muslims to Australia in the earlier years strove to deal with these issues in any way they could to the best of their abilities, they did so with the frame of reference they already had. Young Muslims do not have what their parents had. Their frame of reference is still developing, and is vastly different to their parents, to say the least. Some young people in this study who grew up in Australia, who had to grapple with their identity issues, are taking the initiative to address some of these issues for the younger Muslims. For example, Zainab and Sumaya have both mentioned their effort in sourcing funding to conduct personal development programs for high school students in their Muslim schools with encouraging feedback.

Nadia was among several participants who emphasised the importance of teachers being role models in developing students’ Muslim character, especially for students who came from less practicing families or problematic home environments. It was more important for these students to see how to be a Muslim from living examples than reading it from a textbook. Nadia said, “If I have the opportunity to interview a
teacher… I have to check her thoroughly, make sure she is implementing Islam in her own life…. And from that it will show me the green light [whether] I hire her or not.”

In Schools H and Q, a model of recruiting and training volunteer university students, who graduated from these schools and who were studying to become teachers, had been successful in providing mentors to their secondary students. The volunteer mentors were supported by their school community to commit one afternoon per week to run a tutoring program for students who were able to stay behind after school. Each volunteer mentor was responsible for students in one year level, and s/he was supported by the counsellor and welfare teacher for that year level. The school provided a simple dinner for students after a two-hour tutoring session, followed by a 30 to 45 minutes informal discussion. Although Schools H and Q were not officially registered as Muslim schools, their student body was nonetheless made up of an overwhelming majority of Muslim students. Their model of student welfare with ex-students as mentors in particular, is something that all schools with students from migrant backgrounds could look into adopting to better support their students’ identity development.

**Specific.** Some participants zoomed in on a number of pedagogical concerns they had for the existing Islamic Studies program. They believed that a sound education in Islam played a central role in developing students’ holistic wellbeing. An ideal picture of a well balanced Muslim youth who was educated from an Australian Muslim school was best described by Madina, who said they would “walk in a quiet dignity and show in their action and their deeds.” It would not be presumptuous to suggest that an invigorating and inspiring Islamic Studies program in Muslim schools had a key role to play in realising this ideal. More specifically, was the need to appraise the teaching approach of teachers, especially those who obtained their qualifications from overseas who might or might not have had adequate training to teach, or manage student behaviours quite different from their countries of origin.

**Re-establish the place of Islamic studies.** The value given to Islamic Studies as a learning area by the school community members emerged as a specific feature in the design to support students’ holistic wellbeing. Parents as well as current and ex-students in this study shared their concerns over the lack of seriousness towards Islamic Studies reflected in the way it was run in some schools. Some participants wondered whether the majority of the teachers who taught Islamic Studies had adequate training in teaching from Australian recognised institutions. One principal reportedly encouraged the counsellor to take students out of their Islamic Studies periods for individual
counselling sessions. When approved, allocation of time for group counselling was also taken from Islamic Studies’ class time. It was not uncommon in some schools for students to use their Islamic Studies classes to do “other” things such as catching up on assignments for other subjects, or going to the library, or settling matters with the front office and so on.

Furthermore, it appeared that the Islamic Studies syllabi in some Muslim schools relied on resources acquired from countries abroad which might not address specific issues relevant to Australian students. Suggestions from one Islamic Studies teacher to change the textbooks did not take effect until years later after the stockpile of old textbooks had been used up.

In short, participants related students’ holistic wellbeing specifically to what religion could offer and suggested that Islamic Studies be given the honour and respect it deserved in Muslim schools.

**Teacher appraisal.** Participants put forward suggestions for schools to appraise teachers for their teaching skills. Concerns were raised over a few incidents where teachers, albeit very small in number, were tolerated in some of these schools despite their lack of professionalism as teachers. They had been employed either for their expert knowledge in a specific learning area, or because they had been given authority to teach on merits of years of teaching experience in Muslim schools since before the statewide regulations for teachers’ registration came in. As one participant pointed out, “unfortunately you have a lot of teachers in the Muslim school who have been able to slip through the cracks … five years of xxxxy teaching is five years of xxxxy teaching … if you have no foundation, you are just basically perpetuating the same thing year after year… you are not helping the students.”

To demonstrate these concerns, two participants, Khalid, a parent, and Amira, an ex-student, shared their dismay over teachers’ bias towards students based on their ethnic background or academic performance. Habiba and Ibrahim, both of whom were parents, were among participants who mentioned incidents where religion teachers conducted themselves inappropriately with students. Some teachers had been perceived as having little exposure to the Australian youth culture (Sumaya), and hence lacked skills to connect with their adolescent students, or were not effective in managing students’ behaviour in their classes. Other concerns participants had with some teachers included spoon-feeding (Adam) and a lack of engaging activities in their lessons (Zainab), which not only led to students’ boredom and disinterest in the subject, but also compromised students’ learning.
The discussions in this segment allude to designing an appraisal process, both for the standards of teaching and the conduct of teachers. Strategies to support teachers to meet the required teaching standards for all teachers who had no Australian teaching qualification, regardless of how long they had been teaching in their associated schools are necessary.

Discussion in the following section is the third and final part of the design for students’ holistic wellbeing support, namely, whole school approach.

**Whole School Approach**

During interviews, participants elaborated on what they meant by *whole school approach* as the third descriptor in an ideal student wellbeing service. From the counsellors’ perspectives, stigma associated with psychological and mental health issues existed in every community, but more so within the Muslim community than members of the wider community. Almost all the counsellors commented that this situation had begun to improve in recent years but much work was still necessary to clear the misconceptions and distrust towards professional counselling amongst the service providers in general, and teachers in particular.

**General.** General features in the design for whole school wellbeing support include advocacy, education and optimising the *sheikh* factor.

**Advocacy.** As a growing community made up of members from very diverse cultural backgrounds, most participants were of the opinion that community awareness of what counselling entailed was an essential factor in developing a whole school approach to student wellbeing. Some students and parents held the opinion that awareness through schools and mosques would in time help the community become better informed about what was involved in seeking professional counselling, and to help demystify their fear of the unknown. Participants repeatedly deferred this responsibility to school leadership as a target group from the Muslim community because they had the power to make a world of difference in supporting students’ wellbeing if they knew the extent of its importance.

Since counselling as a service to support one’s wellbeing is a relatively new concept among many ethnic cultures, some service providers at Muslim schools are themselves not open to this approach. This had been reflected in a lack of support for counsellors in some schools, and in teachers’ reluctance in allowing their students the time to see the counsellor during their lessons.

To bridge the information gap between school counsellors, students, teachers and parents, more proactive steps would be useful, as in the case with School N. The
principal at this school acknowledged the school counsellors’ efforts in advocating for and bringing awareness of the school’s counselling service to her school community.

**School community education.** Apart from advocacy for student wellbeing through counselling, the school community also requires on-going education, according to majority of participants in this study. Shifaa, a school counsellor, had found that working in collaboration with the school’s Parents and Friends Committee to provide community education sessions had effected positive responses in parents’ acceptance and cooperation in this area. One imam in another school was working in collaboration with the school counsellor to run a program on parenting.

In addition to information sessions, Shifaa also disseminates a wide range of information on mental health, nutrition, bullying and so on through the school newsletter and website. Jazaa, a school psychologist in a different school was considering adopting similar channels to educate and communicate with parents and all levels of school community.

**Optimising the sheikh factor.** Counselling given in keeping with the Islamic values emerged as a strong feature. Endorsement or support from religious scholars had been helpful according to a number of counsellors and students.

Many participants strongly advocated for counsellors for Muslim youth to be practicing Muslims. In their opinion, going to someone for counselling was tantamount to seeking guidance in life. They reasoned that although the final decision belonged to the person seeking counsel, the options explored during the counselling process should stay within the permissible boundaries of the religion. Being aware of this perspective, many counsellors in this study had solicited their school imam’s advice on matters concerning religion when they deemed it necessary, or for times when parents needed assurance from an Islamic scholar before allowing their children to be seen by a counsellor.

Drawing from participants’ input, school community’s support, including school leadership, can effectively be achieved by optimising what the researcher calls the **sheikh factor**. Some participants held that religious scholars were instrumental in certain cases, such as alleviating the stigma of seeking professional help for emotional and mental health issues. According to some participants, things had improved in the recent years with regards to school community’s acceptance of help-seeking through counselling. Efforts of religious scholars in this regard, like Ali and Idris, who were there to support the counsellors at their schools, could not be underestimated. Elham, a year 12 student, said,
The fact that they are advocating for it now has helped so much. People are realising, “OK, it’s not a sign of weakness of faith, it’s a natural process of life to sometimes feel down. That’s when you need to seek help.

Taking their support to a next level, were Idris and Bilal, who had taken it upon themselves to undertake professional counselling studies which had already started to complement their extensive training in Islamic knowledge.

These initiatives are seen as steps in the right direction, and should be adopted in the design of a whole school wellbeing strategy. Imams who seek to gain understanding and skills in Western approaches to counselling, in addition to their religious knowledge and rapport with the community, have much to offer in support of Muslim youth’s wellbeing. If students find the sheikh easy to connect with, their acceptance as counsellors by the community and young Muslims is almost guaranteed. That said, all of the female participants with the exception of one student in this study, preferred to be counselled by female Muslim counsellors over a sheikh. In support of female students in this situation, the *sheikh factor* is better utilised by female counsellors for endorsement of their service and for clarifying the Islamic stance on a particular issue.

**Specific.** Participants’ discussions on more specific issues were associated with teachers’ professional development in the area of student well-being. These included: raising awareness and paradigm shift. Teachers’ awareness and skills in these areas at a grassroots level would help to identify students showing signs of imbalance in their wellbeing and support them to get help early.

**Raising teachers’ awareness.** One counsellor, Bilal, believed that teachers had a key role to play in helping to identify and refer students in need of his support, especially students from war-torn countries, who had lost their family members, or those from problematic home environments.

Salma, a counsellor at School V for seven years, saw a specific need to educate the teachers on the guidelines for mandatory reporting on cases of child abuse. She said, “I think this is an area of constant confusion even in the school when I have done PD [professional development] there’s this assumption that you have to get permission to do it. And they [teachers] keep coming back.” She hoped that this issue would be built into the design for professional development so the teaching staff could gain clarity and confidence to better support students in their care.

**Paradigm shift.** In this study, teachers who were perceived as those who “cared” stood out in students’ memories for their kindness and compassion. Badieh,
Sana and Tasneem believed that a happy and positive atmosphere could bring out the best in everyone, including the teachers.

Negative assumptions about students’ behaviour issues held by some teachers, oblivious to possible underlying mental health, social or emotional causes, were of concern to Bilal. Iman believed that seeing a “naughty child” as a “hurt child” could change the perspective of teachers towards better supporting their students.

This segment of the discussion completes the third part of the section on the design for ideal and culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service for students in Muslim schools. Drawing from the experiences shared and ideas proposed by participants in developing a whole-school approach in this area, advocacy for and education in counselling and wellbeing support at all levels within the school communities are necessary. Optimising the sheikh factor is considered a sound and practical approach in promoting school communities’ acceptance of counselling. Professional development for teachers with more focus in the area of wellbeing and their potential to make a difference is considered to be specifically helpful in the design for a whole school approach to support students’ wellbeing.

**Focus 3: Design for Counsellor’s Job Description and Selection Criteria**

The descriptors of what participants desired in an ideal counsellor for Australian Muslim secondary school students has been discussed at length in Chapter Six. To complement the design for a culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service, a job description and selection criteria developed from participants’ input may serve as a useful reference to Muslim schools at this stage.

**Job Description**

Participants put forward their ideas on the many aspects of the role a counsellor and wellbeing support staff should play. Broadly speaking, the roles can be divided into two categories: their role towards the school community; and their role towards students.

**Role towards school community.** Depending on the maturity of the existing service in each school, counsellors in some schools had begun to work on policy and procedure development for their school’s counselling service, while others were still in the process of getting the school community to accept them.

**Develop policy and procedures.** Salma, a school counsellor, for example, was finally given the reinforcement of two new counsellors after carrying the workload on her own for seven years. Salma was planning to start on developing policies and
procedures for the school’s counselling department once the new counsellors had gained a better handle on the work involved.

**Educate school community.** Overlapping with one area discussed on a whole school approach presented in the previous section is the role of counsellors to inform and educate the school community regarding the importance of and issues related to student wellbeing. Several counsellors would like teachers, in particular, to be fully aware of their obligations towards their students’ wellbeing and safety as they were considered to have a key role not only in identifying and referring students to them for support, but also in students’ compliance to scheduled counselling sessions.

Shifaa, the head of counselling department at School I believed in keeping parents informed about a broad range of topics on child health and contemporary issues associated with technology and parenting. This was consistent with the multipronged approach in providing better support for students suggested by a number of participants in this study.

**Role towards students.** The job description in this category is subdivided into two parts, individual counselling and group counselling.

**Individual counselling.** Depending on the presenting issues in each school, experienced counsellors emphasised the need to have part of their time spent on developing and running group sessions to reduce the demand for individual counselling, even though the latter remained an essential part of the service for specific issues that required one-on-one attention. Since Muslim schools generally have an extra hour to their school day than government schools, if a counsellor spent 40% of her time within a seven hour working day, s/he would have been able to see approximately 14 students per week, each for a 40 minute session, while still spending lunch and recess breaks where s/he is able to spend informal time bonding with students, or fit in some shorter sessions with students when required.

**Group counselling.** As for group counselling, suggestions for the design included adolescents’ developmental issues, and Muslim adolescents’ character, social and spiritual development. Collaboration across learning areas means economical use of time and human resources, with an added advantage of de-compartmentalising subject areas for a holistic approach to student learning.

**Selection Criteria**

As a reference point for Muslim schools on the subject of selecting a culturally appropriate counsellor, participants suggested the following essential and preferred qualities and skills. Most of the discussions covered in Focus 4 of Chapter Six were
concerned with participants’ ideal counsellor’s qualities, skills and experiences. Listed in the design section are brief points for consideration.

**Essential skills and qualities.**

*Relevant Australian qualification and experience.* Participants strongly suggested that counsellors had qualifications from an Australian tertiary institution, with an undergraduate degree majoring in psychology or counselling at the minimum; and registration with an Australian professional body in their field of training. Some held the opinion that counsellors should have experience working with young people who grew up in Australia to demonstrate they knew how best to relate to them.

*Cultural sensitivity.* Given the diversity of student backgrounds, the counsellor’s awareness of and respect for cultural and religious sensitivities were considered essential. This also included counsellors’ ability to connect with young Muslims.

*Fluency in Australian lingo.* Fluency in verbal and written communication in standard Australian English and the Australian lingo was important especially in connecting with young people who grew up in Australia.

*Team player.* A number of participants suggested a team of trained professionals to work in collaboration to support students’ wellbeing, hence the counsellor’s ability to work as a team member was as important as working independently.

*Personal qualities.* In terms of personal qualities, the most important characteristics participants highlighted were: understanding, non-judgmental, trustworthy and approachable.

**Preferred skills and experiences.**

*Familiarity with Muslim school cultures.* An awareness of Australian Muslim adolescents’ specific needs and knowledge of the school culture were considered beneficial. Two of four counsellors who were graduates of Muslim schools mentioned that it was mutually beneficial for themselves as well as for students that they were familiar with the school culture. Some students expressed their appreciation for their school counsellors in this respect.

*Bi/Multi-lingual.* As with the case of the recent arrival students mentioned previously in this chapter, counsellors who had a second or third language would be helpful to clarify student queries before they became proficient in English.
Areas of expertise. Given the students’ backgrounds in some Muslim schools, a counsellor’s experiences in certain areas were considered desirable by a small number of participants. Some examples given by participants included, but were not limited to:

- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Depression
- Anger

This section projected participants’ dreams of an ideal school counsellor into the design of a job description, selection criteria and a list of culturally preferred items believed to be more appropriate for students in Muslim schools. Individual schools may take this general design suggestion as a basis and modify where necessary to cater for their specific needs.

Focus 4: Design for Transitioning Support

The final focus area discussed in the previous chapter was transitioning for secondary school students in Muslim schools. Two major phases of transitioning were explored. The first phase concerned students in puberty and their transition during this period from primary to secondary school. The second phase dealt with preparing senior students to interact with the wider community after they graduate from high school.

Practical suggestions for the design are discussed next.

Programs for Junior Secondary School Students

Adolescents undergo major changes both within themselves and their school environment around the time they move from primary to secondary schools. Adapting to these changes during this period can be quite challenging for the young person. Well designed transitioning programs and adequate counselling and wellbeing support can go a long way for young people who need that extra assistance during this time.

General programs.

Orientation. Suggestions aimed at helping adolescent students make the transition from primary to secondary school included an orientation program prior to, or at the very beginning of, the first year of secondary school. Most Muslim schools catering from K-12 do not have a separate middle school for students in the middle years save for a very small number of schools. Most students in this study attended Muslim colleges where students had stayed on the same campus since Kindergarten. Even then, many students recalled feeling lost in the first week of high school due to new routines, new buildings, new teachers and new expectations. A school captain in year 12 remembered how nervous she felt at year 8. She wished there was a buddy system where senior students could take on a small group of new students in year 8 to
support and guide them as peers. A student at School E mentioned seeing her cousins attending a year 7 orientation program and wished that similar transitioning programs could be offered to students at her school.

Some schools in recent years had started to introduce programs to welcome and settle new high school students. In School I for example, the Chaplain explained briefly about their orientation camps for all new year 7 students and teaching staff. This program allowed the teachers the opportunity to get to know their students in a more relaxed atmosphere. Not only do these camps provide students with many fun activities, but also the opportunity to meet their peers and form new friendships. The camps at this school were run by external companies contracted by the school. This was a model that could potentially be adopted into the design for supporting students in transitioning to high school.

Adolescent wellbeing development. Other suggestions to address the overall wellbeing of students in this phase of transition included regular contact between the counsellor and students in larger group settings supported by a number of teaching staff in case behaviour issues arose. Areas of concern were mostly related to character/values education, social skills, mental and emotional health; more recently, cyber bullying had become an increasingly important topic to be addressed with junior secondary students.

Specific programs. Purposeful planning should be put into Islamic Studies curriculum aimed at incorporating practical skills to educate students on how to maintain their faith and religious practices in a non-Muslim society. This calls for a concerted effort in developing a holistic and age appropriate Islamic Studies curriculum.

Muslim adolescents’ religious duties. Participants identified a need for an Islamic component put into the transitioning program specifically designed for students reaching the age of puberty.

A former staff member of a Muslim school, Madina, compared the rites of passage for adolescents coming of age in Judaism and some Australian Indigenous cultures, to how young Muslims are prepared during this phase of their development. She observed that in the former cultures there were ceremonies and initiations to formally introduce young people to their rights and responsibilities as adults, reminding them that they were beginning a new stage in the life with different expectations from being a child, whereas in Islam there are no such rites to officiate the beginning of this change. In Islam, puberty marks the beginning of a person’s religious accountability. Preparation of a Muslim child for the obligatory religious duties usually starts from
home or local mosques several years before they reach puberty. For those who came from countries where Muslims were in the majority, the availability of mosques in almost every street meant that some elements of this process could happen quite seamlessly, whereas most young Muslims in Australia rely solely on their parents and Muslim education institutions for this preparation. If parents are not confident to take on this task, their rely solely on Muslim education institutions to which they send their children.

Concerned parents and participants in this interview brought up a number of areas that needed to be addressed by the school for the transition of young Muslims from early adolescence into adulthood. Examples of suggested topics to be emphasised included: ritual baths - how and when a Muslim is required to take a ritual bath; meticulous attention to personal hygiene in relation to their religious obligations; dietary requirements to be observed; how diet affects a child’s behaviour and ability in memorising the Qur’an and worshipping the Creator and so on.

*Decorum.* A number of participants highlighted the need to teach adolescent students the etiquettes of interaction between the opposite genders. In many of the schools, much effort is spent on enforcing rules of segregation. Total segregation in co-ed schools is difficult to achieve unless students are accommodated on separate campuses. A year 11 male student, Mahmud, commented on the school’s approach to segregation. He said, “The school doesn’t really teach us how to interact with girls in terms of limits and what’s acceptable manner.” Rulings and boundaries for interactions between the opposite genders from Islamic teachings and the rationale behind them will be covered in this program. Examples of how Muslim youth in other Western/non-Muslim majority societies deal with this issue will equip students to separate cultural practices from Islamic rulings.

On the topic of sex education, a year 9 male student, Talha, said, “People in my class, whenever it comes to topics like that, during PDHPE, sex education, everyone just making jokes… the teacher’s just blowing his whistle … to calm the class down.”

Iman, a school counsellor, and Mona, a teacher in high school, had concerns over the maturity of students they had worked with. Speaking from experience, both expressed the need for some of these students to know how to behave in public. Zuriyati believed that the home environment had as much to do with students’ decorum in public as the school.

Input from participants indicates the desire to have these topics covered holistically through a more comprehensive wellbeing program that integrates various
aspects of adolescent developmental changes, religious duties and self-awareness to promote mental and physical health. A dedicated team with key people such as the head of Islamic Studies department, the school psychologist and head of relevant learning areas can collaboratively achieve this task in planning a well-defined program using shared class times.

**Programs for Senior High School Students**

Suggestions for schools to prepare students throughout their senior high school years to make the transition into life after year 12 included: school-organised work experience, extra-curricular programs that develop students’ interests and skills other than academic work; training for skills to interact with non-Muslims in the Australian context; making choices wisely; and confidence building to interact with the opposite gender.

The design for such a culturally appropriate transition program to meet the needs of Muslim students in high school is a program that aims at equipping students to live the Islamic way of life in the Australian society without compromising their identity as Muslims, namely Islam in Context. Drawing from the emergent categories, Islam in Context program should have five key components: cultures in context, integration know-how; civil rights and responsibilities; health and safety; and, role models and leadership, to be discussed as follows.

**Cultures in context.** This includes understanding Australian culture and social etiquettes, and understanding the extent of tolerance for diversity within Islam from historical and contemporary evidences within Muslim communities around the world.

**Integration know-how.** This refers to preparing students to live, function and interact with the non-Muslims in mainstream education institutions (universities and TAFE) and the workplace.

Students in this component will be introduced to recognising and gaining awareness of the diversity of viewpoints students are likely to be confronted with in the society, and exploring ways to respond with wisdom and confidence. Effective communication and conflict resolution skills will be embedded in this component. They will also be introduced to practical ways to observe their daily religious duties at work or tertiary education institutions. Some areas to be covered within this component are elaborated below under three points:

**Preparation for employment.** Work Studies was being offered in some Muslim schools for students who selected this subject. It was implied that preparation for work was something that would benefit all students. As part of the transitioning program, a
section on workplace preparation means that students will be: prepared for job seeking skills such as learning to write a resume and application letter for jobs; preparing for interviews; be aware of general work ethics; and, where possible, be assisted to go for school-organised work experience.

**Preparation for tertiary studies.** Students will be introduced to a variety of university courses and the subjects they should select as prerequisites for certain courses and the different pathways to get into a course of their interest.

**Civil rights and responsibilities.** This component will supplement their knowledge gained from the learning area of Society and Environment to understanding Australian political and legal systems, their legal obligations and rights, consequences and rewards of personal choices, from both civil and religious perspectives. This is where some of the controversial issues from different scholars and the media can be looked at from comparative and explorative lenses. Through this component students will gain better understanding and have some confusing opinions clarified so they know areas in which they can actively participate in debates and discussions and what their limits are when engaging with the society they live in. Cultivating a sense of belonging, meeting other minority groups, meeting and working on projects with students from other public and non-government schools are some of the practical, real life situations in which students can learn about people other than Muslims.

**Health and safety.** Programs which aim at bringing awareness of personal safety in various social settings and developing effective skills in social interactions have been proposed by some participants. Most of the suggested topics are readily available in the mainstream. Programs such as education on resiliency, conflict resolution, anger management (of self and other), drug and alcohol awareness, safety issues on using public transport at night, basic self-defense training and so on can go a long way as preventive measures for students’ wellbeing.

**Leadership program and peer support.** Positive young role models and mentors within the Muslim community and the mainstream can be an asset to the Islam in Context program. Those who can commit time on a regular basis, such as the graduate students from School H and Q, can play a role in keeping regular contact with students for on-going projects/programs and during school camps. Others can be invited as motivational speakers, such as those who live with disability, those who made a U-turn in life, those who have come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and so on. Senior students who have the interest to gain hands-on experience can undergo training...
provided by the school or participate in school or local community initiatives to become senior buddies to support the junior students in their school.

**Summary**

Presented in this chapter are features derived from what participants have identified to include in the design of an ideal counselling and wellbeing support service under four focus areas: (1) Implementing Islamic Ethos of Care, (2) Ideal Counselling and Wellbeing Support Service, (3) Qualities and Skills of an Ideal Counsellor, and (4) Appropriate Transition Programs.

Summarising from participants’ views, if Muslim schools intend to impart Islamic values to their students, fundamental shifts in the vision and commitment to student wellbeing are necessary in the design. A dedicated action group of key stakeholders in the area of counselling and wellbeing support should spearhead a well-planned strategy to effect change at every level of the school community.

General adolescent developmental issues and specific issues migrant Muslim youth face academically, spiritually, socially and emotionally, have been discussed in the design for a culturally appropriate student-centred, holistic and whole school approach. Proposed general aspects of a student-centred academic support design include features such as remedial classes, special education support, and career guidance. Suggested English language support and facilities to support students’ learning gaps were more specific areas that Muslim schools should consider providing. To support students holistically, there needed to be an attitude change to give importance to all aspects of student wellbeing and a commitment to make changes to improve the existing counselling and wellbeing support at Muslim schools in general. Specifically, participants’ concerns pointed to the direction of re-establishing the place of Islamic studies in Muslim schools, and setting standards and strategies for improved teaching quality. To provide a whole school support for students, education and advocacy as well as the sheikh factor were essential general features in the design. Professional development for teachers to become better informed about student wellbeing and how best to support them was a specific feature to address the needs of the students as they arise.

The design for culturally appropriate roles, qualities and skills in a counsellor included a job description, selection criteria and a supplementary guideline for additional reference to help schools recruit the most appropriate personnel to lead the counselling and wellbeing support role. This role called for professionals who not only played the primary role of supporting students for individual counselling as well as
group counselling, but who also had responsibilities in educating the school community. Lists of essential and preferred skills and qualities were provided in general for schools to consider. A specific cultural preference in terms of gender and age of a counsellor extracted from participants’ input has been presented in a supplementary guideline for selection under this heading.

To help students with transitioning issues, the design has been organised in two parts: one for junior high school students and the other for senior high school students. Programs for junior high school students include an adequate orientation program for the new students in their first year of high school and a regular wellbeing development program as part of a holistic, integrated and customised curriculum presented under holistic wellbeing support. Specific topics to be addressed in this program include religious requirements for adolescents, their obligatory duties and the significance related to these duties. As for students in their senior years, work experience and extra curriculum activities are design features that can offer them a balanced schooling experience. The design calls for an Islam in Context program, which covers cultures in context, integration issues and skills development, civil rights and responsibilities, health and safety, and role models and leadership development. Since few studies on the subject of counselling and wellbeing of students in Muslim schools in a Western context are available at the time this study took place, follow up studies to test the applicability of propositions made in this chapter are recommended.

This concludes the current chapter on the design for a culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support service for students in secondary Muslim schools analysed from participants’ experiences and suggestions. An overall analysis of key issues will be strategically examined and discussed in the following chapter, Destiny, to be concluded by presenting the theoretical propositions developed from the emergent themes in this study.
CHAPTER 8 – DESTINY: THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.

Qur’an, 13:11

Drawing on emergent themes identified in the previous analytic chapters, the researcher focuses on the meanings ascribed by participants using a constructivist approach (Cresswell, 2008) bringing questions to the data about what participants are really ascribing to; and, at times using the “flip-flop technique” (Corbin & Strauss as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 491), to look at opposites to bring out significant properties. This chapter develops seven theoretical propositions about what ‘is’ (discovery) and what ‘can be’ (dream, design and destiny) in terms of counselling and wellbeing support services for Muslim schools in Australia. Each proposition is supported by a number of sub-propositions.

Proposition One is that some Muslim schools have been products of Muslims’ concerns over their future generations’ faith and economic mobility, and, that their operations reflect a certain mindset for success, which at times, have inadvertently compromised students’ holistic wellbeing. This proposition has two sub-propositions; the first concerns the circumstances that motivated Muslim schools into existence and how these motivators influence the management of these schools; the second concerns the school communities’ perspectives for success, and how these impact on student wellbeing.

Proposition Two is that school imams and counsellors are key stakeholders to raise their school community’s awareness and to facilitate acceptance of professional and culturally appropriate counselling support for Muslim students, whereas school leaders have a responsibility over the holistic wellbeing of students including those with specific and special needs. The two sub-propositions identify service providers who play a key role in students’ support systems through school, and the schools’ duty of care with respect to student wellbeing in general, as well as for students with special needs in physical or developmental disabilities, and specific needs associated with students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Proposition Three is that a reformation of student wellbeing services necessitates that schools align the categories of student wellbeing – assets, appraisals and actions – with a student-centred education focus. This proposition has two sub-propositions. The first concerns with the Muslim schools’ role in promoting student wellbeing within all levels of the school communities. The second sub-proposition deals with the schools’
role in aligning the schools’ mission with Islamic ethos of care to facilitate students’ holistic wellbeing.

Proposition Four is that Muslim schools considering adopting positive education are urged to understand the major philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam in how wellbeing is viewed. Two sub-propositions deal with the two key philosophical differences: the goal and the route to wellbeing.

Proposition Five is that a holistic approach to facilitate Muslim students’ wellbeing involves a three-directional connection from an Islamic perspective: vertically, inwardly and outwardly. This proposition has three sub-propositions. Each sub-proposition deals with a connection in each direction respectively.

Proposition Six is that pedagogical implications for educators of Muslim students facilitating sustained wellbeing from an Islamic perspective should include: an outline appropriate for students’ developmental stages; specific pedagogical responsibilities; and, key operational practices. Three sub-propositions deal with an outline in reference to the three-directional connections; specific pedagogical responsibilities in modelling, facilitating and fostering; and four key operational practices to be imparted to students.

Proposition Seven is that the prospect to improve student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is positive and timely in light of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry. This proposition has two sub-propositions. The first sub-proposition concerns the positive prospects for change; and the second sub-proposition deals with the timeliness for change.

**Proposition One**

**Proposition One is that some Muslim schools have been products of Muslims’ concerns over their future generations’ faith and economic mobility, and, that their operations reflect a certain mindset for success, which at times, have inadvertently compromised students’ holistic wellbeing.**

**Sub-proposition 1**

Some Muslim schools in this study have been established out of community members’ concerns over their future generations’ faith and economic mobility.

This sub-proposition reviews the energy and main aspirations that prompted Australian Muslim schools into existence. From the need to preserve their faith to the need to survive, these schools continue to operate reactively, instead of proactively.
Concern over Muslim children’s faith and values. McCreery, Jones and Holmes (2007) explain that some of the reasons Muslim parents and practitioners in the United Kingdom in their study favour Muslim schools include concerns over their children’s identity and belonging, discrimination, values and attitudes and Islamic education. Similarly, other faith-communities’ reasons for establishing their own faith schools include “the desire to educate children about their religious and cultural traditions, to protect them from outside influences and to ensure the continued adherence to the faith” (McCreery et al., 2007, p. 204). Hurst (2000) voiced a perception that, “Most immigrants have experienced western society as irreligious and immoral” (as cited in McCreery et al., 2007, p. 204).

Some participants in a previous study conducted by the researcher of the current study expressed concerns over “losing” their children and future generations to an open, predominantly Christian, but increasingly secular, society (Mah, 2009, pp. 131, 148). Parents’ choices of schooling were found to base on having a supportive environment for developing Muslim identities and quality of education (Mah, 2009). These findings correlated to a number of factors found to influence Muslim parents’ choice for their children’s schooling in Australia (Donohue Clyne, 2001; Eid, 2008; Jones, 2012).

Unlike Muslim minorities in some Western nations, for example, the United Kingdom, where Muslim children could be educated about their faith in after school or weekend maktab (McCreery et al., 2007, p. 204) in addition to their day time schooling, Australian Muslim communities up until the early 1980s lacked such establishments to offer to their children. Concerned members of the Muslim community then decided to establish a formal hybrid schooling option aimed at offering both secular and Islamic curriculums to their school-aged Muslim children. Despite limited knowledge, expertise, experience and resources required in establishing a formal educational institution in Australia, pioneers of the first Muslim schools forged ahead with financial assistance from Australian government for independent faith-based schools. Some Muslim schools also sourced financial support overseas.

Undeterred by lacking established models to which they could refer, community members’ concerns turned into determination that propelled a handful of Muslim schools into existence, which became forerunners to a rapid increase in number of Muslim schools in the decades to follow across most major cities in Australia. Credit is due to the committed staff and loyal parents of this concept who made much sacrifice
financially, personally and in kind (Mah, 2009) to make the dream of this schooling option become a reality.

Eid (2008) describes that, “All Islamic schools confirm in their web sites that… they are founded to provide Muslim children access to high quality education within an Islamic environment” (pp. 80-81). However, a school founded on mere “worthy motives, but without consideration for their education viability” (Donohune Clyne, as cited in Jones, 2012, p. 39) can rarely be spared from its consequences. The more publicly known among these consequences, is that five Muslim schools have been investigated for allegations of funding fraud within a span of two years (Shanahan, cited in Smith, 2013). Lacking finance and know-how with Australian education, (Donohue Clyne, 2001), high turnover of school principals, sometimes as a result tension between principal and the School Board, and “grossly inadequate teaching resources” (Jones, 2012, p. 39), are some examples of the problems faced by Australian Muslim schools.

**Economic mobility.** The concern over Muslim children’s faith and schooling in an Islamic environment was coupled with first generation migrant Muslims’ anxiety about their children’s economic mobility in Australia. In Western literature on immigrant settlement, an upward economic mobility in the host country is amongst the common indicators of acculturation success (Khoo & Birrell, 2002; Weston, 1997). Demand for skilled and unskilled labour attracted greater numbers of Muslim migrants to Australia in the second half of the 20th Century than ever before. Many migrants left their countries of origin for prospects of employment and improved economic stability and better education opportunities for their children. For example, migrant Muslims in Mah’s (2009) study on parenting presented a common aspiration for their children’s education success. For some, the goal of attaining tertiary education success is a high priority along with preserving their children’s religious values and identity.

Since before the turn of the Millennium, political unrest, massacres and natural disasters in many parts of the world had driven masses of migrants, many of whom were Muslims, to Western nations including Australia, on humanitarian grounds. Qadhi (2007) pointed out in his address at the 2007 Islamic Council of North America (ICNA) convention that the Muslim community in the West was in shock because never before in the entire Muslim history had they experienced such global exodus to the Western, predominantly non-Muslim nations.

In Australia, the demand for Muslim schools continues to increase both from children of second and third generation migrant parents, and newly arrived migrant Muslim families. Existing Muslim schools stretch their limits to accommodate this
demand the best they can. A succession of new schools have also opened, and expanded at a phenomenal rate. Under these circumstances, bound by a moral obligation, Muslim schools have been inundated by the demand to accommodate cohorts of students with a host of complex needs that they are not adequately equipped to handle. Given these contextual issues, this sub-proposition suggests that some of the Muslim schools have been subsisting, and, will continue, as products of communities’ reactive improvisation, unless the energy and approach are realigned with the values and true spirit of Islam.

**Sub-proposition 2**

Australian Muslim schools have been perceived by some participants in this study as operating from a mindset of education pathways, which at times may have compromised students’ holistic wellbeing.

**Mindset for education pathway.** Educational success through a tertiary pathway, measured by a handful of the Australian community’s highly regarded professions, has resulted in some schools losing sight of students’ holistic wellbeing.

**Paradox.** A small number of participants make a distinction between Muslim schools and Islamic schools, and consider their associated schools more correctly be named as Muslim schools. They explain that Muslim schools are schools for Muslims; whereas schools that claim to be Islamic should make Islam central to all aspects of their education and administration. Parents in this study explain that despite their dismay with certain aspects of their schools not reflecting the ethos of Islam, such as the “halal-ness” of the food sold in the canteen, authoritarian approach of teaching staff, inadequate behaviour management and so on, they still keep their children in their associated schools because these schools provide a safe space or an environment of relative sameness for their children to practice religion.

The paradox lies in schools that give stronger focus, dedicate greater time and resource allocation to secular subjects tend to attract more criticism but simultaneously are better supported by community members. Toddlers having to undergo an interview selection process reflect the competitiveness of such Muslim schools. Pressure on students to go through university pathways as a gauge for success outweighs attention given to students’ character building and spiritual connection. However, despite the pressure, registration in many Muslim schools, even from pre-primary level, is often full several years in advance.

It has become apparent in this study that a preoccupation to compete for socially acclaimed and high-earning power careers through education may have sidelined
schools’ concern towards nurturing students’ overall growth, such as developing their interests, building their moral character and supporting students to reach their potential to better serve humanity. The common gauge for education success is performance driven. Student wellbeing and happiness in many of the participant-associated Muslim schools are thus overshadowed by concerns for attaining tertiary entry competitiveness. Parents as consumers buy in to student performance that Muslim schools are promoting from year to year. Competition to enrol students in some of these schools indicates parents’ on-going demand for these schools, due to concern for their children’s religious orientation but more likely, for gaining entry into certain professional lines.

**Attitude towards Islamic subjects.** Currently the religious curriculum is solely devised and self-regulated by each school; no moderation with other schools or assessment standard is used to account for the efficacy of this learning area. On the whole, Muslim schools focus most of their time and energy on meeting the standardised, measurable and consistent requirements for Government funding registration, sometimes seen as not giving the same value to subject areas that do not involve external appraisals such as Islamic studies and Arabic language in primary and lower secondary levels. Unfortunately, this attitude towards these learning areas is filtered down to the students.

**Student wellbeing.** A number of service providers in the present study mentioned obstacles they needed to overcome when they attempted to offer senior students age-appropriate, thought provoking and practical sessions to better prepare them for life after high school. Most counsellors and welfare coordinators in this study were limited to only running programs for students in primary and lower secondary students.

This section discusses the issues participants perceived as having affected student wellbeing of Muslim students. These are: career bias, imbalance and streaming.

**Career bias.** Disdain among the Muslim school communities towards certain career choices, particularly careers in humanities, language and arts, has been perceived as having impacted negatively on student wellbeing. In some schools, Art as a learning area is among the last subjects to be offered to students. Muslim youth in other Western countries have been found to benefit from opportunities and venues to express their talents channelled through creative arts (Ahmed, 2012).

**Imbalance.** Sport and physical education are reduced to a minimum, or completely eliminated in the senior years in some Muslim schools in this study. An Australian study by Hagarty and Currie (2012) of the effects of physical activities on
stress levels of senior school students finds that all students reported at least one perceived benefit; such as reduced individual subjective stress, increased social interaction, improved self-esteem or improved mood states of participation in the exercise program. However, the study reveals similar resistance from some teachers to students engaging in activities not directly related to their studies, especially in their final school year.

Reduction in Islamic studies time and opportunities to develop students’ emotional, social skills or career preparation in the senior years are other examples of this perceived imbalance. The mindset on academic excellence as the measure for successful education is not limited to Muslim schools. It has, in some cases, inadvertently created an imbalance to students’ wellbeing according to a New Zealand study by Soutter, O’Steen and Gilmore (2012) on perspectives of students and teachers on wellbeing in a senior secondary school environment, particularly for students more at risk of social, emotional, learning and mental health issues.

**Streaming.** Most students in the present study believe that streaming according to academic performance is detrimental to student wellbeing. Participants who disagreed with streaming were concerned that non-academically inclined students might feel undervalued. Even some high achievers spoke against streaming as it deprived them of the opportunity to get to know their peers in other classes of the same year level throughout their school life. Some students mentioned impositions on subject selection, and many schools emphasised only one pathway for students to follow.

This hyper-focus on academic pathways for certain career choices common in some Muslim school communities means that wellbeing enhancement programs, such as social and emotional development, extra-curricular activities, drama, art, and even work experience are often seen as “time-wasters” (Achor, 2010). Soutter, O’Steen and Gilmore (2012) suggest that schools consider a “‘bottom-up’ rather than a ‘top-down’ approach to students’ educational experiences” (p. 60) in realising a multi-dimensional approach to student wellbeing, to avoid imposing restrictions on students’ potential along their individual learning journeys.

**Proposition Two**

School imams and counsellors are key stakeholders to raise their school community’s awareness and to facilitate acceptance of professional and culturally appropriate counselling support for Muslim students, whereas school leaders have a responsibility over the holistic wellbeing of students including those with specific and special needs.
Sub-proposition 1

School imams and counsellors/psychologists are key stakeholders to alleviate resistance to, and raising the school community’s awareness and acceptance of, counselling.

Overcoming resistance. There existed a number of barriers within the Muslim school communities towards counselling. Participants perceived that some service providers and parents tend to regard counselling with a degree of distrust as a Western and relatively foreign concept. For some, it is not culturally acceptable to speak to people outside the family about personal or family matters. Stigma associated with mental illness still exists among many cultures. Muslims come from many such cultures. Seeking help from psychologists or mental health professionals is something many try to avoid. Another cultural perception of mental illness is associated with weakness in faith. Those who need help in this area avoid seeking treatment for fear of being judged as “crazy” by the community. Many participants in this study figuratively described an attitude of “sweeping things under the carpet” within their community schools. This may have some association with cultural attitudes and lack of knowledge to deal effectively with psychological and mental health issues outside their collectivist society structure.

Some of the barriers to counselling services discussed by Nasser-McMillan and Hakim-Larson (2003) within a number of Arabic cultural groups in the United States included the individual’s level of education, their level of exposure to Western systems, and cultural views towards handling problems. The diversity of cultures within any given Muslim school in Australia makes overcoming some of these barriers more challenging. Due to the relatively close associations of community members in locations that Muslim schools serve, fear of breaching confidentiality poses significant resistance for students to seek counsel at school.

Key stakeholders.

Dedicated school counsellors/psychologists. Individual counselling sessions aside, counsellors have found that organising age appropriate preventive topics for groups of students on personal, social and emotional development such as study skills, time management, self-esteem, friendship, bullying, cyber bullying, conflict resolution, resiliency and so on are useful for most adolescent students going through transition. Although it takes much more coordination and preparation to conduct group sessions, they nevertheless are worthwhile in two ways: firstly, issues common among adolescence can be addressed in larger groups to benefit even those who are reluctant to
seek help; and secondly, preventative group counselling eases the pressure on one-on-one sessions as counsellors can provide only a limited number of such sessions in any given school day.

Distrust towards authoritative figures is apparent from students in this study. A number of counsellors mentioned having to explain the binding confidentiality of their role, and taking various proactive measures to break the barriers in order to gain trust from students and teaching staff when they first started working at Muslim schools. Word of mouth among students has been helpful in encouraging students to speak to their school counsellors when there is a need. Most counsellors try to make themselves visible during recess and lunch, as well as taking steps to keep students’ identity from teaching staff and other students to help them comply with individual follow up sessions.

Apart from concerns with breaching confidentiality, counsellors’ understanding of Islamic values, professionalism, and ability to connect with Australian born Muslim youth are among the most important qualities students look for when accessing counselling service at school. However, a paradox exists in students’ preference for school counsellors. While most students prefer the counsellors to be Muslim, by the same token, one who is seen as “too religious” in their demeanor or the way they dress can become a deterrent for students to access the service, for fear of being judged, or “told off”. The gender of the counsellor is another important factor that is taken into consideration by Muslim students and their parents when accessing the service. Most participants prefer seeing a counsellor of the same gender as themselves. This preference is stronger among girls than boys. The fact that some schools can only provide one counsellor means that students either go along with what is available, or seek help elsewhere. In a small number of schools where no male counsellors are available, the school imam or the male welfare coordinator steps in as a substitute to provide pastoral care.

**The sheikh factor.** The school imams can play an important role in explaining and reassuring the parents and students who need counselling support. Ansary and Salloum (2012) identify education as “one of the most foundational steps in any prevention and intervention strategy and mental health” and imams “can be one of the key elements of a community outreach effort and are best positioned for education on mental health issues” (pp. 166-167). Most counsellors and students, male and female, have spoken highly of their school imams’ support as counsellors, especially in terms of their spiritual guidance and advocating for community acceptance of counselling. As
demonstrated in a number of discussions during the interviews in this study, some parents were persuaded to allow their children to access counselling services with the school imam’s reassurance; more so if the imams worked in collaboration with school counsellors/psychologists in community outreach programs such as parenting workshops.

A lack of cooperation from some Muslim teaching staff due to lack of understanding or a culture-influenced resistance to counselling reflects a significant need for multi-pronged school community education in this area. Ansary and Salloum (2012) underscore Islamic schools as having an essential role to play in prevention and intervention of mental health issues within the Muslim communities as a whole, specifically because the information will be delivered to a younger audience.

Cooperation between school imams and counsellors is seen as a viable way to fast-track school communities’ acceptance of counselling services to support student wellbeing. Dedicated counsellors/psychologists and imams who understand their influence in the area of student wellbeing have made some inroads into building trust and acceptance of the school community towards professional counselling. Participants in this study have remarked that, although progress has been made in this regard, there is still a long way to go.

**Sub-proposition 2.**

Muslim schools have a duty of care towards student wellbeing, encompassing not only academic support and general issues associated with adolescence, but also special needs due to disabilities and specific needs pertaining to migrant and refugee students.

**Support for adolescent students.** The ability to adapt well to the demands of school life has long been known to link positively with early adolescents’ overall emotional wellbeing, whereas psychological distress is suggested to affect young people’s future academic functioning (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998; Rothon et al., 2009). Muslim adolescents in the West not only have developmental factors such as biological changes, identity development, spiritual development and risk-taking behaviours to come to terms with; some of them also have to contend with major disruptions to their microsystems\(^5\) and mesosystems\(^6\) (Ahmed, 2012). In recent

---

\(^5\)Microsystem: As an individual develops, they interact with their immediate environment, referred to as their microsystem. The microsystem includes settings such as family, peers, school, and communities (Ahmed, 2012, p. 260).

\(^6\)Mesosystem: The mesosystem is the system of systems, or the interconnections and interactions between the microsystems of individuals. It includes settings such as the community, cultural context, and social networks (Ahmed, 2012, p. 260).
decades, Muslim adolescents and emerging adults experience with changes in the 
exosystem⁷ such as racism and discrimination; and in the macrosystem such as the 
added stressors of Islamophobia and surveillance for terrorism with which Muslims in 
the West as a whole struggle, are factors that affect their transition (Ahmed, 2012).

An extensive literature review conducted by Urbis (2011) for the New South 
Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) examining effective 
models in educational settings on the psychological and emotional wellbeing needs of 
children and young people reports that students’ academic achievements have been 
enhanced effectively by social and emotional learning programs. Although the 
definition, conceptualisation, measurement and improvement of student wellbeing as a 
non-academic schooling outcome is still being debated and evolving, outcomes 
implicitly and explicitly related to student wellbeing in the Australian education 
curriculum commenced in 2012 (Lyons & Cassebohm, 2012). When data collection for 
this study took place in 2012, a number of Muslim schools, based on the individual 
schools’ awareness and financial means, were, to some extent, implementing strategies 
to support student wellbeing. For example, some schools appoint selected teaching staff 
to take on the role as welfare coordinators; one participant was employed as a welfare 
coordinator without teaching duties. A number of schools in the eastern states, 
particularly K-12 schools with student enrolments exceeding 1000, employ school 
counsellors or psychologists, either full-time or part-time. Four schools employed both 
male and female counsellors to meet both the demand for counselling and cultural 
appropriateness. However, as was discussed in Proposition One, a number of 
participants viewed their associated schools as having concentrated their resources and 
efforts mainly on students’ academic achievement, rather than enhancing student 
wellbeing for improved academic performance.

Participants from two associated schools with enrolments exceeding 2000 have 
mentioned organisation of sporting teams and facilitation for primary and junior high 
school boys in their schools to participate in events and games with other schools. In 
this study two non-faith independent schools catering for majority Muslim students 
provided after school tuition and dinner sessions, one day for each year level during the

⁶Mesosystem: Mesosytems consist of the interrelationships between the major settings of the developing 
adolescent or emerging adult. These include relationships between the individual’s family, school, peer 
groups, and sometimes ethnic or religious community (Ahmed, 2012, p. 269).
⁷Exosystem: The exosystem refers to social structures that do not necessarily contain the developing 
adolescent or emerging adult, but have an indirect impact on the individual or his or her immediate 
setting. Examples of exosystems that may impact the development of Muslim youth include creative arts, 
the Internet, the mass media, racism and discrimination (Ahmed, 2012, p. 272).
week. These two schools and one other Muslim school also provided organised recess and lunch welfare classes or activities to reduce isolation and promote socialisation among students in mixed age groups. Although not a prevalent practice, some Muslim schools provide various programs to facilitate student transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Considering the complexities with which Muslim adolescents and emerging adults have to contend, more concerted effort is definitely beneficial to enhance existing structures to support students in Muslim schools. Participants speculate that there is still a long way to go to provide more adequate support for students on the whole. To demonstrate their point, some counsellors in this study observed that occasionally other service providers in their schools expected them to discipline students with a “soft touch”. Some teachers expect the counsellor to “fix” students’ behaviour problems after a session or two, and become reluctant to release students for further follow up sessions from their class. One counsellor mentioned that during his term of employment over two years at one school, no Muslim teachers had made any referrals to him. This reflects a need to educate the entire school community at different levels to gain appropriate and better understanding about counselling as a support service, students’ psycho-social and mental health status, and how these factors can impact on young people’s growth and learning.

**Support for students’ special and specific needs.** Support for students with special needs is minimal in Muslim schools. Muslim schools on the whole are not adequately staffed or equipped to support students with physical disabilities, learning disabilities or sensory impairments, let alone students classified as having profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. Less than a handful of schools in this study provide wheelchair access to buildings and washing facilities. Not long before the interview, a parent in this study was advised by his six-year old daughter’s teacher to send his daughter who had a rare disability to a special school. In a different school, two students in their teens with sensory impairment were enrolled without the necessary support for their learning. Similarly, no participants mentioned special programs for gifted and talented students to extend those students showing high aptitudes in various learning areas, except streaming them into high achievers’ classes, or suggesting primary school students to skip a year.

Due to students’ migrant and refugee backgrounds in Muslim schools, specialised support is necessary for students who experience difficulties associated with learning particularly with English language, it being a gateway to all other learning
areas within the Australian education system. Muslim schools enrolling new arrivals, or students whose parents are unable to support them due to limited literacy in their own language or themselves lacking English proficiency, have a greater responsibility in providing these students with adequate facilities for their language learning.

Language aside, struggles with multiple issues such as following a school routine, organisation, and coping with schoolwork have been experienced by some students from refugee backgrounds who experienced interrupted formal learning due to instabilities in, or displacements from, their home countries.

Children who suffer from loss and trauma from war-torn countries also require specialised support to restore their sense of wellbeing, without which, learning can be difficult. Ahmed (2012) remarks about additional stressors on adolescents and emerging adults from this subgroup of migrants among Muslim communities in the West:

Families may have experienced multiple losses and chaotic circumstances during the migratory process. For some youth, these losses may decrease their ability to structure and integrate their experiences, which may manifest itself in the form of trauma symptoms… refugee youth may report lack of trust, social isolation, difficulties maintaining peer relationships, developmental delays, academic difficulties, and symptoms of depression, anxiety and distress…

Ahmed (2012) signals the added pressure on refugee Muslim youth by parents who hold high hopes for their children to achieve academically. Some students react to their emotions through acting out, while others internalise their emotions, leading to more serious psychological and mental health issues. Schools that enrol students with such backgrounds need to be prepared to source out services actively to support students with specific needs such as those presenting symptoms of posttraumatic syndrome disorder and other psycho-social or mental health issues.

**Proposition Three**

A reformation of student wellbeing services necessitates that schools align the categories of student wellbeing – assets, appraisals and actions – with a student-centred education focus.

**Sub-proposition 1**

Muslim schools play a key role in taking the lead in educating all levels of the school community to better support student wellbeing.

Community support is indispensible in the continuation of its Muslim schools. A review and reformation of student wellbeing cannot be complete without engaging
the school community at every level. Muslim schools, like other faith-based community schools, exist and operate on the premise of two common goals shared by members of the community for their future generations: to live by Islamic values for success in the hereafter; and to obtain knowledge and skills for a decent worldly life. The present study finds that the positivity in positive education and values-based education are largely compatible with the Islamic teachings, and therefore likely to be accepted by most members of the Muslim school communities.

**Positive school environment.** Geelong Grammar School (GGS), in pioneering positive education, is a prime example in adopting a multi-pronged approach to educate an entire school community, in support of their staff and students’ wellbeing, through Positive Education. In a school publication in 2011, the Director of Student Welfare at GGS, Hendry (2012) writes,

> The correct environment prompts all the neurological and physiological circumstances required and the contagion associated with living together means that all will do better. (p. 4)

A collective effort in creating an environment conducive to learning from a wellbeing perspective is therefore a worthy consideration by the Muslim school communities. It has been found in this study that in order to maintain harmony within the school, given the Muslim communities’ diversities in cultures and interpretations of religious rulings, school imams in the present study have taken the lead to focus on the principal tenets of Islam. Two school imams, for example, are open to explaining the variations on jurisprudential issues from different schools of thought recognised by mainstream Islamic jurists, and remain respectful towards students’ and their families’ choices in the school of jurisprudence they wish to follow.

**Parenting.** Recognising the impact of environmental factors on student wellbeing, a number of counsellors and school imams in this study have also extended their service to include educating parents to enhance students’ support from home. School counsellors are communicating with parents via school bulletin boards, newsletters, school assemblies and community events. One of the school counsellors in this study regularly sources free information from the Department of Education, local council and community organisations to provide to parents.

**Community education.** In some schools, the counsellors have collaborated with the school’s Parents and Friends (P&F) committee to provide information sessions for parents on a range of topics pertaining to child development, health and wellbeing. Parenting workshops are another initiative by counsellors in three of the participant
associated schools in this study. Two participants mentioned the need to find creative ways to invite more parents to benefit from these programs. Translation of information or presentations into different languages to cater for non-English speaking parents has been considered by one of the schools that rated on the higher end of the scale developed in this study that compared adequacy of wellbeing support service of participant associated schools.

By making a Muslim school “the hub of the community” (Zanettino, 2007, p. 11), access to information, community services and resources for parents and children are centralised. The benefits of the “hub” are manifold: through intersection between home and school, students’ needs can be more effectively addressed both within and outside the school; it reduces isolation for some families; better communication can be established to support students more holistically; and it empowers parents through parenting skills, support and knowledge. Community education on mental health and socio-emotional wellbeing benefits not only students, but also parents. Knowledge about the interrelatedness of the wellbeing domains helps parents to gain better understanding of their own emotions, recognise and seek ways to resolve personal issues and take measures to improve self-care, in order to provide more empathic support for their children.

**Sub-proposition 2**

Muslim schools are urged to view education objectives from a wellbeing perspective which means that some schools may need to examine and re-align their school missions with Islamic education objectives through a holistic student-centred education lens.

This sub-proposition discusses the status of young people’s wellbeing, how wellbeing relates to performance, an examination of student wellbeing in Muslim schools using Soutter, Gilmore and Steen’s (2012) student wellbeing conceptual model (SWBM), and a proposed focus to realign Islamic education objectives with Muslim school education.

**Status of young people’s wellbeing.** Seligman (2011), in his survey asking thousands of parents about what they desire most for their children and what the schools are teaching, finds a distinctive gap in the list of responses parents give to the two questions. He observes almost no overlap between the two lists. Instead, Seligman (2008) points to the paradox that within the prosperity of first world countries there is a rapid decline of wellbeing particularly among young people. Seligman (2011) remarks further, “Depression now ravages teenagers: fifty years ago the average age of first
onset was about thirty. Now the first onset is below age fifteen” (p. 79). Suicide, particularly among young men in Australia, is common (Seligman, 2008, p. 20).

In a report on assessing over 10,000 Australian students’ social and emotional wellbeing, Bernard, Stephanou and Urbach (2007) write,

Four in 10 students worry too much, 3 in 10 students are very nervous/stressed, 2 in 10 students have felt very hopeless and depressed for a week and have stopped regular activities, a third of students lose their temper a lot and are sometimes quite mean to others, two-thirds of students are not doing as well in their schoolwork as they could, and 4 in 10 students have difficulty calming down. (as cited in McCallum & Price, 2010, p. 22).

This disturbing “epidemic” of hopelessness and depression among young people (Seligman, 2008, p. 20) is not limited to youth in the mainstream, and is cause for concern to every parent, guardian, carer and educator. Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence are among some of the common issues counsellors and welfare coordinators in this study have encountered with their students. As much as some members of the Muslim community would like to believe otherwise, thoughts of leaving home, self-harming behavior and suicide ideation, albeit not prevalent, are a reality among young Muslims.

**Student wellbeing and performance.** From the perspective of educators, student wellbeing has had a close link with “academic achievements”, “educational success”, or “student engagement” (Soutter, O’Steen & Gilmore, 2012, p. 35). Scholars of Positive Psychology are advocating for positive emotion, positive character and positive institution (Seligman, 2008) to enhance performance, health and wellbeing. The Director of Student Welfare at Geelong Grammar School, Hendry (2011) holds, School-related demands are potent sources of stress in normal child and adolescent populations…. Examples: pressures to perform well, ranking students academically, school circumstance, school relationships and performance rivalry all lead to student strain…. Stressors diminish application and positive engagement and directly impact on academic performance, health and wellbeing.

Hendry (2011), like other key stakeholders of student wellbeing at GGS, is committed to the whole-school positive education, particularly of staff, in self-evaluation and training to enable and enhance flourishing for all. From the perspectives of participants in the current study, a number of key issues have been raised and found to impact unfavorably on student wellbeing in Muslim schools. Some of the examples
include: the focus on competing for academic success through a school-directed pathway, and teaching Islamic text in the absence of context, among others.

**Student Wellbeing Model (SWBM).** For discussion purposes in the current proposition, the Student Wellbeing Model (SWBM) by Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen (2010, cited in Soutter, O’Steen & Gilmore, 2012) is referenced for the structure it offers to the multi-dimensions of wellbeing in the context of a school setting. Drawing from extensive literature on wellbeing, Soutter and colleagues conceptualise aspects of student wellbeing into three categories: *assets, appraisals* and *actions*. Within each category are domains of wellbeing: *assets* - having, being and relating well; *appraisals* – feeling and thinking well; and *actions* – functioning and striving well.

Soutter et al. (2012) explain that all domains are interdependent and mutually enhancing. If the school’s emphasis is mainly on academic achievement, this can lead to an imbalance impacting other areas of student wellbeing. Students falling short of attaining good grades are likely to have other domains of their wellbeing affected.

Soutter et al.’s (2012) study resonates with some of the findings in the current study. These include perceptions of: a “top-down” approach to students’ educational experiences; the school placing less emphasis on thinking and feeling of students; and the meaning of wellbeing in functioning and striving in a school setting being closely associated with assessment-related activities and achievements of desired grades.

Table 7 below presents an adapted version of Soutter et al.’s Student Wellbeing conceptual framework Model.

**Table 7**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellbeing Categories</th>
<th>Assets:</th>
<th>Appraisals:</th>
<th>Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domains</td>
<td>Having, Being, Relating</td>
<td>Feeling, Thinking</td>
<td>Functioning, Striving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets</td>
<td>Literature Foci</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having</td>
<td>Research located within the <em>having</em> domain focuses on assets, typically external to the individual, and gained through either one’s efforts or through gifts or exchange.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being</td>
<td>Scholarship on individual’s internal assets comprises the <em>being</em> domain: aspects of one’s genetic make-up; the socio-cultural and historical circumstances and conditions of one’s life; the extent to which one’s wellbeing is stable, fluctuates or significantly alters throughout one’s life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lifespan; the roles of autonomy and independence in wellbeing; and issues related to identity – personal, social and role-oriented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relating</th>
<th>This domain includes assets that are relational: the interpersonal connections experienced, felt and aspired, and which influence experiences, emotions, thoughts and choice of actions; understandings of relationships to place; relationships as meaning; experiences of transcendence: feeling connected to other people, places, ideologies or beliefs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appraisals</td>
<td>Research focusing on happiness and depression, and the full spectrum of affect; and how one’s affect relates to cognition, behaviours and interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>Affective appraisals are often complemented with cognitive appraisals as means to gauge people’s sense of wellbeing. Thinking-related scholarship explores phenomena related to cognitive appraisals, cognitive strategies, decisions and errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Scholarship organised under functioning explores the activities, behaviours and involvements individuals experience and with which they are engaged, both volitional and obligatory involvements, as well as questions about how the number and breadth of one’s involvements impact on wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving</td>
<td>Striving represents the empirical and theoretical scholarship on the influences, processes, content and outcomes of one’s goals. Motivation and goal theories constitute a large part of the literature in this domain. In addition, age-old questions regarding relationships between process and product, future and present are explored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brief review of student wellbeing support in Muslim schools.** A brief review of the existing wellbeing focus within the Muslim school community using Soutter et al.’s SWBM is as follows.

**Assets.** With reference to Soutter et al.’s (2012) conceptual framework of wellbeing in school settings, most participant-associated Muslim schools in this study can be appreciated for doing their level best to make sure students are having well in school education for having well later in life. Expansions to buildings, science labs, libraries, employing experienced and better-qualified teachers, and even streaming, are some examples of schools’ dedicated effort in providing students with quality school education. However, Assets does not only mean having well, it also includes being well and relating well. Students’ character strengths, self-concept, confidence in their identity, their relationship with their Creator, with those around them, and with the wider community, are all part and parcel of being well and relating well that complement their assets. Schools that have begun to provide student welfare and...
counselling support in recent years, and that are open to introducing programs to develop students in areas other than academic success, indicate their awareness and attempts at supporting students’ assets from a more holistic perspective.

**Appraisals.** In terms of developing students’ domain of *thinking well* in Muslim schools, there seems to be less focus on developing students to become independent thinkers; for example, one student from a high achievers’ class used “spoon-feeding” to describe the way he was taught by his teacher. Other terms such as “not intellectually stimulating” and “archaic approach” were used specifically to describe the way in which Islamic studies was taught. Schools with a strong focus on academic success provide more opportunities to high achieving students, leaving some students performing in the ‘average’ or ‘weaker’ categories feeling either ignored or unappreciated. This is an indication of imbalance in the domain of *feeling well* for students.

**Actions.** In the category of *Actions*, Muslim schools have been perceived as mainly focusing on preparing students to *striving well* more than *functioning well*. The emphasis on striving well is evident in transitioning programs such as university visitations or seminars by graduates to share their university experiences with students in their senior years. From the perspectives of some counsellors and welfare coordinators, a focus on academic performance may have helped to extend students’ cognitive development, but student characters as Muslims, and their skills in social interactions, have not been developed in balanced proportions. A number of parents, teachers and counsellors in this study voiced their concerns over students’ maturity levels in social settings outside their school environment.

In terms of functioning well, for those students who live a rather sheltered life, school may be their only platform to learn certain independent skills, such as catching public transport, being able to problem-solve and knowing what to look out for with regard to their own safety. An array of community youth programs initiated by government and non-government organisations is readily available if schools recognise their importance.

**Realigning Islamic education objectives with Muslim school education.**
Saleh (2002) identifies the philosophy and key principles of educational administration from an Islamic perspective, taking into consideration their contextual relevance to the contemporary world. Saleh (2002) believes that Islamic principles of educational administration are the most comprehensive because they incorporate the physical, social, spiritual and material needs of the human being.
Islamic values cannot be taught as a separate learning area if imparting Islam as a value system to students is intended in the school mission. It has to permeate the entire school culture, starting from the educational administration. Saleh (2002) holds that “educational administration from an Islamic point of view is an act of worship… an excellent educational administration would not exist if no attention is paid to high morals and ethical standards” (p. 122).

When this worldview is taught separately from life sciences and the media (language, arts and so on) through which understanding is expressed and enhanced, learning becomes compartmentalised and disconnected. Islamic studies in Muslim schools are currently independent from all other learning areas. Al-Farabi (d. 950) was among the first Muslim scholars to propose an integrated curriculum of “foreign” and “religious” sciences (Gunther, 2006, p. 373). Al-Farabi stresses the teacher’s role in facilitating a student-centred learning process to simultaneously emphasise ta’lim – for understanding, and talqin – for character building (Gunther, 2006).

Al-Jahiz (ca. 776-868), another Medieval Muslim thinker, advises teachers to take into account their students’ mental capacity, and teach them skills to communicate their own thoughts clearly. Al-Jahiz’s teaching and learning process focuses not only on the teacher’s role in “transmission” (Biesta & Miedema, 2002, p. 179) of knowledge, but more importantly, in encouraging students to make meaning of the knowledge, and developing students’ ability to communicate their ideas effectively (Gunther, 2006).

Muslim schools can benefit much from the early Islamic philosophers, provided that they view education outcomes through the lens of a child’s balanced growth. Parents, educators, and administrators of Muslim schools need to adjust the lenses through which they view the purpose and outcome of education, by taking into account the growing evidence of what puts students in their optimum place to learn and flourish. A focus on moral development as the prerequisite for students’ progress is proposed for Muslim schools, which, unlike aptitude, is attainable by all. Subjective and objective evidences of students’ character and conduct may offer more authentic and fair reflections of the original intent for offering Islamic education to Australian Muslim students. Only if Muslim schools realign their objectives with Islam’s life objective, is the beginning of a positive and Islamic school culture likely.
Proposition Four

Muslim schools considering adopting positive education are urged to understand the major philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam in how wellbeing is viewed. These differences are: the goal and the route to wellbeing.

Following from the national educational goals for Australian schools made in the Hobart Declaration in 1989 and the Adelaide Declaration a decade later (Ailwood et al., 2011), the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) further reviewed its policies in 2008, and is committed to focus on wellbeing in employment, education and training sectors, especially in the educational direction for young Australians in every school, public or independent (MCEETYA, 2008). Australian Muslim schools, if not already conforming to, this goal will soon be required to teach wellbeing to their students. Pioneered by Geelong Grammar School to adopt a whole school approach to positive education since 2008, a growing community of positive education schools around the nation prompted the formal launch of Positive Education Schools Association (PESA) in February 2014 (PESA, 2014). Currently, the majority of member schools are independent faith schools, yet it appears that no Muslim schools to date have taken up membership with PESA.

The appeal of Positive Psychology lies in the prospect of choosing to live a meaningful life in reference to positivity and values at a time of rapid moral decline in the West. Positive education is the teaching of wellbeing to young people (Seligman, 2011). As Positive Psychology, on which positive education is based, compared with Islam is by and large compatible, it is proposed that should Muslim schools consider adopting positive education in their curriculum under the national educational impetus for schools to nurture young people’s wellbeing, they make an active effort to understand the philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam. This proposition attempts to highlight two fundamental philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam for educators of Muslim children in the West, which are significant in how wellbeing is viewed and taught to Muslim students.

The following two sub-propositions address two fundamental philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam: the goals and routes.

Sub-proposition 1

The goal of wellbeing pursued in Positive Psychology is *eudaimonia*, or flourishing in this life; the goal of wellbeing from the Islamic perspective is to flourish
in eternity by returning to one’s Lord with a sound heart; with flourishing in this life a likely bonus, but never the end goal.

The focus of Positive Psychology is studying and developing scientific ways to improve people’s wellbeing. This is a revolutionary shift from a problem-focused discipline to one that studies what makes people well. From the development of the theory of Authentic Happiness in 2002 came the Wellbeing Theory, which has attracted favourable attention from the US military, British government, the European Council, and governments the world over to measure “national wellbeing” as a guide to public policy (Evans, 2014).

Authentic Happiness proposes three elements that one can choose for their own sake. These elements are: positive emotion (what we feel); engagement (flow, where one merges with the object); and meaning (purpose) (Seligman, 2011). Having recognised that Authentic Happiness Theory is heavily associated with mood, a shift from Happiness to Wellbeing motivated the development of Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2011).

In viewing wellbeing as a construct that cannot be directly measured, Seligman (2011) identifies five measurable elements that contribute to, but do not define, wellbeing. These elements are: Positive emotion; Engagement; Positive Relationships; Meaning; and Accomplishment (PERMA). Each element must fulfill three properties: that it contributes to wellbeing; that it is pursued for its own sake; and that it is defined and measured independently of the other elements. With this, Seligman sets out to fulfill his mission for Positive Psychology PERMA51, that “by the year 2051, 51 percent of the people of the world will be flourishing” (Seligman, 2011, p. 240).

It is essential to clarify at this juncture that Islam is not averse to one obtaining a good life in this world; in fact, the constitution laid out in the Qur’an and Prophet’s teachings are all conducive to a person’s holistic wellbeing. For example the rituals of prayers and fasting bear significance not only to one’s spiritual wellbeing, but there are also definite physical, emotional and social benefits. The concept of worship encourages a believer to strive for Ihsan⁸, which requires one’s sincere efforts in attaining excellence in all pursuits of life as if one is performing in the presence of his Lord. The ultimate goal, however, from an Islamic perspective lies not only in pursuit of a good, meaningful worldly life, but attainment of a sense of inner peace, of a sense

---

⁸ From a hadith about an encounter between Angel Jibril (the questioner) and Prophet Muhammad, Safiullah quotes, “Tell me about ihsan.” He said, “That you worship Allah as if you see Him, while you do not see Him truly He sees you …” (Safiullah, 2013, p. 5).
of reassurance, that will lead one to return to his Lord with a *reassured soul* (Mogahed, 2012, p. 108) in the hereafter⁹. The goal for a Muslim is to meet his Lord with a sound heart; for only those with a sound heart attain the eternal wellbeing as promised repeatedly by the Creator Himself in the Qur’an. To illustrate, God says (Qur’an 26:88-89), “The Day when there will not benefit wealth or children, but only the one who comes to Allah with a sound heart” (Saheeh International, 2013).

**Sub-proposition 2**

The route to wellbeing in Positive Psychology is through the five elements of PERMA; the route to wellbeing in Islam is a conscious and deliberate process of aligning the *self* (*nafs* in Arabic) with the criterion set by the Creator through emulating His final messenger, Prophet Muhammad.

From a social science viewpoint, all five of Seligman’s elements that contribute to wellbeing, PERMA, as mentioned in the previous sub-proposition, fulfill the criteria of a scientific approach, which are testable, provable and measurable. Although spirituality is acknowledged as something significant that gives meaning to people, the way to measure one’s spirituality has been criticised as being highly subjective, and needs to be further developed. According to Evans (2014), some participants from the US military who were atheist were offended by the low scores they received on their spiritual fitness questions during the Character Strengths test developed by Seligman and his team.

Islam explains a human’s purpose in his spiritual and physical realms of existence hence cannot be bound by the same criteria as for science. Positive Psychology being a discipline within social science is hence considered by Muslims with an understanding that it is a construct of human effort, which offers a range of scientifically developed and potentially useful tools to help people live a satisfying virtuous life, but not to be taken as the complete roadmap for eternal wellbeing that Muslims are urged to strive for in this temporal life.

From an Islamic perspective, what makes human uniquely human is the faculties within the human heart. In it resides one’s innate disposition to the pure and the good, the self’s (*nafs*) inclinations towards temptations in response to stimuli from both the physical and spiritual realms, as well as the will to desist temptations to sin. A person’s cumulative life choices will account for one’s ultimate end that leans heavier towards

---

⁹ “(To the righteous soul will be said:) ‘O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord – well pleased (thyselves), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then among My devotees! Yea, enter thou My heaven!’” Qur’an, 89:27-30 (Mogahed, 2013, p.108).
salvation or destruction (Safiullah, 2013). Safiullah (2013) describes the human heart as follows:

The palpable heart is soft and tender – that which absorbs light and its radiant splendour. It is the centre for the inner and the outer, the transmitter of energy. It is the sponge that absorbs the good and turns it into light and absorbs the bad and turns it into darkness…. For the Master [Prophet Muhammad] says, ‘There is a part in your body, which if it is good will keep you intact and if not will corrupt it’\textsuperscript{10}. So be mindful and keep it safe-guarded, for it is the rider for here and now and beyond. (p. 24).

Thus, from an Islamic worldview, life for mankind is a summation of struggles in taming of nafs towards submission and obedience to the Creator, and, as such, having elements of PERMA during the test may help but does not categorically direct one’s vision to one’s final destiny, beyond the physical life in this world. To pass the test on the Day of Judgement with a favourable outcome, believers with the vision for eternal wellbeing will spend their entire life preoccupied with the condition of their spiritual heart by the yardstick set by their Lord until they are granted their final, eternal abode on that Day, when no soul will be wronged, and no virtuous deeds will be overlooked. God says in the Qur’an (99:6-8), “That Day, the people will depart\textsuperscript{11} separated to be shown their deeds. So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it” (Saheeh International, 2013). Good life or otherwise, this physical world to a Muslim is only temporary; and it is the only chance to use one’s freewill to align one’s heart, mind and body to strive for a promised destiny in the eternity\textsuperscript{12}.

The development of a virtuous character from an Islamic viewpoint starts with an enlightened heart. An enlightened heart seeks to submit and respond to guidance from the Source and Creator of all virtues. An enlightened heart is attained through a process of much struggle in refining and cultivating intellectual and physical abilities to align with the Divine revelation for spiritual contentment. A heart that is given to the

\textsuperscript{10} Narrated by Nu’man bin Bashir, ‘There is a piece of flesh in the body, if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart’; Al-Bukhari, the Book of Belief (Faith), Hadith No: 48.

\textsuperscript{11} From the place of judgement to their final abode. Another interpretation is “emerge separately” (from the grave).

\textsuperscript{12} God says in the Qur’an (84:6-15), “O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with great exertion and will meet it. Then as for he who is given his record in his right hand, he will be judged with an easy account, and return to his people with happiness. But as for he who is given his record behind his back, he will cry out for destruction and burn in a blaze. Indeed he had been among his people in happiness; indeed he had thought he would never return (to Allah). But yes! Indeed his Lord was ever, of him, Seeing.” (Saheeh International, 2013).
temptations in this life is darkened by following and executing the promptings of various external influences towards sin, and will in time become so stained that it loses its ability to respond to the Divine guidance.

A Muslim is urged to focus on how well his deeds fare on the scales of his Lord and the only route to achieving the outcome of an assured soul is to live by the criterion of the Lord by taking heed of the advice and following the demonstrations of His appointed chain of prophets throughout the history of mankind. As valued as the latest revised edition of a book is to its readers, so too is Prophet Muhammad to Muslims. Recognising that he is the one through whom the Lord has sent to confirm His final reminder to mankind, Muslims hold Prophet Muhammad dearer to them than their parents or their own lives.

The route to the ultimate wellbeing for Muslims is to live a life according to the Qur’an and the Sunnah (Way) of Prophet Muhammad to the best of their abilities. What positive education can offer to young people for wellbeing built upon Positive Psychology theories may very well be considered by Muslim schools for their students as long as the educators of Muslim children are mindful of their responsibility to review them for potential inconsistencies against the Islamic route to attaining wellbeing. This proposition aims to bring awareness to educators of Muslim children of the fundamental philosophical differences between Islam and Positive Psychology.

**Proposition Five**

A holistic approach to facilitate Muslim students’ wellbeing involves a three-directional connection from an Islamic perspective: vertically, inwardly and outwardly.

This proposition is supported by three sub-propositions; each discusses one connection. The vertical connection teaches one to connect with one’s Creator. Following from this connection is one’s insight into their own psychology; and through understanding and developing one’s inner strength one learns to engage with the external environment and people, in ways that feedback to their ultimate wellbeing, namely, their inner peace and pleasure of God. It proposes for educators of Muslim children to concentrate on the two most crucial elements of wellbeing as the starting point; that is, their relationships with God and with the self, to effect a fulcrum positioning change (Achor, 2010) to help students make meaningful connections with fellow creations other than the self.
Sub-proposition 1

A person’s holistic wellbeing stems from the heart; therefore fostering the vertical connection between the heart and the Creator strengthens the core for the remaining two-directional connections to attain inner peace.

Empirical research in recent decades confirm the strong association between religion/spirituality and mental health/ psychological wellbeing (Ivtzan, Chan, Gradner, & Prashar, 2011; Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012). Spirituality as part of student wellbeing is also gaining scholarly attention in the mainstream (Tregenza, 2008). Palmer was cited as having said that the development of spirituality can be “a quest for connectedness with self, with others, with the worlds of history and nature, and with the mystery of being alive” (Sisk, 2008, p. 25).

Not all Muslims, despite being born and brought up in Muslim environments, have the understanding, or have developed the habit to work on their vertical connection with God. Reflecting on the decline of Muslims since the Golden Age, Topbas (2009) identifies one crucial factor in this regard. He says:

…when they [Muslims] have abandoned the practice of Islam or they have only practiced it in form and not in spirit they have correspondingly lost their strength and unity…. The rituals are mechanically performed as if only a kind of social custom while the spirit of Islam has been almost totally lost. (pp. viii-ix).

Echoing Topbas’ lament but on a more individual level, Mogahed (2012) writes, “If one is praying, but continues to live a life full of sins, the Salah [formal prayer] is likely only the action of the limbs – not heart or soul” (p. 100). This “dissonance” as Safiullah (2013) calls it, is “the discord that we create within ourselves and others to feed our ever growing Ego (Nafs)…. The head being divergent from the heart – misaligned…. “ (p. 10).

Many participants in this study who rated their associated schools’ counselling and wellbeing support services lower on the scale have directly or indirectly alluded to the need for their associated schools to realign their administration and practices with the Islamic teachings in spirit. A number of service providers have indicated similar need for parents. This sub-proposition suggests that Muslims from a young age be taught to align their hearts with their Creator through knowledge about God and His attributes.

From the Islamic perspective, human’s spirit (ruh) existed before their life on earth when God gathered the human spirits and asked them to testify His Lordship in
their primordial state before being sent to earth\textsuperscript{13}. This spirit is known as the *ruh* in the Qur'an. It refers to the divine infusion of life into the heart (Al-Majid, n.d.) of every human being. The inner voice of questioning what is right and what is wrong within every human being comes from this innately pure spirit (*ruh*). When a child is born, it is in a state of *fitrah*, or a “natural disposition that signifies human’s inborn, intuitive ability to discern between right and wrong, true and false, and, to sense God’s existence and oneness” (Safiullah, 2013, p. 65). This sub-proposition discusses the vertical connection in terms of three main contributors to wellbeing from Islam: Source of Guidance, Object for Submission and Foundation of Security.

**Source of guidance.** Recognising the Creator as the source of guidance helps a Muslim to journey through life like a traveler equipped with a trustworthy map in hand. This guidance comes in the form of the Creator’s speech to mankind, the Qur’an, demonstrated in the Sunnah of His Messenger, Muhammad, on how to navigate through life’s journey to attain the ultimate success in the final abode. Knowledge in Divine guidance helps to fix one’s sight on the final destination. The Qur’an is a source of guidance that comprehensively explains the virtue and standard of conduct in life just like the road signs and traffic rules for travelers. Helping young Muslims to value the Qur’an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad as their source of guidance offers them the key to their wellbeing, spiritually first and foremost, but equally beneficial to their mortal life on earth.

**Object for submission.** Since Muslims believe that all creations are innately connected to their Creator, the need to worship their Creator is therefore a natural inclination within each creation. Recognising God’s superiority over human’s limitations leads one to obedience and surrender. Submitting to the Master of the worlds through one’s heart, mind and action is therefore a creation’s expression of gratitude, love and at the same time, admission of one’s fallibility, imperfection and dependence. Being able to direct these emotions and admissions to the Creator liberates one from submitting to any other creation. Mogahed (2012) writes, “… true liberation and empowerment lies only in freeing oneself from all other masters, all other definitions. All other standards…. Our worth, our honour, our salvation, and our completion lie not in the slave. But, in the Lord of the slave.” (p. 123). Total submission to the Creator provides a Muslim with a sense of dignity, trust and peace.

\textsuperscript{13}This is mentioned in the Qur’an (7:172), “And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them] ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we have testified.’ [This] – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘Indeed, we were of this unaware.’” (Saheeh International, 2013)
**Foundation of security.** The vertical connection with the Creator helps young Muslims to develop a “quiet confidence” (Madina) through a sense of security and hope. Muslim children through knowing that there is a Greater Being who is most Loving, Merciful, Compassionate, All-Wise and All-Aware of what is better for His creations are likely to grow up to put their trust and hope in The One who will never reject them. As all humans are prone to sin, being encouraged to turn to God in sincere repentance, as He is the Oft-forgiving and Eraser of sins is a comforting and powerful healing tool to restore optimism when one slips up.

This vertical connection achieved through knowledge and practice will essentially strengthen the child’s spiritual wellbeing, considered here as the core for other dimensions of wellbeing. In recognising God as the source of Guidance, one learns to submit, and put trust and hope in this unwavering source of Mercy and Power. Primary carers and teachers, or responsible agents of Muslim children, have a significant role to play in helping Muslim children to recognise their Creator in the most perfect and absolute sense of His Lordship. A heart that has been primed to fortify this vertical connection with its Creator is will respond more readily to guidance later in life. This vertical connection is proposed as it prepares a young Muslim to develop a strong sense of security, confidence and hope necessary to face life with all its ups and downs in steadfastness, patience and positivity.

**Sub-proposition 2**

Students’ personal wellbeing is attained through gaining awareness of their own nature, connected inwardly to self-regulate and to live a life of purpose.

This sub-proposition posits an internal connection aimed at helping students to understand their *fitrah* (innate inclination towards God’s system) and *nafs* (the uniquely human disposition to choose between higher and lower desires, emotions etc.), empower them with knowledge and skills to regulate their own emotions, decision-making and self-care. By introducing Muslim children to understand the human self from an Islamic perspective, they learn to draw strength from the Source of all strengths. Three key elements of the internal connection that leads to a person’s wellbeing include: awareness, self-regulation and life purpose.

**Awareness.** Stemming from the vertical connection is an internal awareness on two levels: God-consciousness and self-awareness.

**God-consciousness.** A Muslim’s awareness of God, His Knowledge, His Ever-presence and Ever-awareness of everything and every happening are essential to the development of God-consciousness. This level of awareness makes one exercise
caution in what one thinks and does. It teaches one to make decisions with discernment and, exercises, when in need, the virtue of patience and deferring matters to the One Greater and More Knowing.

**Self-awareness.** The second level of awareness is knowledge about the human nature, and discovery of one’s own inclinations. Residing in the human heart along with the pure spirit (*ruh*), is the human self, or the *nafs*. Freedom of choice associated with cognitive processing is part of this uniquely human endowment. Dharamsi and Maynard (2012) explain the relationship between the spirit (*ruh*) and the human self (*nafs*) as follows:

Emanating from the Absolute Divine, the *ruh* is perfect and limitless, whereas the *nafs*, reflecting relative reality, is imperfect and confined, having no existence at all without the *ruh*. The *nafs* is the persona, or self. It is that limited sentience, that part of us that we normally identity with – the “I”. (p. 136)

It is in this belief that Muslim students should be made aware that the worldly life is a journey of contention between the spiritual and the physical. The merging of the spiritual with the physical entities is described by Haeri as, “…two different domains meet within the human heart. It is this convergence that can generate confusion as well as reliable guidance. …These two worlds meet within every human being; they need to be acknowledged and their consciousness unified.” (cited in Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012, p. 137). The *nafs* is attracted to all things worldly but is trainable to choose what is both physically and spiritually sound.

Life on earth to a Muslim is nothing but a test (Mogahed, 2012) to distinguish the God-fearing good-doers from others. Some of the human desires are essential for survival in the physical world; yet many attractions in this physical world are placed as trials and temptations to one’s faith and submission. Therefore life is a journey that will serve as testimony to one’s hidden and open intents, decisions and actions that lead to one’s destiny.

**Self-regulation.** Knowledge of the human nature and one’s individual inclinations empowers one to be an active participant of one’s own journey in life. With a clear destination in mind, the taming of the *nafs* out of one’s own volition motivates one to travel through life’s journey with discretion.

Oser (2010) states that no research has been carried out in the field of the “inner moral happy life of mankind” (p.611). Oser (2010) argues that “the one who listens to the inner voice of conscience … is less successful and not so happy in the immediate
and shallow sense, but appeared to be satisfied in a deeper sense” (p. 611). At times one needs courage to do the right thing. One may even have to make sacrifices or suffer some kind of loss to stay on that “morally correct path as their moral perceptions guide them” (Oser, 2010, p. 611).

Al-Ghazali (1052-1111), considered to be one of the greatest architects of the development of classical Islam’s educational philosophy and ethics (Gunther, 2006; Haque, 2004), wrote about the human self (nafs) in terms of the reassured or contented self\textsuperscript{14}, the reproaching self\textsuperscript{15}, and the commanding self\textsuperscript{16}. The reassured self is a state that one strives for throughout one’s life. It should be the goal for all Muslims. Human hearts given to the commanding self are more prone to external incitements to vice, leading to various diseases of the heart such as conceit, jealousy, hatred, greed, vanity, laziness, miserliness, heedlessness, cruelty and so on (Zarabozo, 2002). These diseases of the heart are detrimental to a person’s own wellbeing due to the imbalance they bring to the spiritual heart and as a consequence, if left to fester, one’s emotional, physical and mental wellbeing will also be compromised. Human hearts with uncontrolled desires when teamed up with the human mind can lead to ruthless pursuits, resulting in destruction of the self, others and the environment. Moreover, a person who is ruled by the commanding self and given in to external negative influences will eventually face wretched consequences in the hereafter.

From the Islamic perspective, the conscience in each human may be likened to the voice of the reproaching self. Training Muslim children to pay attention to their reproaching self from an early age and establishing the habit of referring to the Qur’an and Sunnah for guidance in decision making empowers them to practice self-regulation. An obedient self will likely be paying heed to the reproaching self over the voice of the commanding self in order to attain the state of contented/reassured self.

Quoting literature on self-regulation, Sokol, Hammond and Berkowitz (2010) write that self-regulation facilitates “conscious control of thought and action” (Kerr & Zelazo, 2004, in Sokol et al., 2010, p. 585), and is believed to be central to “all socially useful, personally enhancing, constructive, and creative abilities” (Lezak, 1982, in Sokol et al., 2010, p. 585). Children as young as two years of age have shown abilities of voluntary inhibition and can become reasonably competent at regulating impulsive behaviour over extended periods of time by the age of five (Sokol et al., 2010). In

\textsuperscript{14} Qur’an 89:27-28.  
\textsuperscript{15} Qur’an 75:2  
\textsuperscript{16} Qur’an 12:53
Islam, children before the age of puberty are not held accountable for their actions. Each mistake one makes is an opportunity to make amends, to improve, to seek further guidance, and to become more self-aware.

Muslim children who have been taught to make connections between the self, the divine guidance and the regulating practices are equipped with tools that they will find useful throughout their lives. They learn to attune to the voice of the reproaching self, to discern right from wrong by the guidelines set by the Creator, and will hopefully hold themselves to standards not set by social trend, but by the noble examples of the prophets and pious predecessors. The aim is not perfection, but sincere striving, for the state of ultimate contentment. The benefit one reaps by learning to tame one’s nafs through submission for a higher purpose is not limited to spiritual, but also a healthy lifestyle and a virtuous, productive existence on earth.

**Individual purpose in life.** The awareness and appreciation that God created each human differently with a different purpose motivate a person to discover one’s intended purpose in life. Parents and teachers play a key role in helping students discover their personal strength and passion, and to nurture and support them to develop their skills and knowledge in areas of their interest. A student who is well connected with his/her own personality and is aware of his/her natural inclinations is likely to discover the interests and talents he/she has been gifted with. Parents and teachers can facilitate learning opportunities for their students to discover their individual purpose as God had intended for them. Parents and teachers influenced by cultural or social preferences for certain professions owe it to their children to review their own ideologies lest they become a hindrance to their children’s potential to flourish.

This internal connection, if introduced early, is likely to prepare Muslim children to become more aware of their inner selves, which helps them to understand and accept who they are as an individual. Through the interconnections between the vertical and the internal, students will be taught to habituate obligatory and recommended practices in Islam and gradually come to appreciate the various ways to self-regulate. With the help of parents and teachers, this will further help one to identify personal strengths and passion, to discover and fulfill one’s purpose on earth as an individual. Having a better understanding of one’s spiritual and physical disposition, and how everything is connected to God’s grand plan, young Muslims may be helped to develop resilience in coming to terms with their struggles in life, including their identity. This is especially important when Muslims in recent decades have been affected again and again by a
“media and political discourse [that] have induced a conflation of negative images with anything Muslim” (Ihram, 2009, p. 130).

**Sub-proposition 3**

Vertical and internal connections offer a person the compass to connect outwardly with people, community, society and humanity at large. This connection motivates one to relate well, to serve well, and to assess and accept external circumstances for the sake of one’s own wellbeing.

Seligman (2011) proclaims that, “it is accepted without dissent that connections to other people and relationships are what give meaning and purpose to life” (p. 17). This statement speaks for a view of what gives life its purpose. It suggests that one derives meaning and purpose in life through their engagement and relationship with other people. In Islam, a person’s fair and good treatment of people has a deeper purpose, one which serves as a means to attaining the ultimate goal of returning to their Creator with praiseworthy deeds and a sound heart.

**Relationships.** No man is an island. Muslims are given clear guidelines on social etiquettes when it comes to treatment of people. These include one’s relational priorities set by God. One is answerable to God for how well one has fulfilled the rights of people, creatures on earth and the environment. No one should feel superior based on their skin colour, race, lineage, capability or wealth. Every person will face the consequences of harbouring even an atom size of superiority in one’s heart on the Day of Judgment.

Teaching students to know the extent to which one is held accountable for one’s attitude and behaviour towards others not only helps them build good relationships with others, but also draws the line for students to exercise caution when they sense the need to disassociate from people with behaviour that clearly contradicts the moral teachings of Islam. Furthermore, one is motivated to behave in the best possible manner regardless of whether similar manner is returned because God describes His believers in the Qur’an (25:63) as, “…the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace” (Saheeh International, 2013). The Divine guidance that provides the yardstick for pro-social behaviour is extremely important for Muslim youth living in today’s pluralistic society. This outward connection guided by the Divine revelation promotes the collective and common good on the one hand, and protects the individual’s rights and wellbeing on the other.
Responsibilities/service. The extent of responsibility required of each person towards people is gauged by the means one is given. It is but an expression of one’s meaningful connection with God. The following verse from the Qur’an (2:177) illustrates a broad guideline in this regard:

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakat; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous. (Saheeh International, 2013, p. 35)

Righteousness in deeds in the above verse is given in order of one’s closeness in relationship with people, and according to the urgency of needs. Caring for the weak and the vulnerable, the poor and the needy and fellow human beings as well as animals and the environment according to God’s instructions will all be testaments for one’s final judgment. The more one is given in terms of capability, wealth, strength or social standing, the more is one held accountable for how one applies oneself through these favours. One of the attributes of the companions of Prophet Muhammad in Madinah commended by God was that they gave preference to the Muslim emigrants from Makkah over their own needs (Qur’an 59:9). The quest for earning the honour as a true servant of God motivates a believer to strive as a pro-social being. This divinely guided outward connection provides young Muslim students with a lens through which they are taught to view their services as a form of worship, that through striving for meaningful co-existence with other creations on earth will ultimately feed back to their own scales.

Acceptance. Seligman (2011) explains that people’s emotions in response to adversity differ from person to person not as consequences to the adversity itself, but from the belief in how adversity is viewed. In his discussion of a program developed for the US military staff, Seligman (2011) gives three examples of thought patterns that drive certain emotions: thinking traps, deeply held beliefs, and catastrophic thinking. The program teaches military staff skills to deal with their situations by understanding their thought patterns, and to use optimism to prevent mental health issues.

In the current discussion on acceptance, the researcher proposes to use Islamic concepts to teach students how to avoid falling into thinking traps, deeply held beliefs or catastrophic thinking while they are still young. Islamic perspectives on trials and
hardship are viewed as God’s way to purify, to strengthen, or to redirect a believer back on track when one starts to stray off the right path (Mogahed, 2012). When a student is taught from young to view events, people and circumstances one encounters as being placed strategically by God, one learns to accept unfavourable or difficult situations as a Will of God for one’s own ultimate wellbeing.

In accepting that God is in control of the systems and events in the entire universe, one is relieved from feeling responsible for circumstances beyond one’s control. In terms of one’s relationship and service to people, one accepts that the outcome is not within one’s control. One is only accountable for one’s own action and attitude. This acceptance helps a believer to do righteous deeds and to live a life according to one’s means and capability even when external factors do not reciprocate in like manner.

The understanding of God’s supreme attributes makes one conscious of one’s actions and at the same time it gives one strength to endure injustice or oppression without resorting to transgressing the limits, as none will escape the court of justice in the hereafter. It prevents one from overstretching to breaking point. It spares one from grieving to despair. It gives one balance through deference, and encourages one to exercise moderation. It is a perspective especially helpful for one to accept imperfections in life. It empowers one to overlook and forgive other’s shortcomings. It makes one focus on what is within one’s control. This element of external connection saves one’s sanity, and softens the blow of setbacks or adversities in life.

In summary, Proposition Five posits an interrelated three directional connection to develop Muslim students’ personal wellbeing through a divinely guided, meaningful, ethical and balanced perspective and, in turn, for a better society. This three-way connection proposition attempts to address the many emerging themes from this study concerning student wellbeing and identity related issues. This proposition is believed to be central to the role Muslim schools can play in raising a new generation of productive and positive local and global citizens through the lens of Islamic teachings and beliefs.
Proposition Six

Pedagogical implications for educators of Muslim students facilitating sustained wellbeing from an Islamic perspective should include: an outline appropriate for students’ developmental stages; specific pedagogical responsibilities; and, key operational practices.

The first of the three sub-propositions is an outline to develop student wellbeing is proposed with reference to students’ spiritual and cognitive developmental stages within the broad guideline of children’s upbringing from Prophet’s teachings. The second sub-proposition highlights the specific pedagogical responsibilities for teachers. The third sub-proposition elaborates on the four key wellbeing operational practices to be cultivated in students.

Sub-proposition 1

An outline to develop student wellbeing is proposed with reference to students’ spiritual and cognitive developmental stages within the broad guideline of children’s upbringing from Prophet’s teachings.

This sub-proposition presents a proposed outline for developing student wellbeing from an Islamic perspective with references to Prophet Muhammad’s recommended broad stages of a child’s upbringing and considerations given to Fowler’s stages of faith consciousness within the traditions of constructive developmental theorists such as Baldwin, Dewey, Piaget and Kohlberg (Fowler, 1991). This outline is tentative in nature. As Roehlkepartain, Benson, King and Wagener (2006) explain, that a lack of needed attention in scholarship with spiritual development in the mainstream social sciences has “limited our capacity to fully understand the person in its entirety at all points in the life span and within its multiple social, cultural and national contexts” (p. 2). This outline tentatively proposes a developmental outline for wellbeing from the perspective of stages in faith development (Fowler, 1991) and Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Educators should be mindful that these stages are used only as a general guideline and are not to be adopted rigidly due to each child being a unique individual, who matures and develops qualitatively at their own pace. This overview is presented in Table 8.
Table 8
*A proposed outline on developing Muslim students’ wellbeing*

**Fowler’s first four stages of faith development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Fowler’s Stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primal (Infancy)</td>
<td>Primal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive-Projective (Toddler/pre-school age)</td>
<td>Intuitive-Projective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mythical-Literal (Early primary school age)</td>
<td>Mythical-Literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional (Upper primary/early adolescence)</td>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuative-Reflective (Late adolescence/early adulthood)</td>
<td>Individuative-Reflective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Piaget’s cognitive development stages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Piaget’s Stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensori-motor (0-2 years)</td>
<td>Sensori-motor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoperational (2-7 years)</td>
<td>Preoperational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete (7-11 years)</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal (11+ years to adulthood)</td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Islamic upbringing broad guideline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Islamic guideline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play (0-7 years)</td>
<td>Play (0-7 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline (7-14 years)</td>
<td>Discipline (7-14 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice (14+ years)</td>
<td>Advice (14+ years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who is in focus?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Who is in focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know God, relate to self</td>
<td>Know God, relate to self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know self, relate to God</td>
<td>Know self, relate to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know role of self to others by God</td>
<td>Know role of self to others by God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotions; healthy body; story telling; sensory experiences;</td>
<td>Positive emotions; healthy body; story telling; sensory experiences;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self care of body, mind and emotions;</td>
<td>Self care of body, mind and emotions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal hygiene, inquisitive mind,</td>
<td>Personal hygiene, inquisitive mind,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regulate emotions</td>
<td>regulate emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for others; guided heart, analytical mind, physical fitness; meaningful engagement; purpose</td>
<td>Care for others; guided heart, analytical mind, physical fitness; meaningful engagement; purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Why**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust, hope, security; intuitive, imaginative; fascinated by the power and attributes of God; begin to relate human relations with the divine</td>
<td>Trust, hope, security; intuitive, imaginative; fascinated by the power and attributes of God; begin to relate human relations with the divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing logical thinking; fairly uncritical of conventional values; sense of right from wrong esp. in interpersonal interactions</td>
<td>Developing logical thinking; fairly uncritical of conventional values; sense of right from wrong esp. in interpersonal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in logic, begins deductive reasoning, understands abstract ideas; faith forged in personal reflection and experiences; questions prior assumptions; making meaning; depend less on guidance of authorities</td>
<td>Increases in logic, begins deductive reasoning, understands abstract ideas; faith forged in personal reflection and experiences; questions prior assumptions; making meaning; depend less on guidance of authorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach/Train</td>
<td>Teach/Train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Guide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Where**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home, School, Nature</td>
<td>Home, School, Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home, School, Community</td>
<td>Home, School, Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home, school, community, society</td>
<td>Home, school, community, society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From an Islamic perspective, parents and teachers who have children in their care are endowed with a trusteeship from God. Likewise, Fowler (1991) underscores the roles significant carers of infants and children in their early childhood play in developing children’s faith. According to Fowler’s (1991) conceptualisation of Stages of Faith Consciousness, a child is likely to develop four out of the seven stages from infancy through to the end of high school. For teachers and significant carers of Muslim children and young adults, an awareness of the various developmental phases
spiritually and cognitively is crucial in helping students to recognise and maintain their vertical, internal and external connections. When helping students to develop skills to enhance wellbeing from a faith perspective, teachers and parents should bear in mind that this is a self-empowering process, and that their approach should be one of facilitation, of modelling and of guidance and not one of coercion.

Graphic representations of connection emphases for teachers are displayed in Figures 6, 7, and 8.

**Age group 0 - 7 years**

![Figure 6](image1)

*Figure 6. Connection emphases for student age group 0 – 7 years*

**Age group 7 - 14 years**

![Figure 7](image2)

*Figure 7. Connection emphases for student age group 7 - 14 years*

**Age group 14 +**

![Figure 8](image3)

*Figure 8. Connection emphases for student age group 14 years and older*

**Sub-proposition 2**

Three specific pedagogical responsibilities for educators of wellbeing for Muslim students include modelling practice, facilitating growth and fostering meaning.
**Model practice.** Educators of Muslim children, especially on the subject of wellbeing, are students’ immediate and concrete examples of what they teach.

Muslims of all times who wish to strengthen their connection with God are instructed by God to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad. Gunther (2006) quotes a Qur’anic verse (3:79) in this regard, “Be you masters in that you teach the Scripture and in that you yourselves study” (p. 367). In terms of essential qualities of educators of children, Ibn Sina, a Medieval Muslim thinker, for instance, stresses on their virtuousness, their laudable character, as well as the pedagogical ability to deal with children (Gunther, 2006). Saleh (2002) lists seven essential personal attributes in Islamic educational administrators. Six are directly related to a person’s connection with God. Only one principle relates to a person’s competency for the job.

Educators of Muslim children in the West in 21st Century have an added responsibility to model best practice in their interactions with non-Muslims due to their being a minority in a pluralistic society. The proposed wellbeing outline calls for educators to model excellence in their connections with God, with their inner self and to the people with whom they interact. Recommendations from participants of this study allude strongly to this quality they desire for the teachers in Muslim schools.

**Foster meaning.** Through observing what children are deeply interested in and capable of doing independently, Maria Montessori developed an educational method that focuses on understanding the needs, development and potentialities of the child (Tregenza, 2008) that continues to benefit children worldwide. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) place spirituality as a dominant meaning-maker in the development of a person’s ability to integrate other aspects of development. Recognising human’s extraordinary potential for growth and development, Robinson (2010) advocates for creation of conditions at home, at school and at workplace that facilitate development of “a new paradigm of human capacity to meet a new era of human existence” (p. xiii). Robinson uses the term the Element to describe “the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together” (p. xiii). Drawing on these properties, educators and parents of Muslim students ought to realise the important role they play in assisting students to make meaning in their learning in two major aspects: help students to

---

17 Another translation to this Qur’anic verse reads, “‘Be pious scholars of the Lord because of what you have taught of the Scripture and because of what you have studied.’” (Saheeh International, 2013).

18 Saleh’s (2002) seven essential personal attributes for Islamic educational administrators: (i) Ta’ah and ‘ubudiyyah - obedience to Allah and a sense of servanthood to Allah, (ii) tawakkul - trust in Allah, (iii) muraqabah - supervision (of self), (iv) muhasabah - accountability, (v) akhlaq - moral and ethical behavior, (vi) job competency, (vii) amanah and ‘adl - responsibility and justice (pp. 67-78).
discover and develop their individual talent, and to equip them with the necessary tools to strengthen their three-way connections.

**Discover individual talent.** Creating a learning environment that encourages children to explore and discover their personal gifts early on in life helps to foster their connection with God in their own ways that are meaningful to them personally. Educators have a responsibility to provide learning opportunities for children to “deeply concentrate”, to experience “joy in engagement and to thoughtfully reflect within and respond to an atmosphere of still and quiet” (Tregenza, 2008, p. 7). A child’s discovery of their interest that takes them into a space of deep concentration and joy is a form of self-understanding of their purpose in life as an individual. This meaning making of one’s personal purpose through spiritual connection is to be fostered by significant carers and educators of young children.

**Tools.**

**Classical Arabic language skills.** One essential skill to help Muslim students foster meaning in their spiritual development is their adequate grasp of classical Arabic language. It is a medium that Muslims are highly encouraged to acquire in order to grasp the meaning of the Qur’an in its original language, and classical Islamic literature and treatises. It is recommended in this sub-proposition that Muslim schools prioritise classical Arabic as a key learning area for all Muslim students. It is a tool that helps them foster meaning about their faith.

Muslim schools with an initial noble intention to preserve future Muslim generations’ Islamic identity and faith ought to redress their educational objective and school administration. Although Arabic is currently offered to students in most Muslim schools, several participants from non-Arabic speaking backgrounds bemoaned how little progress they made with Arabic language throughout their entire schooling in their respective Muslim schools. The most non-Arabic speaking students would learn from attending Muslim schools was to read the phonetics in Arabic of the Qur’an without comprehending the language. Since the Qur’an is meant to be a Muslim’s guide in life, it is proposed that Muslim schools make Arabic a subject of mandatory pass as much as the value given to English. This paves the way for students to access resources of their Islamic heritage later in life.

**Resilience.** Some life situations challenge one’s steadfastness, patience, endurance, forbearance, forgiveness and sacrifice. Only if students are adequately prepared in the proposed three-way connections, will they have enough motivation and fortitude to persevere when the going gets tough. Educators are responsible for offering
developmentally appropriate skills to practice ways to get closer to God. Students learn to appreciate God’s recommended acts of worship from a spiritual perspective, such as seeking forgiveness, engaging in remembrance of God, observing dietary requirements and giving charity, and how these acts are connected to the personal, physical, emotional, and social wellbeing, especially during trying times.

**Facilitate growth.** Somewhere along the line since the Muslim thinkers wrote their educational treatises approximately one millennium ago (Gunther, 2006), a culture of punitive, shaming, fear-driven and condemning approach in the way children are taught in some parts of the Muslim world had crept in. The only “benefit” from this approach is perhaps the instructor/parent’s triumph at effecting immediate compliance in young children, albeit short-lived. It does little for, and may be even detrimental to, the lasting transformative effect in the child. It goes without saying that this is against the very spirit of Islam and Prophet’s teaching methodology and it risks obliterating the beauty of Islam from the young hearts. Although rare, incidences of teachers’ harshness and actions tantamount to assault towards students in Muslim schools have been raised by a number of participants in this study.

Educators and parents of Muslim children are their closest role models and guides they have in terms of Islamic practices in a non-Muslim society. Bearing in mind the objective of Muslim schools to nurture true Muslim characters, a developmentally sound teaching approach is essential. A general guideline for gradual shifts in pedagogical foci for the different developmental stages is as follows: from directed and experiential learning in the early years (0-7 years), to phasing into facilitated learning in the primary school to middle school years (7-14 years), to assisted and gradual introduction of self-directed learning in late adolescence (14 years and older).

**Sub-proposition 3**

Educators of young Muslims are recommended to establish in their students four operational practices for lifelong maintenance and development of wellbeing: recognising, nurturing, striving and safe-guarding.

**Recognise.** All Muslim children should be taught to recognise and reaffirm their need to feed the soul as much as their need to feed their body. Mogahed (2012) writes, “…we put the needs of our body above our souls… ironically, the body that we tend to is only temporary, while the soul that we neglect is eternal” (p. 99).

Recognition of the transcendent attributes of the Creator, in contrast with one’s own insignificance fortifies one’s vertical and internal connections. Believing in
predestination helps one to cope in trying situations. Recognising that one’s intention and sincere efforts are what God will hold one accountable for liberates one from putting unreasonable pressures on themselves and on others. It is proposed that a greater proportion of the teaching be dedicated to helping children to get to know their Creator, and about themselves in the younger grades. As the child develops, this practice takes the form of reflection and deeper appreciation for their Creator. This operational practice of recognition, like the remaining three practices to be discussed next, enhances a person’s wellbeing from one’s spiritual core; and regular reflection deepens one’s three-way connection.

**Nurture.** Recognition and knowledge are essential but insufficient to help a child make meaningful connection with the Creator unless the child is nurtured to develop trust, love, awe and hope in the Creator. Experiencing nature with the senses, discovering and cultivating each child’s natural talents are some of the suggested ways to nurture children to live a happy, contented, focused and productive life.

Early Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Sahnun, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali recommend teaching the Qur’an to shape children’s upright moral character and good manners (Gunther, 2006). Nurturing a love for the Qur’an, and learning to consult it on a regular basis as Muslim students’ source of solace and guidance is therefore crucial to maintaining their wellbeing.

**Strive.** Since one’s intention and efforts are what counts in the Sight of God, one is always motivated to give one’s best in seeking the pleasure of God.

In addition to doing what is obligatory and commendable, and refraining from what is prohibited and disliked, one is encouraged to aim for the level of *ihsan*, a highest level of professed “being” through one’s mindfulness of God’s omnipresence and omniscience. To strive for *ihsan* is a manifestation of one’s conscious and true love for one’s Lord, whether one is in one’s own company or otherwise (Abbasi, 1986). This mindfulness will align thoughts, deeds and speech with the objective of seeking God’s pleasure, knowing with certainty that through this pursuit, one also benefits from a sound mind, body and heart. A major aspect of attaining *ihsan* is through interactions with people in the best of manners. Desire for choosing to profess *ihsan* motivates one to live a life with sincerity and excellence.

**Safe-guard.** As a young child develops, he/she learns to respond to his/her needs and uses his/her will and other faculties to have those needs met. The educator and significant carers of Muslim students play vital roles in helping them understand their natural dispositions, and that their hearts need special attention, in order to stay in
control like a good captain of the ship. Safe-guarding oneself against negative motives, emotions, or influences includes tying one’s personal strength to spiritual guidance, to shape one’s will to make the right choices in the best manners against the promptings of one’s commanding self. This operational practice helps the child to later experience the sweetness of inner peace after choosing what is pleasing to God even if it is against one’s desire at the time.

Apart from the self with its natural tendencies to lean towards physical gratification, egoistic and immediate pleasures, the students learn that the company that one keeps can also influence one’s choices. As students develop their wellbeing Islamically in higher grades, they also become aware of the need to safe-guard themselves against entities in the unseen such as Jinns and Satan, who by God’s permission are part of the test of one’s faith. A heart that engages in much wrongdoing will in time be covered in darkness devoid of light. Seeking protection in the Creator against evil influences from both the seen and unseen worlds, and immediate repentance when one slips up are some of the ways God teaches the believers to safeguard their hearts. This operational practice is again a lifelong habit that one strives to develop to maintain holistic wellbeing.

A proposed distribution of emphasis on teaching wellbeing practices during the different developmental stages is summed up in the diagram below.

![Figure 9. Proposed distribution of emphasis on wellbeing practices](image)

The key implication for Proposition Six is that educators and parents should aim for their children’s transformation and not merely instruction or transmission of knowledge (Biesta & Miedema, 2002). Provision of opportunities to practice and apply knowledge in a student’s daily life, or “everyday spirituality” to “awaken the soul” (Bone, Cullen & Loveridge as cited in Tregenza, 2008, p. 10) is to be taken into consideration by educators of Muslim students. Fostering meaningful learning opportunities, with the end in mind, and a gradual process of facilitation towards
student-directed learning is an important pedagogical responsibility that educators of Muslim students ought to bear in mind.

Proposition Seven

The prospect to improve student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is positive and timely in light of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry.

Sub-proposition 1

The prospect to improve student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is positive due to the Muslim school community members’ desire for change, indications of their readiness for change and identified potential for change.

Desire for change. A strong and recurring theme in this study is change. Some observed slow but positive changes in recent years in terms of the school counselling and wellbeing support service and hoped for further improvement; others articulated the need for attention to student wellbeing in their associated schools. Experiences vary from school to school, as well as from person to person even if they were associated with the same school. Participants’ desires for change covered educational outcomes, school governance, leadership, and realignment with Islamic ethos. The common sentiment of participants in both categories is their concern for students’ holistic wellbeing during their school years and beyond, particularly with students’ Australian Islamic identity (Ihram, 2007, p. 80). The desire for a whole school approach in caring for students’ wellbeing can be substantiated by individual participants’ suggestions for a range of changes to take place such as community education to reduce stigma and clear misconceptions, “educate not enforce”, a shift in attitude, need for collaboration between schools, parental involvement, introduce vertical socialisation for students of different year levels, peer support, skills training, involving more students in interfaith dialogues and professional development for staff about wellbeing and child protection mandate, to name a few. Central to Appreciative Inquiry’s aim for change is the recognition of and building from an organisation’s existing strengths.

Some school members were aware of the connection between being well and doing well and were committed to seek out funding opportunities to provide wellbeing development programs especially for students who had a tendency to withdraw or to be left on the peripheries. The solution lies in a multi-pronged school community education that prioritises holistic wellbeing over emphasis on academic performance alone.

Indications of readiness for change. The researcher of this study proposes attention be given to the strengths within the school communities. Two emergent
strengths being induced are: community members’ goodwill and an increase in availability of role models.

**Community members’ goodwill.** A great deal of goodwill from participants in this study was expressed through their support of and anticipation for this study to bring better understanding to the Muslim school communities to improve students’ holistic wellbeing with a more organised approach as a whole school. Ihram (Ihram, 2007), an Islamic education consultant with experience as principal in a number of Muslim schools in New South Wales over the past three decades, believes that Muslim schools need to provide sound “organisational care”; that is, well structured organisation and compassionate care, especially for students from low socio-economic family backgrounds, to adequately develop their students. Using her school as an example, Ihram (2007) writes in her blog:

Troubled students who did not respond well to the discipline of public or private schools found solace in the individualised care that was generally on offer to the students in my school. Our students succeeded and despite their low socio-economic status, nearly every student gained entrance into tertiary studies.

Motivated by faith that holds nurturing and caring for Muslim children as an opportunity to seek God’s pleasure, a number of participants who were teachers or wellbeing support staff in Muslim schools, expressed a sense of urgency and willingness to assist with initiatives for concerted change in the area of student wellbeing support services, should such an initiative become a reality.

**Role models.** Another observation being made is that the situation with a lack of role models for Muslim students expressed by earlier graduates of Muslim schools is improving. In cities where Muslim settlement began over 40 years ago, a growing band of Muslims from second and third generation migrant backgrounds is strengthening their support for students in Muslim schools with their presence. They are Australians who have, in one way or another, selectively embraced the best of multiple cultures they had to come to terms with growing up, and chosen to live Islam as their way of life. They are what Ihram (2009) describes as having adapted and implemented “Islamic concepts within an authentic Australian discourse of identity” (p. 81). Some of the second and third generation Australian Muslim participants in this study appear to resemble Ihram’s description of this unique identity. They have struggled with developing their identity as Australian Muslims as they grew up and are therefore able to relate to the challenges Muslims younger than them experience with better insight and empathy.
Young Australian Muslim teachers, youth leaders or counsellors can provide much needed support to Muslim students in both public and independent schools. Two participants in this study chose to teach in a public high school to offer their pastoral support, and to liaise between school and parents because they understood the need for extra support among adolescent Muslim students in a mainstream school setting.

**Potential for change: think outside the square.** Although most Muslim schools struggle financially with a high percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, one must not lose sight of Muslim school communities’ existing strengths and potential for making positive changes to better support their students. However small they may be, collectively they can spark hope within the school communities. The strengths are now discussed in the form of suggestions on how best to utilise them.

**Centralised coordination.** The vignettes in Chapter Four illustrated examples of different practices from three schools. For Australian Muslim schools to do well collectively given most schools’ struggles, this sub-proposition puts forward the suggestion that schools in each state be supported by one centralised body to source for community support, human resources, to coordinate pooling of resources and sharing/exchanging ideas for best practice. The head of counselling in one school mentioned her effort in establishing a library specialising in child development and wellbeing related subjects for parents and teaching staff at her school. If a borrowing system were in place, staff from all member schools through an annual school subscription would benefit from a wider collection of resources at a fraction of the cost.

**Reaching out for community support.** A centralised body specifically for Muslim schools operated from the department of education, or the association for independent schools of each state, may be more manageable than a national body. Some schools may benefit from support through mentoring coordinated by this body to improve teaching quality and administrative skills from neighbouring, more established public and other faith schools. This body may also negotiate collaboration with neighbouring schools to run student development programs. The potential for mutual benefit from such community interactions is manifold, such as effective space and equipment utilisation, skills sharing, opportunities for young people to interact with people from backgrounds different to their own thus gaining better understanding of diverse cultures and religious beliefs and so on.

**Pooling of human resources.** Since not all schools are able financially to hire more than one counsellor, several Muslim schools within the same city could perhaps
better utilise a centralised counselling team. Counsellors as a team can strengthen and support each other. The task of organising and running group, class or whole school programs for student development can be shared, and no school counsellors have to plan or work in isolation. More complex issues from member schools could be referred to the more experienced and better-qualified counsellors/psychologists on the team. Pooling of human resources managed by a centralised counselling team allows optimum utilisation of expertise. A team of professionals can provide more structured care not every school can afford. Counsellors and wellbeing support staff can also learn from each other to meet the community’s preference for a more culturally appropriate counselling service for Muslim students.

**Support for the supporting team.** The vignettes in Chapter Four illustrated three schools presenting contrasting degrees of adequacy in each school’s counselling and wellbeing support services for students. In this study, participants acknowledged efforts of exemplary teachers, imams and counsellors within the Muslim school communities. They are, by and large, overworked and under-supported. The associated schools mostly operate in isolation. Some staff risk burnout. A centralised body can potentially narrow the contrast in service adequacies from one school to another, and provide a more efficient and supportive service, for students as well as the counsellors and welfare staff.

**Strength from within: faithful citizens.** The Islamic way of life offers a comprehensive map for its adherents to attain all dimensions of wellbeing. Muslims who strive to implement the Sunnah way of living are likely to enjoy better health overall. For example, Muslims are protected from the ill consequences of intoxicants or sexual promiscuity; and they benefit physically and spiritually through mild exercises strategically spaced throughout the day at five intervals prayers (*salat*) and yearly month-long fasting. They are obligated to consume only the pure and clean food in moderation. It is a unique way of life that promotes physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing. Australian Muslim youth, if raised and educated according to Islam, have the potential of giving back productively and ethically to the country in which their parents/grandparents have chosen to settle.

As discussed in Proposition Five, understanding and nurturing the three-way connections is conducive to one’s meaningful personal and social relationships and engagements. Furthermore, the annual 2.5% alms giving incumbent for those who have wealth/properties in surplus after all living expenses over a period of one year is a social system that demonstrates the message common to all Abrahamic religions that strive
for “justice, mercy and a love that shows itself in practical charity” (Lovat, 2006, p. 50). Alms giving and charity are believed to have a cleansing effect on a person’s soul. All these injunctions are significant in maintaining a balanced state of individual wellbeing as well as collective wellbeing in society.

At a time when the Australian economy is burdened by lifestyle related diseases and increasing mental and emotional illnesses, not to mention debilitating social diseases associated with drug and alcohol abuse, gambling or promiscuity, there is a need for Australian Muslim schools to incorporate more effectively Islamic values into their curriculum for the sake of students’ holistic wellbeing, in keeping with the educational goals in the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Muslim schools with Islam as the principal source of guidance can no longer afford to give only “tokenistic effort” (Zainab) to impart the values they wish their future generations to adopt. The faith directed social responsibilities obligate Muslim parents and educators to raise their children as God-conscious, ethical, healthy, productive citizens in whichever country they reside.

Sub-proposition 2

The prospect of improved student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is timely because the positive impact of wellbeing on performance is gaining attention in Western Psychology and a community of schools adopting positive education nationally is fast growing.

A shift in Western Psychology research interest. Two points for discussion include impact of spirituality on wellbeing that is gaining Western scholars’ attention, and, an increase in availability of contextually relevant literature on Muslims in the West.

Impact of spirituality on wellbeing gaining Western social scientists’ attention. Zarabozo (2002) likened Western psychologists’ blindside to spirituality to treating “the human…[as] a physical body without a soul” (p. 11). To an extent, religion was even “labeled as problematic” (Weber & Pargament, 2014, p. 358). This viewpoint possibly explains, at least partially, the widespread resistance and distrust among Muslims as far as Western Psychology is concerned.

However, in one and a half decades, Positive Psychology has revolutionised the way human psychology and psychiatry are viewed in the Western world. “After a half century of neglect,” writes Seligman (2011), “psychologists are again studying spirituality and religiosity in earnest” (p. 261). Admitting that psychologists can no
longer ignore the importance of spirituality and religiosity to people of faith, and how one’s belief shapes one’s actions and is a source of solace for the individual, researchers are now acknowledging the role spirituality plays in a person’s wellbeing (Seligman, 2011; Sisk, 2008; Tregenza, 2008). Pargament (2013) asserts that “spirituality is an important, irreducible motivation in and of itself” (p. 271). Borne out of this research attention, is a focus on the spiritual development of children and adolescents (Roehlpartain et al., 2006).

**Availability of contextually relevant literature on Muslims in the West.** Young people in the West coming from backgrounds that are different from the mainstream, including religious beliefs, such as Islam and other Asian beliefs, are in need of professional support that takes their cultural and religious worldviews into consideration for more appropriate support. It is timely that Muslim schools can benefit from researchers and therapists from the United Kingdom, North America and Canada, who have begun to contribute to the knowledge on Muslim living in the West such as issues in help seeking and spirituality (Dharamsi & Maynard, 2012; Haque & Kamil, 2012; Utz, 2012). Practitioners who work with Muslims have begun to seek understanding of human psychology from an Islamic perspective, taking into consideration the spiritual realm in addition to Western theories and treatment strategies. Different aspects of the unseen world within the Islamic belief system thought to contribute to psychological or mental illnesses (El Taiba, 2007; Utz, 2012) and alternative treatment methods are beyond the scope of this study for discussion at any length. Muslim carers and professionals at this juncture can benefit from this growing body of literature because of the possible cultural and contextual facets it offers.

**Australian national goals for educational direction.** In December 2008, the Melbourne Declaration made by Ministerial Council of Employment, Education and Training for Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) announced its commitment to address the educational direction for young Australians, in recognition of the need to broaden the education frame to meet global changes and rapid advancements in technology (MCEETYA, 2008). One of the goals states that: “All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8).

The Declaration states that the government commits to support schools to help students become people who are “motivated and skilled to live healthy, satisfying lives” (Melbourne Declaration, MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13). It goes on to elaborate on the need for a curriculum that “will enable students... to understand the spiritual, moral and
aesthetic dimensions of life; and open up new ways of thinking…” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13). Lovat, Dally, Clement and Toomey (2011) question whether teachers are adequately trained for this task. Lovat et al. (2011) argue that values pedagogy with its strong credentials in facilitating holistic education is missing in current teacher education.

Given the statistics showing the rapid decline in the mental health status of young people in developed nations (Seligman, 2011), Australian Muslim schools must recognise the extent to which they are responsible in nurturing and educating future generations of Australian Muslims. The Qur’an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) offer a comprehensive worldview that is conducive to a healthy and productive society. This understanding has particular importance to Muslim youth witnessing continuous mental and emotional challenges globally causing them to experience a “renewed fear of loss” (Ihram, 2009, p. 84) that threatened their “fragile state of negotiated comfortable identity” (Ihram, 2009, p. 86). Young Muslims’ need for extra support as a result of witnessing Muslims in many parts of world living in the throes of political unrest, warfare, and massacres may not be adequately addressed by the theory of “flourishing” in Western Positive Psychology. The Islamic worldview on hardship and ease, and their ultimate goal in life are what will carry young Muslims through this turbulent era. One’s responses in deference to God in the face of trials are the real contributors to attaining the reassured/contented soul.

It is timely for Muslim schools take a proactive role to have a voice in informing the MCEETYA of the wellbeing needs of students enrolled in their schools. For this to happen, it is necessary to have a body of scholars versed in the sciences of wellbeing and education, as well as Islamic education to represent Muslim schools in current and future MCEETYA’s consultative processes on this agenda.

A growing national community that adopts positive education. Scientific research linking wellbeing to performance at school and later in life is useful in assuring stakeholders of Muslim schools of the proven merits in approaching education from this perspective.

Since the publication of emerging science on Positive Psychology by the American Psychological Association in 2000, a growing interest in the area of wellbeing has led to an enhanced understanding of how, why and under what circumstances positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions enable people to flourish (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). In 2008, Seligman and his team were invited by Geelong Grammar School (GGS) in Melbourne to initiate a
world’s first whole-school approach to positive education. Seligman and his hand-picked A-Team “infused” everyone at every level in every aspect of the school life at GGS with an in-house training for optimum student wellbeing and accomplishment (Seligman, 2008, p. 21). From 2009 onwards, many schools in other states around Australia followed suit in adopting positive education. In February 2014, the Positive Education Schools Association was launched at the Fourth Positive Psychology Conference in Melbourne (Positive Education Schools Association, 2014).

As was discussed in Proposition Four comparing the relevance and differences between Islamic philosophy on wellbeing and Positive Psychology, the researcher of this study proposes that it is timely for Muslim schools to join the growing community of PESA, to engage in meaningful exchanges with other schools for the wellbeing and enhanced performance of students under their care. Even though Islam offers a comprehensive core concept of why and how to attain the ultimate wellbeing, to date, no Australian Muslim school to this researcher’s knowledge, is implementing a school curriculum from the perspective of Islamic wellbeing. It is at this infancy stage that Muslim schools may benefit from other members of PESA in their discussions and knowledge sharing of pedagogical and whole school approaches in developing their own positive education. Through active participation in a supportive environment that PESA offers, Muslims schools may consider developing a whole school, student-centred, holistic and Islamic wellbeing approach to effectively address multiple issues currently limiting their counselling and wellbeing support services. A model developed from an Islamic perspective will provide a framework that benefits not only students in Muslim schools in Australia, but also Muslim students attending public or other independent schools within the PESA positive education community.

Summary

In brief, this chapter developed seven propositions pertaining to the future of counselling and wellbeing support services for Muslim schools in Australia. The propositions were generated from key emergent themes identified from participants’ perspectives.

Proposition One examines the background and motivating factors that brought Muslim schools into existence three decades ago. Proposition Two highlights key stakeholders within Muslim schools who can spearhead the change for improved student wellbeing support; and the duty of care the school leaders have for their students, particularly those with special or specific needs under their care. Proposition Three identifies indicators of imbalance affecting student wellbeing and conveys
participants’ suggestions to address these imbalances. Proposition Four deals with two key philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam. Proposition Five conceptualises a three-directional connection for nurturing Muslim student wellbeing from an Islamic worldview. Proposition Six provides an overview of pedagogical responsibilities in developing wellbeing for Muslim students. Proposition Seven presents the positive outlook for Australian Muslim schools in improving their wellbeing support services for students. This proposition highlights assets, best practice and opportunities from within the Muslim school communities, as well as local and global interests and opportunities, focusing on promoting students wellbeing to enhance their performance in school, in society, and later in life.
CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the thesis. First it summarises the aim and rationale of the study, the research method and design, findings and significance. It then discusses the implication of the findings for policy, practice and research, and outlines the parameters of the research.

Aim and Rationale

This study initially aimed to develop understandings of issues involved for counselling services for students in Australian Muslim secondary schools. The focus of the study was on Muslim school community members’ perspectives on issues related to the provision of school counselling services to students. The study was undertaken with the objective of developing theory and principles of practice for a culturally appropriate counselling service in Australian Muslim schools.

It was hypothesised that the needs of students in Muslim schools were unique due to the role religion plays in their lives as a non-homogenous minority group in a secular society. In addition, the influences of parents’ cultural and religious frameworks on Muslim youth, as well as the impact of school input and processes in Muslim schools, make the attempt at understanding the situation of counselling in Muslim schools complex and challenging.

The researcher’s employment as a counsellor in a Muslim school gave her insight into students’ need for support, in addition to academic progress, due to their multicultural, multiethnic family backgrounds as recent arrivals, and as second or third generation migrants. A second dimension from the researcher’s experience that motivated this study was the school leaders’ perceptions of school counselling. Throughout the period of her employment the researcher would often have to deal with situations of task overload due to the lack of clarity in her role, often seen by the management as a position that is superfluous wherever and whenever the need for extra staff arose across the school timetable. Student issues presented during this period also reflected some underlying barriers to an effective counselling service, such as a general lack of understanding towards the concept and process of counselling, and reluctance associated with seeking counsel from an outsider in certain cultures. It was also postulated that counsellors had a key role to play in Muslim schools in supporting students with transitioning from primary school to high school, and more importantly, from a Muslim school environment to the wider community. It was on these premises that this study based its inquiry.
Research Method and Design

Initially, the study set out to ask: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling services in Australian Muslim schools?* From an Interpretivist symbolic interactionist paradigm this study adopted the approach of a perspectival study, using semi-structured interviews to generate data from stakeholders of Muslim school communities on the subject of school counselling. Semi-structured interview questions were steered by the Discovery-Dream-Design-Destiny (4-D) approach of Appreciative Inquiry’s (AI) framework. Grounded Theory strategies for participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis were employed with the aim of achieving theoretical saturation.

Memoing from the researcher’s reflective journal was incorporated into the study (Punch, 2005) to avoid the issue of breaching anonymity without precluding the researcher’s contribution from her personal experience as a student support staff in one Muslim school at one stage.

The inquiry covered three major cities in Australia with the highest Muslim populations. The data collection commenced with a pilot study in which seven stakeholders from Muslim schools were interviewed. It became evident early on during the pilot study that the focus of the study on counselling was too narrow. Participants’ input indicated that broader issues of wellbeing from an Islamic worldview should also be addressed. This resulted in the expansion of the scope of the study from counselling to student wellbeing. The general research question was thus modified to: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders on counselling and wellbeing support services in Australian Muslim schools?*

The semi-structured interviews were conducted either individually or in small groups of two or three. A total of 56 participants from both consumer and service provider categories were recruited to share their experiences and knowledge on counselling services and wellbeing support for students in Muslim schools with which they were associated. All 18 participant-associated schools offered a curriculum of both secular and religious subjects to students. The data offered perspectives on multiple facets of and in varying depths into counselling and wellbeing support of students in their associated Muslim schools.

Face to face interviews were recorded on a digital note-taker with participants’ written consent (for those under 18 years of age parental consents were also obtained). The interviews were manually transcribed. Pseudonyms and letters from the alphabet were assigned to each participant and their associated schools respectively; the states in
which the schools were located were omitted to ensure anonymity. Using grounded
theory strategies of coding and memoing, the interview transcripts were coded phrase
by phrase initially, then paragraph-by-paragraph as the process progressed, with
memoing when necessary. Coded data were examined, grouped, compared, contrasted
and inducted into emergent and divergent themes, and presented in order of AI’s 4-D
framework, for the development of seven theoretical propositions on *Destiny* in Chapter
Eight.

**Summary of Findings**

Findings of this study were presented in Chapters Four to Eight. Chapter Four
discussed the contextual background of the inquiry. Illustrations of the diverse range of
counselling and wellbeing support services in practice were presented in the form of
vignettes from three participant-associated schools. Chapters Five to Eight were
presented in order of the Appreciative Inquiry’s 4-D framework of Discovery, Dream,
Design and Destiny. Chapter Five - Discovery explored the issues and current practices
on counselling and student wellbeing support services in participant-associated Muslim
schools. Chapter Six - Dream consisted of participants’ views on an ideal student
wellbeing service that they desired for their associated schools. Chapter Seven - Design
described participants’ input in what was thought necessary to materialise their ideals.
Chapter Eight - Destiny presented seven theoretical propositions developed from the
emergent themes identified in the previous analytical chapters. The seven theoretical
propositions are briefly described in the following paragraphs.

**Proposition One** is that some Muslim schools have been products of Muslims’
concerns over their future generations’ faith and economic mobility, and, that their
operations reflect a certain mindset for success, which at times, have inadvertently
compromised students’ holistic wellbeing. This proposition has two sub-propositions:
the first concerns the circumstances that motivated Muslim schools into existence and
how these motivators influence the management of these schools; the second concerns
the school communities’ perspectives for success, and how these impact on student
wellbeing.

**Proposition Two** is that school imams and counsellors are key stakeholders to
raise their school community’s awareness and to facilitate acceptance of professional
and culturally appropriate counselling support for Muslim students, whereas school
leaders have a responsibility over the holistic wellbeing of students including those with
specific and special needs. The two sub-propositions identify service providers who
play a key role in students’ support systems through school, and the schools’ duty of
care with respect to student wellbeing in general, as well as for students with special needs in physical or developmental disabilities, and specific needs associated with students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Proposition Three is that a reformation of student wellbeing services necessitates that schools align the categories of student wellbeing – assets, appraisals and actions – with a student-centred education focus. This proposition has two sub-propositions. The first concerns with the Muslim school’s role in promoting student wellbeing within all levels of the school community. The second sub-proposition deals with schools’ role in aligning school mission with Islamic ethos of care to facilitate students’ holistic wellbeing.

Proposition Four is that Muslim schools considering adopting positive education are urged to understand the major philosophical differences between Positive Psychology and Islam in how wellbeing is viewed. Two sub-propositions deal with the two key philosophical differences: the goal and the route to wellbeing.

Proposition Five is that a holistic approach to facilitate Muslim students’ wellbeing involves a three-directional connection from an Islamic perspective: vertically, inwardly and outwardly. This proposition has three sub-propositions. Each sub-proposition deals with a connection in each direction respectively.

Proposition Six is that pedagogical implications for educators of Muslim students facilitating sustained wellbeing from an Islamic perspective should include: an outline appropriate for students’ developmental stages; specific pedagogical responsibilities; and, key operational practices. Three sub-propositions deal with an outline in reference to the three-directional connections; specific pedagogical responsibilities in modelling, facilitating and fostering; and four key operational practices to be imparted to students.

Proposition Seven is that the prospect to improve student wellbeing in Australian Muslim schools is positive and timely in light of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry. This proposition has two sub-propositions. The first sub-proposition concerns the positive prospects for change; and the second sub-proposition deals with the timeliness for change.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge on counselling and wellbeing support services in Muslim schools in Australia that few researchers have attempted. Due to the Muslim school communities’ cultural and religious frameworks of living, the inquiry was appropriately adapted from the pilot
study to approach the issue of counselling from a more holistic view, inclusive of students’ spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing. As the inquiry progressed and developed to its final form, not only did it offer empirical data on Muslim schools’ counselling services in a Western context, but also its broadened scope was significant in contributing to a discourse that examines holistic wellbeing through a whole-school approach. The direction this inquiry has taken as a result of employing Appreciative Inquiry principles makes it one of the first empirical research studies on issues associated with developing holistic student wellbeing in a Western context in light of Positive Psychology from an Islamic worldview.

Implications of the Findings

The implications from the findings can be explored on three levels: (i) policy, (ii) practice, and (iii) further research, as follows.

Policy

Although the focus of this study is on school-aged students from a particular religious group, the desired outcome is in line with the national commitments to the wellbeing, holistic development and citizenship of young Australians made in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008). The conceptualisation of wellbeing from an Islamic worldview in this study provides timely knowledge that can be utilised to inform education policy makers at micro-meso-macro levels of education governance for school-aged students who are Muslims.

At a micro level, the findings have direct relevance for the Muslim school governing bodies and leaders. Suggestions have been made for individual school governing bodies and those in leadership positions to examine and evaluate their school’s mission, policies and organisational appropriateness for students’ wellbeing development.

At a meso level, state education authorities, such as departments of education, associations for independent schools, and, where available, associations for Muslim schools within each state, can benefit from the findings of this study to consider and develop policies to effect culturally appropriate collaborative initiatives to better support the wellbeing of Muslim youth.

At a macro level, findings from this study provide a birds-eye view of the varying states of student wellbeing and counselling support services in Muslim schools across three states where approximately 90% of Australian Muslims are found. The circumstances that motivated the establishment of Muslim schools that provide hybrid-curricular education, the contextual background and vignettes illustrating the range of
services and their adequacies in supporting students’ wellbeing, all offer insight into the current situation of student wellbeing support and counselling services in Muslim schools. The information provided in this study will very likely be of value to policymaking at a federal level with a focus on mandates and support for schools to include holistic wellbeing as part of their duty of care towards Muslim students under their governance.

**Practice**

What follows from policy evaluation and redress from a macro-micro level is the potential for reformation of practice at the ground level. The three-directional interrelated connections to develop student wellbeing from an Islamic perspective, in particular, lays a foundation for conceptualisation of Islamic wellbeing for teachers and significant carers of Muslim children, in Australia and likely in other Western societies as well.

The findings of this study have developed into suggestions for practitioners and parents in the Muslim school communities to promote wellbeing concepts and habits for Muslim children in their care. The elements conducive to implementation of a school community education process have been discussed. Teachers’ professional learning and practice were explored. A multi-pronged approach through advocacy, education and support for student holistic wellbeing within the school communities has been examined. Interested schools and educators of Muslim children may wish to customise the suggestions made in this study and test drive these ideas to provide follow up reports on their practicability.

**Research**

The implications of findings from this study for research are multiple. From a philosophical viewpoint, this study explored two major differences between Positive Psychology and Islamic worldview on wellbeing and their reference points. On a theoretical level, further empirical studies on the compatibility between the two will complement the findings in this study.

Following from the findings of this study, several studies on a different level of inquiry worth exploring include: (i) the strategies with which young Muslims deal with transition from Muslim schools to further studies and to employment in the wider society; (ii) whether students from religious communities, such as Muslim students in mainstream and non-Muslim independent schools, are adequately supported spiritually; (iii) perspectives of school leaders on the role they can play to improve students’ holistic wellbeing in Muslim schools; and, (iv) a longitudinal case study of the effect of
introducing whole school positive education to a Muslim school, if adopted, over an extended period of time.

**Parameters of the Study**

The specific focus on Australian Muslim schools was purposeful in order to gain an understanding of what was considered culturally appropriate counselling and wellbeing support for Muslim students. The wellbeing and counselling support for Muslim students in the Australian mainstream public and independent schools was beyond the time frame of this study. However, as a reference, this study quoted part of a young Muslim woman’s speech on her experience through an Australian public school, in addition to comments from a number of participants who went through the public school system, to illustrate the need, similar, if not greater, for attention to be given to adolescent Muslim students in the mainstream in support of their Muslim identity, spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing development that is culturally appropriate.

The recruitment of participants was dependent upon willing and interested stakeholders on the subject, rather than seeking extensive representations from each of the participant-associated schools. Therefore some schools were better represented than others. Findings in this study are not reflective of the practices in those schools that did not respond to the invitation to support this study, or had no associated participants to contribute to the data in this study; nor are the findings representative of a generalised description of practices in the participant-associated schools. The theoretical propositions in this study are but interpretations of participants’ experiences and viewpoints through their memberships with some Muslim school communities in Australia, as one would expect of a perspectival study.

**Conclusion**

With close to 50% of the Australian Muslim population under the age of 24, the significance of shaping the identity of young Muslims through schooling, and how they can be supported to become confident and productive members of the Australian community, cannot be overemphasised. Amidst waves upon waves of media and politically incited misconceptions about, and hostility towards, Islam and Muslims locally and globally, and the potential for young Muslims to fall prey to radicalisation in the name of faith, the wellbeing of young people of Islamic faith in Australia has never been more at risk. While Australians’ public awareness of differentiating between everyday peace-loving Muslims and radicalised “Muslims” is on the increase, a deep-seated current of racism still runs in the psyche of some. Individuals may hold different
interpretations on a personal level, but each gesture or event of injury targeted at Muslims impacts negatively on Muslims on a collective level. Responsible agents of this young vulnerable minority population have a shared duty in protecting, guiding and facilitating their balanced development. This study is one attempt at gathering empirical data for better insight into the needs of this group, towards offering adequate and culturally appropriate support for students enrolled in Australian Muslim schools.


guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input.
*Pathfinder International Tool Series*, 2011, from
http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/m_e_tool_series_inddepth_interviews.pdf

about well-being: A qualitative analysis of refugee youth mental health from

Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

seek counselling? *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 44*(1), 34-50.

Event]. Retrieved from
http://diamondsofislam.blogspot.com.au/2012/01/diamonds-of-islam-youth-group-
event.html

Carr, D. (2011). Values, virtues and professional development in education and
teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research, 50*, 171-176. doi:
10.1016/j.ijer.2011.07.004

education. In R. Toomey, T. Lovat, N. Clement & K. Dally (Eds.), *Teacher
Education and Values Pedagogy: A Student Wellbeing Approach* (pp. 75-95).
Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.

Qualitative Analysis.* London: Sage.


Chobdee, J. (n.d.). Seven Dimensions of Wellness Retrieved 26 June, 2013, from
http://wellness.ucr.edu/seven_dimensions.html

Council of Victoria.

Clement, N. (2010). The first pillar of student wellbeing pedagogy: the neuroscience
research. In R. Toomey, T. Lovat, N. Clement & K. Dally (Eds.), *Teacher
Education and Values Pedagogy: A Student Wellbeing Approach* (pp. 15-31).
Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.


Fox, C. L., & Butler, I. (2007). "If you don't want to tell anyone else you can tell her": young people's views on school counselling. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 35*(1), 97-114. doi: 10.1080/03069880601106831


Ihram, S. (2007, 3 March). Education makes a difference [Web log comment]. Retrieved from [http://silmapol.blogspot.com.au/search?updated-min=2007-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2008-01-01T00:00:08:00&max-results=25](http://silmapol.blogspot.com.au/search?updated-min=2007-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2008-01-01T00:00:08:00&max-results=25)


Mattis, J. S. (2002). Religion and spirituality in the meaning-making and coping
experiences of African American women: a qualitative analysis. Psychology of
Women Quarterly, 26, 309-321.
Wellbeing, 4(1), 19-34.
McCary, J. (2005). Individualism and Collectivism: What do they have to do with
counseling? Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development, 33(2), 108-
117.
Psychotherapy in Australia, 9(2), 30-34.
Michael, M. S. (2009). Australia's handling of tensions between Islam and the West
doi: 10.1080/02185370902767599
Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Retrieved
from
http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educ
ational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf.
Multiculturalaustralia. (n.d.). A timeline history of multicultural Australia, from
http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/
Retrieved Aug 2011, from
eministers/john_howard/
Noble, T., & McGrath, H. (2010). The third pillar of student wellbeing pedagogy:
Positive educational practices In R. Toomey, T. Lovat, N. Clement & K. Dally
(Eds.), *Teacher Education and Values Pedagogy: A Student Wellbeing Approach* (pp. 54-74). Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.


Urbis. (2011). Literature review on meeting the psychological and emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people: models of effective practice in educational settings. NSW: Department of Education and Communities.


Yasmeen, S. (2008). Understanding Muslim identities: From perceived relative exclusion to inclusion. The University of Western Australia, Perth: Centre for Muslim States and Societies.


# APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE_PILOT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>What is the best of current counselling practice in the participant’s associated school? <em>(Discovery)</em></th>
<th>What would be the ideal for supporting students’ SSE wellbeing to enhance their performance? <em>(Dream)</em></th>
<th>How could that be achieved? <em>(Design)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ethos of care</td>
<td>What are the best practices within the school’s ethos of care? Why?</td>
<td>What should an ideal school counselling service cover under this ethos of care? How could this ideal vision be realised?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Best support for student wellbeing</td>
<td>What have been considered the best experiences/memories of witnessing secondary students improve their performance at school (school work, attitude, personal development, life skills etc.) when their SSE (spiritual, social and/or emotional) wellbeing was/were adequately supported?</td>
<td>What would be the ideal for supporting students’ SSE to enhance their performance? How could that be achieved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Culturally appropriate counselling</td>
<td>What are the most culturally appropriate aspects of the existing chaplaincy/counselling programs for their secondary students?</td>
<td>What should a culturally appropriate counselling program include? How could this be established?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Role and quality of counsellor in Muslim school</td>
<td>What best defines the role of a school counsellor for students in an Australian Muslim secondary school?</td>
<td>What qualities, skills and background knowledge should this position demand? What will help the Muslim school community appreciate what school counselling can do for their adolescent students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Helping students with transition</td>
<td>What are the best programs in preparing students to make the transitions:</td>
<td>What could best help students make smooth transitions during their secondary school life and beyond? How could the school best support their students in making these transitions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) from primary to secondary school, and</td>
<td>What? How?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) from secondary school to the wider community?</td>
<td>What? How?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2 - PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For purposes of record keeping, data analysis and future contact, your assistance in providing the following information is highly appreciated.

Gender: Male/Female

Country of birth: ____________________

Years in Australia: ___________

Language/s spoken at home: ___________

Marital status (please circle): Single Married

Age group (please circle): 10-18 19-25 26-35 36-45 45-60 61+

Your past and present affiliation/s with Muslim school/s:

• Are you currently affiliated with any Muslim schools in Australia? Yes/No

• Specify your current/past affiliation/s with Muslim school/s:

  Staff member /volunteer/student/parent/ interested stakeholder

  If you circled staff member or volunteer, please specify position or work involved:

  _______________________________________________________

• Number of years affiliated with Muslim school/s: ______________

• Have you had any affiliations Muslim schools overseas? Yes/No

  If yes, please specify name of country: _________________________

For the purpose of following up regarding this interview when required, please provide one or more contact detail/s of your preference:

Email: __________________________

Landline: (   )______________________

Mobile: __________________________

All information provided in this form will be kept confidential.
APPENDIX 3 - GROUP INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. The support you would like to see Muslim schools provide to enhance students’ wellbeing is/are:

a. _______________________________________________________________________

b. _______________________________________________________________________

To achieve this, we need:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

2. Your vision for an ideal counselling service in a Muslim school includes:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Because:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3. The most important aspect/s of an Australian Islamic school counselling service should include:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

The way to make sure this happens is

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Because:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

4. What will help students to make the following transitions easier?

a. From primary school to secondary school:

__________________________________________________________________________
b. From secondary school to the wider community:

5. What effect does the counsellor have on the overall teaching/learning of the school?

In your opinion, what role should the school counsellor play in supporting secondary level students specifically in an Australian Muslim school?

The ideal qualities a counsellor for Muslim secondary students in Australia should include:

How can a counsellor in Muslim secondary school be best supported?

In addition to the points above, do you have any other ideas, suggestions you would like to contribute to this research?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School focus/approach</th>
<th>Question qualification</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compete</td>
<td>Nepotism</td>
<td>Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result focus</td>
<td>Losing the plot</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>Gender issues</td>
<td>Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Sex education</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivistic</td>
<td>Religious obligations</td>
<td>Tokenistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make-shift</td>
<td>Cutting corners</td>
<td>Well developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Double standards</td>
<td>Study focused support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Insecure teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking seriousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibitionist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protectionist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unqualified staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrot and Stick policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Segregation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindset</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pathway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity undervalued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity unsupported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity is quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual is spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-wasters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spreadable/dispensable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put-up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez faire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overkill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dread</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDHPE ineffective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypocrisy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed messages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblivious to cry for help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation of Islamic ethos</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission statements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual rigour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment: Islamic studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counselling and wellbeing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self harm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal ideation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffer in silence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role confusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting roles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear roles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensable role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperation from teaching staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some teaching staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff burn out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissive MH issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumers' desire</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialisation with non-Muslims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity: Australian Muslim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices heard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy on wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy positive school culture/atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naughty kids hurt kids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-judgmental</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender matched</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australianness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassurance: Imams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy: Counsellors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling and wellbeing from Islamic perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic pastoral care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right people right job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers – key stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post HS life preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Counsellors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional qualities and qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for imams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imam and counsellor team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidisciplinary team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value counselling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 5 – EXAMPLES OF PRELIMINARY CATEGORIES

### Ethos of care and spiritual wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Preliminary categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Open Codes (dimensions and properties)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Ethos of care</td>
<td>Islamic knowledge</td>
<td>Focus, Provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ritual practice</td>
<td>Rules enforcement, Provision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual wellbeing investment</td>
<td>Key staff</td>
<td>Religion staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substance</td>
<td>Text, Teaching quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Upliftment, Routine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Satisfactory, Lacking: Sex education, Skills preparation, Intellectual rigour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Allocation</td>
<td>Insufficient, Priority, Lacking seriousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Discipline, Motivation, Skills, Modelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Re-alignment</td>
<td>Initial intent, Curriculum emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Humanistic</td>
<td>Fairness, Respect, Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process focused</td>
<td>Spiritual development, Transformative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modelling values</td>
<td>Good manners, Conduct of teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atitude</td>
<td>Positive, Motivation, Prohibitionist, Protectionist, Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>School atmosphere, Leadership sets the tone, Impact on learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Recognising</td>
<td>Individuals, Concerned, Empathic, Willing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organising</td>
<td>Collective, Team work, System change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilising</td>
<td>Existing strengths, Goodwill, Mobilising key players, Existing human resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Student wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Preliminary categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Open codes (dimensions and properties)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>School support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Provision, Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Approach, Qualifications, right people right job;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic hyper-focus</td>
<td>Monitoring performance</td>
<td>Pressure to perform, Streaming, Low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>Definition of Success</td>
<td>School directed, Parents directed, economic success, tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student needs</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Students’ interest and talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transitioning</td>
<td>Good support, Adjustment academically, physically,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
wellbeing support:
  specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>place of Islamic studies</th>
<th>Relevant topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher appraisal</td>
<td>Qualifications to teach</td>
<td>Expert knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to connect with</td>
<td>students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whole school approach:
  general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advocacy</th>
<th>Importance of student wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>All levels of school community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimising sheikh factor</td>
<td>Key agent for change in Muslim community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whole school approach:
  specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Raising teacher awareness</th>
<th>Grassroots; cooperate; early detection and support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm shift</td>
<td></td>
<td>Behind behaviour problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Junior high school transitioning:
  general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Bonding; alleviate anxiety;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friendship; responsibility; bullying issues;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Junior high school transitioning:
  specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Muslim adolescents’ religious duties</th>
<th>Purification; religious obligations; interplay between rituals, faith and spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decorum</td>
<td></td>
<td>Segregation; immaturity; effectiveness of PDHPE on students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior high school transitioning preparation support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultures in context</th>
<th>Parents’ ethnic cultures; Australian culture; Islamic practices and interpretations;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration know-how</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills to live fluidly between cultures – “change gears”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil rights and responsibilities</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>Knowledge and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and peer support</td>
<td>Mentors; buddy system; support for university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School counselling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Preliminary categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Open codes (dimensions and properties)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>Disciplinary - soft approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solve</td>
<td>“Fix” student’s problem;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role confusion</td>
<td>Conflicting roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Persevere; resign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misconceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weakness of faith; “crazy”; un-Islamic; weakness; outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values given</td>
<td></td>
<td>Luxury; dispensable; superfluous; valued;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting issues</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Adolescents’ wellbeing issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Faith related; Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Range of practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adequacy of service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support for counsellors</td>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential features</td>
<td>Assurance of confidentiality</td>
<td>Trust; access</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum power</td>
<td>Connection; relate; approachable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service providers’ essential characteristics</td>
<td>Values compatibility</td>
<td>Muslim youth issues; guidance in life; directions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and age match</td>
<td>Same gender preference; younger more understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect ability</td>
<td>Empathy; personal disposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counsellors’ roles</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Academic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counsellor’s qualities and skills</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Skills; knowledge; training; experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insightful</td>
<td>Knowledge of Muslim school culture;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim youth issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judgmental</td>
<td>Student concern; deter access</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Job description</th>
<th>Towards school community</th>
<th>Develop policy and procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educate parents, service providers of all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Towards students</td>
<td>Individual counselling: curative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group counselling: preventive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection criteria</th>
<th>Essential skills and qualities</th>
<th>Relevant Australian qualifications and experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td>Familiarity with Australian lingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity with Muslim school cultures</td>
<td>Team player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred skills and experiences</td>
<td>Bi-Multi-lingual</td>
<td>Areas of expertise in counselling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 6 – SAMPLE AXIAL CODING PARADIGM

Core Category

**Improvisation:**

Admin-
- make-shift, compromise qualification,
- losing the plot, cutting corners
- leadership

Teaching –
- insecure teachers (sub-skilled)
- Role Models
- compartmentalisation,
- lacking awareness

Intervening conditions

**Counselling wellbeing**
- tokenistic support
- Non-existent,
- study-focused support,
- role confusion,
- conflicting role,
- unclear role,
- dispensable,
- attitude,
- expectations
- misconception
- inconsistent
- lacking cooperation,
- lacking support

**Strategy**

**Mindset**
- Uni pathway
- Resource allocation
- Extra academic support

**Context**

**Economic mobility**
- Career bias
- Student aspirations: undervalued, under supported

Causal conditions

**Anxiety:**
- compete,
- ranking,
- prohibitionist,
- protectionist,
- overkill,
- Streaming
- Discipline
- Ritual focused
- Rule enforcing

Consequences

**Student wellbeing compromised**
- Denial
- Oblivious to cry for help
- Special/specific needs not addressed
- **Lacking**-
- social skills, integration skills,
- confidence, Undervalued
- A numbers game
- Mishandle behaviour
- Laissez Faire
- Isolation

**Proposition 1**: Proposition One

is that many participant-associated

Muslim schools were improvisations emerging from migrant Muslims’ anxiety over their future generations’ value system and economic mobility, managed from a mindset for success, sometimes perceived as having compromised students’ holistic wellbeing.
WINthrop Professor Anne Chapman  
Graduate School of Education  
Crawley, Perth  
Western Australia 6009  
Facsimile: +61 8 6488 1056  
Anne.Chapman@uwa.edu.au  

16 February 2012

Dear

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:  
Counselling services in Australian Muslim schools

You are invited to participate in a PhD degree research study named above. The research is led by Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman and Professor Marnie O’Neill of the Graduate School of Education of the University of Western Australia, assisted by this study’s research student Aminah Mah.

The research aims to generate theory and principles of practice from the perspectives of stakeholders of counselling services in Australian Muslim schools. Being members of the Muslim community in your state, your participation will contribute valuable information for professional providers including counsellors, administrators, principals and teachers towards providing appropriate counselling services to students attending Muslim schools. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask any questions you may have before consenting to take part in this project.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to gather information from school personnel (principals, teachers, counsellors, and administrators), parents, students (present and former), and community representatives of their perspectives on counselling to gain understandings of what is culturally appropriate for counselling programs in Australian Muslim schools to better support their students.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice. You are also free to withdraw at any time.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to take part in this study, Ms Aminah Mah will conduct a one hour up to 90-minute face to face semi-structured interview with you in small groups or individually if preferred at a place mutually agreed by you and Ms Mah.

The interview will include questions about your understandings and opinions of the existing counselling services in your community Muslim school. You will be asked to share your perspectives on what constitutes a culturally appropriate pastoral care/school chaplaincy/counselling program and how this can help support the needs
of secondary Muslim school students. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder.

**Risks and benefits:** The foreseeable risk to you in taking part of this research is negligible. Although very unlikely, you may find some aspects of school counselling slightly uncomfortable to talk about. Yet your insight on how these issues were/could have been dealt with could be extremely helpful in enhancing the existing counselling programs in Muslim schools.

Benefits to you from an Islamic perspective can be found in knowing that your son/daughter’s experiences and viewpoints have contributed to a service aimed at nurturing future Australian Muslims through supporting the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Muslim students in Australia. Your participation also contributes to the body of knowledge on counselling Muslims in a Western context.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. A pseudonym will be used throughout the report. Research records will be kept securely in the Graduate School of Education which only the researchers will have access to. If you wish to have the digital file of your interview destroyed, we will do so after the interview has been transcribed which is anticipated to be completed within three months of its recording. Once this research has been completed, a summarised copy of your interview will be sent to you for verification if required. It is also possible that the results be published for academic purposes. The data will be kept securely for a minimum of five years from the date of publication before being destroyed.

**If you have questions:** Should you require any further information, or have any concerns regarding your participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact Aminah Mah at 20726644@student.uwa.edu.au, or on (08) 64882390 during office hours, or 0404935647 after hours. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact Prof. Anne Chapman at anne.chapman@uwa.edu.au or 64882387; and Prof. Marnie O’Neill at marnie.oneill@uwa.edu.au or 64882392. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights in this study, you may contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee Research Services at +61 8 64883703 or access their website at [http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics](http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics).

Yours sincerely,

Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman  
(Co-ordinating supervisor)

Aminah Mah  
(Ph.D. candidate)

*Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information sheet and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.*
APPENDIX 8 – INFO SHEET UNDER 18

16 February 2012

Dear

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:
Counselling services in Australian Muslim schools

You are invited to participate in a PhD degree research study named above. The research is led by Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman and Professor Marnie O’Neill of the Graduate School of Education of the University of Western Australia, assisted by this study’s research student Aminah Mah.

The research aims to generate theory and principles of practice from the perspectives of stakeholders of counselling services in Australian Muslim schools. Being a student at your community school, your participation will contribute valuable information for professional providers including counsellors, administrators, principals and teachers towards providing appropriate counselling services to students attending Muslim schools. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask any questions you may have before consenting to taking part in this project.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to gather information from school personnel (principals, teachers, counsellors, and administrators), parents, students (current and former), and community representatives of their perspectives on counselling to gain understandings of what is culturally appropriate for counselling programs in Australian Muslim schools to better support their students.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice. You are also free to withdraw at any time.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to take part in this study with your guardian/parent’s consent, Ms Aminah Mah will conduct a one hour up to 90-minute face to face semi-structured interview with you in small groups or individually if preferred, most probably on the school grounds, or at a place mutually agreed by you, your parent/guardian and Ms Mah.

The interview will include questions such as your experiences, understandings and opinions of the existing counselling services at your community Muslim school. You will be asked to share your perspectives on what constitutes a culturally appropriate pastoral care/school chaplaincy/counselling program and how this can help support
the needs of Australian secondary Muslim school students. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder.

**Risks and benefits:** The foreseeable risk to you in taking part of this research is negligible. Although very unlikely, you may find some aspects of school counselling slightly uncomfortable to talk about. Yet your insight on how these issues were/could have been dealt with could be extremely helpful in enhancing the existing counselling programs in Muslim schools.

Benefits to you from an Islamic perspective can be found in knowing that your experiences and viewpoints have contributed to a service aimed at nurturing future Australian Muslims through supporting the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Muslim students in Australia. Your participation also contributes to the body of knowledge on counselling Muslims in a Western context.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. A pseudonym will be used throughout the report. Research records will be kept securely in the Graduate School of Education which only the researchers will have access to. If you wish to have the digital file of your interview destroyed, we will do so after the interview has been transcribed which is anticipated to be completed within three months of its recording. Once this research has been completed, a summarised copy of your interview will be sent to you for verification if required. It is also possible that the results be published for academic purposes. The data will be kept securely for a minimum of five years from the date of publication before being destroyed.

**If you have questions:** Should you require any further information, or have any concerns regarding your participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact Aminah Mah at 20226644@student.uwa.edu.au, or on (08) 64882390 during office hours, or 0404396764 after hours. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact Prof. Anne Chapman at anne.chapman@uwa.edu.au or 64882387; and Prof. Marnie O'Neill at marnie.oneill@uwa.edu.au or 64882392. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights in this study, you may contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee Research Services at +61 8 64883703 or access their website at [http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics](http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics).

Yours sincerely,

Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman
(Co-ordinating supervisor)  
Ms Aminah Mah
(Ph.D. candidate)

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia. In accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to [research@uwa.edu.au](mailto:research@uwa.edu.au). All research participants are entitled to receive a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
APPENDIX 9 – INFO SHEET GUARDIAN

The University of Western Australia

Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman
Graduate School of Education

Crawley, Perth
Western Australia 6009
Facsimile: +61 8 6488 1056
Anne.Chapman@uwa.edu.au

16 February 2012

Dear

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:
Counselling services in Australian Muslim schools

Your child is invited to participate in a PhD degree research study named above. The research is led by Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman and Professor Marnie O’Neill of the Graduate School of Education of the University of Western Australia, assisted by this study’s research student Aminah Mah.

The research aims to generate theory and principles of practice from the perspectives of stakeholders of counselling services in Australian Muslim schools. Being members of the Muslim school community in your state, your child’s participation will contribute valuable information for professional providers including counsellors, administrators, principals and teachers towards providing appropriate counselling services to students attending Muslim schools. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask any questions you may have before consenting to your child’s participation in this project.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to gather information from school personnel (principals, teachers, counsellors, and administrators), parents, students (current and former) of Muslim schools, and community representatives of their perspectives on counselling to gain understandings of what is culturally appropriate for counselling programs in Australian Muslim schools to better support their students.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If your child decides not to take part or to skip some of the questions, or to withdraw any unprocessed data he/she has supplied, he/she is free to do so without prejudice and is also free to withdraw at any time.

What we will ask your child to do: If you give your permission for your child to take part in this study, Ms Aminah Mah will conduct a one hour up to 90-minute face to face semi-structured interview with him/her in small groups of students or individually if preferred, most probably on the school grounds, or at a place mutually agreed by you and Ms Mah. Your child’s consent will be obtained in addition to your consent as the guardian. The interview will include questions such as your child’s experiences, understandings and opinions of the existing counselling services in his/her community Muslim school. He/she will be asked to share his/her perspectives on what constitutes a culturally appropriate pastoral care/school
chaplaincy/counselling program and how this can help support the needs of Australian secondary Muslim school students. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder.

Risks and benefits: The foreseeable risk to your child in taking part of this research is negligible. Although very unlikely, your child may find some aspects of school counselling slightly uncomfortable to talk about. Yet his/her insight on how these issues were/could have been dealt with could be extremely helpful in enhancing the existing counselling programs in Muslim schools. Benefits to you from an Islamic perspective can be found in knowing that your son/daughter’s experiences and viewpoints have contributed to a service aimed at nurturing future Australian Muslims through supporting the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Muslim students in Australia. Your child’s participation also contributes to the body of knowledge on counselling Muslims in a Western context.

Your child’s answers will be confidential: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. A pseudonym will be used throughout the report. Research records will be kept securely in the Graduate School of Education which only the researchers will have access to. If your child wishes to have the digital file of his/her interview destroyed, we will do so after the interview has been transcribed which is anticipated to be completed within three months of its recording. Once this research has been completed, a summarised copy of the interview will be sent to your child for verification if required. It is also possible that the results be published for academic purposes. The data will be kept securely for a minimum of five years from the date of publication before being destroyed.

If you have questions: Should you require any further information, or have any concerns regarding your child’s participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact Aminah Mah at 20226044@student.uwa.edu.au, or on (08) 64882390 during office hours, or 0404396764 after hours. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact Prof. Anne Chapman at anne.chapman@uwa.edu.au or 64882387; and Prof. Marnie O’Neill at marnie.oneill@uwa.edu.au or 64882392. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a guardian in this study, you may contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee Research Services at +61 8 64883703 or access their website at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman
(Co-ordinating supervisor)

[Signature]
Aminah Mah
(Ph.D. candidate)

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia. In accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures, any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaint about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to ethicalresearch@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
APPENDIX 10 – INFO SHEET PRINCIPAL

Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman
Graduate School of Education
Crawley, Perth
Western Australia 6009
Facsimile: +61 8 6488 1056
Anne.Chapman@uwa.edu.au

16 February 2012

Dear

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:
Counselling services in Australian Muslim schools

You are requested to assist in a PhD degree research study named above. The research is led by Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman and Professor Marnie O’Neill of the Graduate School of Education of the University of Western Australia, assisted by this study’s research student Aminah Mah.

The research aims to generate theory and principles of practice from the perspectives of stakeholders of counselling services in Australian Muslim schools. Your assistance in this research will entail informing and facilitating any number of your staff, students and parents to be interviewed on your school grounds. This will allow participants, to contribute valuable information on counselling services to students attending Muslim schools. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask any questions you may have before consenting to your staff, students and parents to taking part in this project.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to gather information from school personnel (principals, teachers, counsellors, and administrators), parents, students (present and former), and community representatives of their perspectives on counselling to gain understandings of what is culturally appropriate for counselling programs in Australian Muslim schools to better support their students.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If any of your staff member, student or parent decides not to take part or to skip some of the questions, or to withdraw any unprocessed data s/he has supplied, s/he is free to do so without prejudice. S/he is also free to withdraw at any time.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to assist in this study, Ms Aminah Mah will conduct a one hour up to 90-minute face to face semi-structured interview with the participant/s in small groups or individually if preferred, on your school grounds at a time and venue deemed suitable. Individual consent and parental consent (if students are less than 18 years of age) will be obtained prior to the interviews.

The interview will include questions such as participants’ experiences, understandings and opinions of the existing counselling services at your community Muslim school. Participants will be asked to share their perspectives on what constitutes a culturally
appropriate pastoral care/school chaplaincy/counselling program and how this can help support the needs of Australian secondary Muslim school students. With each participant’s permission, the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder.

Risks and benefits: The foreseeable risk to participants in taking part of this research is negligible. Although very unlikely, some participants may find certain aspects of school counselling slightly uncomfortable to talk about. Yet their insights on how these issues were/could have been dealt with could be extremely helpful in enhancing the existing counselling programs in Muslim schools.

Your assistance in this research will contribute to the body of knowledge on counselling Muslim students in a Western context. Benefits to the participants from an Islamic perspective can be found in knowing that their experiences and viewpoints have contributed to a service aimed at nurturing future Australian Muslims through supporting the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Muslim students in Australia.

All participants’ answers will be confidential: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or your school. A pseudonym will be used throughout the report. Research records will be kept securely in the Graduate School of Education which only the researchers will have access to. It is also possible that the results be published for academic purposes. The data will be kept securely for a minimum of five years from the date of publication before being destroyed.

If you have questions: Should you require any further information, or have any concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Aminah Mah at 20726644@student.uwa.edu.au, or on (08) 64882390 during office hours, or 0404396764 after hours. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact Prof. Anne Chapman at anne.chapman@uwa.edu.au or 64882387; and Prof. Marnie O’Neill at marnie.oneill@uwa.edu.au or 64882392. If you have any questions or concerns related to the rights as a school principal in this study, you may contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee Research Services at +61 8 64883703 or access their website at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/human_ethics.

Yours sincerely,

Winthrop Professor Anne Chapman
(Co-ordinating supervisor)

Aminah Mah
(Ph.D. candidate)

Approved to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaint about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hrresearch@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
APPENDIX 11 – CONSENT FORMS

Consent form for persons participating in the current research project

I ___________________________ (print full name) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice. I consent to having the audio interviews recorded.

I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the investigator. The only exception to this principle of confidentiality is if a court subpoenas documentation. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, what the purpose is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research.

I agree that the research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

Your Signature___________________________ Date________________________

Parental Consent

(Required if participant is less than 18 years of age)

I ______________________________ (print full name) give permission to my child _______________________________ (print name) to take part in this research. I understand separate consent is obtained from my child in addition to my consent.

Parent’s Signature___________________________  Date________________________

"Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au

All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project."