

**AL-GHAZALI'S TEACHINGS CONCERNING MASTER-PUPIL
AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE ISLAMIC FAMILY**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Al-Ghazali’s Description Of The Cultural Ideals In Master-Pupil And Parent-Child Relationships, And Identifying Educational Opportunities Within The Islamic Family.....		1
Introduction.....		1
Al-Ghazali’s Ideal Master-Pupil Relationship.....		4
Al-Ghazali’s Master-Pupil Model.....		7
Al-Ghazali’s Ideal Parent-Child Relationship		14
Parents As Educators		16
Children As Learners		21
Summary		22
Comparison Of Key Features Of Al-Ghazali’s Proposed Master-Pupil And Parent-Child Relationships To These Relationships In Contemporary Kuwait.....		24
Background		24
The Master-Pupil Relationship		26
The Parent-Child Relationship.....		29
Summary		30
Comparison Of Key Features Of Contemporary Master-Pupil And Parent-Child Relationships In Both Kuwait And The United States		31
Background		31
The Context Of The Educational Experience		32
Single Gender Versus Mixed Gender Classes		34
Teacher Roles.....		35
Classroom And Home Activities		37
Parental Involvement In The School.....		38
Summary		40
Bibliography		43

Chapter 1

AL-GHAZALI'S DESCRIPTION OF THE CULTURAL IDEALS IN MASTER-PUPIL AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS, AND IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE ISLAMIC FAMILY

Introduction

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 CE) had a great deal to say about the rights and responsibilities of both teachers and learners. He emphasized characteristics that each should possess, he praised both those who teach and those who learn for participating in this act of worship, and he even encouraged scholars to complete their spiritual and intellectual education fully before embarking on a profession. Al-Ghazali prioritized both the important and the trivial subjects, and recommended which kinds of knowledge to avoid completely as they were a waste of the learner's efforts.

In Al-Ghazali's teachings, he placed a strong emphasis upon the ideal of seeking knowledge and devoting oneself to the process. Al-Ghazali's (1997) most comprehensive work was *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [Revival of the Religious Sciences]*. This multi-volume encyclopedia addressed many topics of interest to him, including education. In *Ihya'*, he said: "knowledge will not give you of itself unless you give it yourself utterly" (Vol. 1, p. 62). This suggests that a good education is obtained by a motivated pursuit of knowledge; nothing is gained by a half-hearted, casual acquaintance with the material. This is supported by one of the most important

ahadith, which emphasizes that whatever one does should be done with sincerity. Al-Ghazali asserted that to experience salvation and nearness to God, one must do all things with sincerity (in Al-Manawi, 2001).

Al-Nawawi (in Rabah & Al-Daqaq, 1991) was another medieval Islamic thinker. He, too, wrote that the most important characteristic of the master-pupil relationship is working with sincerity, and that this quality should define the relationship. He acknowledged that it is, in fact, very difficult to be sincere, and cited instances of both teachers and learners who were insincere, to the detriment of both. Al-Nawawi offered guidelines for measuring the sincerity in one's teaching, such as not being jealous if one's student consults with another teacher, and willingness to share whatever knowledge one has.

As a teacher, Al-Ghazali modeled this sincerity to the end of his life. A student came to visit with him as he lay dying and asked if Al-Ghazali had any final wisdom to share with him. Al-Ghazali's advice was to "be sincere;" that is, to do everything properly for the sake of doing a good job – not for some other ulterior motive. Zolondek (1963, p. 15) emphasized that, "the respect which Al-Ghazali enjoyed as a theologian and as a teacher amongst the Muslims, and the sincerity of his teaching, which resulted from his own personal experience, favored the success of his endeavor."

Al-Ghazali began his *Ihya'* (1997) with the importance of knowledge, approaching both teaching and learning with sincerity, and he ended this tome with discussions of death, Paradise, and Hell. In *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali used the term 'sincere' more than 80 times, and the term 'intention' more than 120 times. Al-Ghazali's model for the master/parent and pupil/child described how the right path – being sincere – would lead to Paradise. For example, he advised

teachers to teach not for the salary, but for the glory it brings to God. He discouraged students from doing anything merely for the prospect of material gain.

Implemented successfully, this approach demonstrates Covey's (1997) concept of win-win. When all "members think in terms of mutual benefit, they foster support and mutual respect. They think interdependently – 'we' not 'me' – and develop win-win agreement. They don't think selfishly (win-lose) or like a martyr (lose-win)" (Covey, p. 390). McLaughlin & Talbert (1993, p. 236) cite one teacher who noted that, "I really don't care how they learn it, as long as they learn it ...the object is to learn. If someone can get it across better than I can, fine." This teacher clearly emphasizes that reaching goal – the child learns – is more important than personal gain.

Al-Ghazali acknowledges that keeping one's intention on the goal is often difficult. In this case, the goal is to teach selflessly, without being distracted by external influences. In an ideal society, if everyone operated sincerely, from a win-win position, there would be no wars or conflicts between and within the groups in society. In order to make this concept the springboard from which family members can grow as a unit, this paper suggests that we teach from this perspective, starting on the small scale – the family environment.

Al-Ghazali (1997) recognized that the family unit is one of the most significant and influential organizations in a person's life. He also proposed that one's pursuit of knowledge begins from the moment of birth, and does not wait until the child enters school. He suggested taking advantage of this situation by having the family members teach one another, primarily parents and other adults teaching the youngsters, but also that children often teach their parents, as well. Family education is a reciprocal arrangement, such that knowledge sometimes passes from parent to child, and sometimes it goes from child to parent.

This paper will identify the characteristics of Al-Ghazali's master-pupil and parent-child relationships, then superimpose the master-pupil context over the parent-child relationship, in order to speculate what recommendations Al-Ghazali might have made, had he specifically addressed the topic of education in the Islamic home. His thoughts about education within the home are scattered throughout his teachings. No single document or volume devotes more than a single chapter to this subject. This paper will gather and synthesize these pertinent data in order to facilitate parents developing worthwhile educational programs for their children.

Al-Ghazali's Ideal Master-Pupil Relationship

Because it was his most significant effort, the majority of the information for this study has been gleaned from Al-Ghazali's book, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (1997). The first chapter, "The Book of Knowledge," talks about master-pupil relationships, especially in their social and academic interactions. In another chapter, "Disciplining the Soul," Al-Ghazali discusses good and bad character, "diseases" of the heart, disciplining children, and health information. Some of the stories he used in *Ihya'* will be used to support the recommendations in the model for this study.

By using the master-pupil relationship as a model for the parent-child relationship, families can take full advantage of implementing learning and teaching methods and opportunities within the family context. These are usually found only outside the home as part of one's formal education. In the school context, the relationships and interactions are for a few hours a day, for a few years. Eventually the teachers retire and the students move on to have

families of their own. While children are in school, their teachers may have as much or more influence on them than their parents, since young children spend the majority of their day in school. But the educator-learner context is always present in both the school and the family; there is no day when one “finishes” learning. The anticipated outcome is that families realize and practice that living is more than just eating and sleeping together.

The examples supporting the data use the writings and teachings of Al-Ghazali, who relied upon the *Holy Qur'an* and *ahadith*, as expressed by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Al-Ghazali believed that learning and teaching are the highest forms of worship, which is the first priority for Muslims. Prophet Muhammad placed knowledge on an equal footing with prophecy. He stated that, “the learned men are the heirs of the Prophets” (in Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 1997, Vol. 1, p. 12). Al-Ghazali (1989) believed that this model – the student-teacher relationship – was the path to happiness; when Al-Ghazali ranked members of society, he placed scholars second only to the prophets. Al-Ghazali (1991, p. 16) reported that Al-Hassan Al-Basri noted that Muhammad’s opinion was that “the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr.”

Just as religion requires one’s total allegiance, so, too, does learning. One example of actively seeking knowledge is how one of Al-Ghazali’s students, Sa’ad Al-Khayr, traveled to many countries (e.g., China and Spain), crossing seas and deserts, in order to consult with different *shaykhs* (teachers), and he returned with many unique books.¹ Al-Khayr then taught what he had learned to his daughter, Fatima bint Sa’ad. Fatima ultimately learned enough *ahadith* and *fiqh* (Islamic law) not only to obtain a license (*ijazah*) to teach *ahadith*, but also to

¹ He was such a frequent traveler, in fact, that when people mentioned him by name, they referred to him as Sa’ad Al-Khayr al-Andalusi al-Sini, which means Sa’ad Al-Khayr from Andalus who traveled to China (Al-Dhahabi, 1994).

award the *ijazah* to other students who were sufficiently knowledgeable (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 2001; see also Al-Dhahabi, 1994, 2001). In this example of sharing education within the family, Fatima learned from her father, and she subsequently taught her grandson, Ali Ibn Ibrahim.² This explains several aspects of what we know about the history of education in Islam, and confirms that a Muslim woman in Al-Ghazali's era could be educated and could also be a *shaykhah* (the feminine noun form for teacher).

Thus, first, women were acknowledged to be capable of both learning and teaching, both at the elementary and advanced levels. Second, these women had both male and female students, so there was no shame felt by the many men who had female teachers. Third, some women went even further and became *musnida*³, which is a highly qualified person (feminine form) who can narrate the *ahadith*, as in Fatima's case. Roded (1994) and Tritton (1957) note that not only were men and women teaching and learning from one other, but also that the proximity of the family members creates a natural environment for learning. In addition, the author reports that learned men of the family also brought their young daughters to learn from scholarly colleagues. Thus, not only were they teaching the youngsters themselves, but they were also facilitating access to additional education. These models demonstrate how family members can interact as both learners and teachers.

² An ethnographic content analysis revealed that some scholars (i.e., Khatib Murda and Ibn Al-Hafidh) traveled long distances to consult with Fatima bint Sa'ad in order to discuss such topics. Other scholars, such as Ibn Magreb, have included some of her teaching in their writings (Al-Dhahabi, 1994, Vol. 22, p. 318; Vol. 23, p. 325).

³ This is an obsolete term used to refer to someone qualified to teach *hadith* science (in this case, the feminine form of the word), but it is no longer in common use.

Aboo Zayd (2000, p. 65; see also *Ihya'*) cites scholars who report that for “every glory not emphasized by knowledge, then humiliation is its destiny.” Al-Ghazali’s teachings reflect Islamic philosophy, which is that spiritual knowledge and intellectual knowledge are not mutually exclusive, and many of his educational recommendations still influence the education systems in many Islamic countries.

Al-Ghazali’s Master-Pupil Model

Al-Ghazali encouraged students to complete their spiritual development before committing to the business world, recommending that one be immersed in one’s religious studies. As Al-Ghazali mentioned, “Wisdom is the aim of every believer...” (Al-Ghazali, in Faris, p. 1310). He also admonished students to respect their teachers, and also the teacher to be kind to the students, each learning from the other. A review of classical Islamic literature reveals that Al-Ghazali, (1997), Al-Mansur biallah (2001), and other scholars encouraged both students and teachers to learn from one other, emphasizing that wherever they find good knowledge, they should take it.

Al-Razi, a scholar who preceded Al-Ghazali, was an influential, medieval Muslim physician and teacher of medicine (*Encarta Encyclopedia*, 2001). Al-Razi advocated a particular organization of the classroom environment to facilitate interactive learning. He would arrange the room so that the students sat in rows facing him, with the most senior students closest to him and the least experienced in the outer rows. Ibn Al-Nadim (2001) said that Al-Razi would bring in a patient who would describe his or her condition to the medical students, and the students would try to diagnose and treat the patient. The patient would start with the least experienced

students and continue row by row, until Al-Razi felt that the patient was diagnosed and treated properly. During the process, the students would listen to the dialogues and observe the interactions. If none of the students could help the patient, the patient continued until meeting with Al-Razi, who would diagnose and treat the condition.

This approach allowed a great deal of interaction among the people in the classroom, both teacher-to-student and student-to-student. This hands-on training served not only as a diagnostic tool but also allowed students to observe communication techniques used with patients in order to facilitate effective treatment. Al-Ghazali (in Tritton, 1957, p. 49) noted, “it is better to have small classes than single students,” which suggests that there is much to be gained by interaction among learners. Modern education research has revealed that students learn a great deal from each other (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), and not just from the teacher.

The Islamic historical literature reports that Muslim thinkers came from a variety of races and backgrounds, that Islam does not differentiate among people by race, gender, or socio-economic status, and that family background does not necessarily determine the level of attainable education. For more than 14 centuries, it has been common in Islam for Muslims to learn from any qualified teacher. For example, many Muslim scholars (e.g., Bilal Al-Habashi and ‘Ata’ Ibn abi Rabah) were black and came from very modest social circumstances, but they made many contributions to Islamic education and they earned the respect of their students. ‘Ata’ and Bilal’s teachings are documented in classical Islamic education. In *Ihya’* (1997) Al-Ghazali cites the contributions of Bilal 21 times and ‘Ata’ 5 times. Al-Ghazali was also a poor orphan, but he became a well-known thinker and is still highly regarded today.

Al-Ghazali further emphasized the Qur’anic principle that categorization by race has no place in Islam. For example, concerning inter-marriage, the only true Islamic qualification for a

marriage is that both parties should be willing to accept each other as they are and be open to creating a family. The example that Al-Ghazali used to illustrate this position of race being immaterial was that many darker-skinned males (e.g., Bilal and Suhaib) married lighter-skinned women, which would have been impossible prior to the advent of Islam. Al-Ghazali's proposal was a clear vision to establish the Islamic family using Islamic principles as a cornerstone, and racial discrimination is not an Islamic principle.

Al-Ghazali was not the only person to note the concept of human equality among Muslims. American historian Will Durant (1950, Vol. IV, p. 209) noted that, in Islamic history

...slaves were allowed to marry; and their children, if talented, might receive an education. It is astonishing how many sons of slaves rose to high places in the intellectual and political world of Islam, how many, like Mahmud and the early Mamelukes, became kings.

In another example from Islamic history, Al-Dhahabi (1994) mentioned a story about a king in the Middle Ages named Al-Bakhirzy who educated his slaves in the *ahadith*, and Arabic language and writing, and they became well educated. They wrote 40 books for the king and he even allowed them to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Those slaves made great contributions in Islamic history. This also indicates that education was free, and anyone with a thirst for knowledge was encouraged to pursue it (Muessig & Allen, 1962).

If one examines educational history in Western cultures, it is very difficult to find examples of black scholarship from more than 100 years ago.⁴ In 1954, the US Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, mandated desegregation of US schools. Subsequently – although painfully and slowly – educational opportunities opened to

⁴ In 1965, Malcolm X, an influential Black Muslim, wrote bitterly about the need for Islam at a time when many African Americans felt disappointed. He said that, "I am in agreement one hundred percent with those racists who say that no government laws ever can force brotherhood. The only true world solution today is government guided

non-whites. Yet, many researchers (Oakes, 1995; West, 1993; Lansberg, 1995) maintain that equal education is still not a reality. West reports that equal educational opportunity is still a goal to be reached, not yet accomplished in all 50 states, and notes the need to rededicate our efforts. In both theory and practice, however, Islam specifically indicates that everyone must have equal access to an education.

In terms of respect, Al-Ghazali noted that “A person has three fathers: one who begot him, another who fostered him, and a third who educated him, and the last is the best of all” (Al-Ghazali, in Shalabi, 1954, p. 175). He stresses that one’s conduct should demonstrate respect for one’s teachers. In this context, “fathers” are like teachers; they are also counselors, as was Al-Ghazali. This philosopher wore many hats, one of which was advising or counseling his students beyond their role as students. Parents also wear many hats as parents, spouses, and role models. Al-Ghazali’s role as an advisor comes directly from the Prophet Muhammad, who said in one of the *hadith* that religion is advice. Since Al-Ghazali was, first and foremost, a great Islamic thinker, we can understand that he would embrace the idea of counseling as part of his calling as teacher.

Al-Ghazali suggests that teachers should be kind to their students, treating them like their own children. He asserts that they should encourage good conduct and discipline with sympathy. Teachers should be honest with their students about their progress, not misleading them to think that they know more than they do, and teaching only what the student is able to absorb, in order to avoid teaching subject matter that is beyond the comprehension of the student. Teachers should follow the example of the Prophet, and both teacher and student need to remember that the object of an education is to gain nearness to God. Teachers should exhort the students to do

by true religion – of the spirit. Here in race-torn America, I am convinced that the Islam religion is desperately

well, and rebuke them for misconduct. They should not criticize the subjects of fellow teachers to their students.

Al-Ghazali advised teachers to practice what they teach in order not to confuse the students, and to support their knowledge with practice in order to inculcate the knowledge in the students' minds (i.e., Al-Ghazali suggests that teachers "teach by [their] reputation more usefully than by [their] tongue[s]" (Shalabi, 1957, p. 146).

If the actions of a teacher are contrary to what he preaches, it does not help towards guidance, but it is like poison. A teacher is like a stamp to clay and a student is like clay. If the stamp has no character, there is no impression on clay. Or he [is] like a cane and the student is like the shadow of the cane. How can the shadow of the cane be straight when the cane itself is crooked? God said: "Do you enjoin good to the people and forget it for yourselves? (2:44)" (Al-Ghazali, 1977, Vol. 1, p. 70).

Al-Ghazali believed that a teacher should live "what he teaches and not allow his works to give...lie to his words, because knowledge is comprehended through the mind while it works through the eyes. But those who see with their eyes are more than those who perceive with their mind, therefore when practice contradicts theory, righteousness is frustrated" (in Faris, 1991, p. 152).

Al-Ghazali believed that it was possible to modify one's behavior and improve less desirable personal characteristics through effort and training. He argued that the organic function of religion is to guide people in the refinement of their character. If religion does not control and influence the people's behavior in this case, "then all Prophetic messages, advice, and education would have been groundless" (Asari, 1993, p. 89). Al-Ghazali offered the master-pupil relationship as the first step to modifying one's behavior and improving personal characteristics. He suggests four ways to modify undesirable characteristics:

needed, particularly by the American Black man" (in McNergney & Herbert, 2001, p. 125).

1. One should identify for himself a spiritual guide (i.e., a teacher),
2. One should seek good friends,
3. One should take advantage of one's enemies by listening to what they say about him because they will describe his weaknesses, and
4. One should socialize with different people in society and pay attention to their good manners (Abul Quasem, 1978, p. 87; Asari, 1993, p. 89).

Al-Ghazali's methods of modifying behavior through effort and training contend that one must believe that all evil character traits can be cured through knowledge and action. The cure for vicious conduct is to oppose its cause, so we should investigate the source of the problem in minute detail (see Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 1978, Vol. 3, p. 65; Abul Quasem, 1978, p. 92). As a practical example, if a person were miserly, the remedy would be to recommend that the person make frequent charitable donations (Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, Vol. 3, p. 65).

The relationship between teacher and student is more than just transmitting book knowledge. There are also the subtle elements of how to behave in a way that honors the self, and one's parents and teachers. Al-Ghazali (1951) offered a story that demonstrated the benefits beyond book knowledge. Here, a certain *shaykh* asked his disciple what he has learned in 30 years and the disciple answered that he had gained eight benefits that served him well:

1. doing good deeds because it makes one feel good,
2. rejecting passionate desires and disciplining one's soul to obey God,
3. seeking comfort in spiritual wealth instead of worldly things,
4. being pious because it is more attractive to God than accumulated possessions,
5. being satisfied with what you have,

6. hating none but Satan,
7. being thankful to God because He put us here and we have to appreciate His generosity, and
8. not relying on material goods but trusting in God as He is an excellent guardian.

These benefits are also mentioned in the four great books of religion: the Torah, the *Qur'an*, the Psalms, and the Gospels (Al-Ghazali, 1951, 1997).

Although Al-Ghazali held teachers in high regard, he nevertheless warned students that viewing one's teacher as a role model is acceptable, but that blind imitation of the teacher is not. The role of the student is to seek the truth. He advises students to use their minds to think and learn the truth, and not just rely on the teacher. Al-Ghazali believed that teachers should direct the efforts of the students, but that the student should then take these guidelines and follow their own individual paths to reach the truth, and that students should learn from every school of thought without depending on a particular philosophy or scholar, in order to be fully informed. In practice, Al-Ghazali implemented this concept by researching all four branches of Islamic law to consider what the best approach was to a particular situation.

Both Aristotle, who lived before Al-Ghazali, and Descartes, who lived after Al-Ghazali, embraced the idea of accepting something as true only after considering it. One should not automatically assume knowledge blindly. Al-Ghazali (1989) recommended examining the truth, and noted that whoever does not doubt does not look, whoever does not look does not see, and whoever does not see remains blind and perplexed (see also Young, Latham, & Serjeant, 1990). This is not to say that everything is automatically unreliable, but he wanted students to take the

time to investigate and not just assume that something is as it appears. Al-Ghazali asserted that those who do not know the truth will stay in darkness and error.

Al-Ghazali's Ideal Parent-Child Relationship

In order to integrate the master-pupil model with the parent-child relationship, first we need to look at two things. One, the parents' and children's rights and responsibilities in their interactive relationships, and two, what Al-Ghazali had already covered in his writings briefly touching on the subject of education within the family. Al-Ghazali (in Watt, 1996) illustrated how children imitate their parents, since small children are imitative by nature.

The snake-charmer must refrain from touching the snake in front of his small boy, because he knows that the boy imagines he is like his father and will imitate him, and must even caution the boy by himself showing caution in front of him (p. 42).

Rosenthal (1952) notes the strong influence parents have on their children, and the importance of taking advantage of these opportunities to teach. He reports that children will do even dangerous things, like playing with wild animals, because they have no instinctive sense of self-preservation. That sense is acquired from the parents, who demonstrate when and where fear is appropriate.

Theoretically and ideally, Al Ghazali would say that the parent-child relationship is actually a reflection of the master-pupil relationship; that is, each teacher would treat each student as his or her own child. He also maintained that the parents are the child's first teachers. Many great philosophers have examined the nature of children and how they learn, and have confirmed that parents teach their children, on purpose and inadvertently. Researchers have pointed out that even infants have the magnificent ability to develop self-esteem (Pettapiece,

1992, p. 158). Strom (1989, p. 40) notes the opportunity for early childhood education in the home because “preschoolers respect their parents, imitate them, and are responsive to family guidance.”

Al-Ghazali (1997) felt that the heart of a child is bright, soft, and free from all impressions. Thus, the child is like a lump of clay, and the parents have the opportunity to mold this clay into something valuable. Purification of the soul and acquiring good traits cannot be accomplished without action. Therefore, parents must model the behaviors they want to inculcate in their children in order to demonstrate how to avoid impure habits as much as possible, according to their capacities and abilities.

Historically, Muslims have believed that children need to realize and practice moral and spiritual virtues in order to be good learners. The Islamic philosophy of formation of children offers the essential spiritual matters that can be grasped while the children are still young. Al-Ghazali and other Islamic thinkers have supported a practice of the Prophet’s where, immediately after a child is born, one of the parents takes the infant and whispers in one ear the call to prayer (*adhan*) and in the other ear the announcement that praying is to begin (*iqamah*). This is done to establish from the beginning one of the five pillars of Islam, which is prayer (*salah*). Thus, children grow up practicing many sacred traditions and rituals, and by the time they reach adulthood, they are able to understand these concepts very well. This aspect of Islamic training is still practiced today, particularly in primarily Islamic countries.

Zarabozo (1999) expresses concern that Muslim families living within other cultures are relaxing some of their standards for conduct – perhaps under the influence of the West – and that many of these Muslim children are not learning accountability or that proper moral development is essential (Zarabozo, Vol. 2, p. 738). He emphasizes the importance of being accountable for

one's actions, and notes that proper training of children must start early in order that they know exactly what is expected of them by the time they reach puberty. Anwar (1981) notes that both parents and young people feel that Muslim children show more respect for their parents than English children do, but expressed concern that this advantage could disappear by exposing these children to a Western educational system.

Al-Ghazali cited one of the *hadith* that says, "When a man dies, all except three of his works perish, namely, a permanent endowment for charity, useful knowledge, and righteous progeny that bring honor upon his memory" (in Faris, 1991, p. 22). Al-Ghazali believed that even if a parent dies, the relationship with the children continues in the values the children have learned. The children visit the remaining family members and the parent's peers, and offers prayers on the parent's behalf. For spiritual growth and harmonious social order, all of Al-Ghazali's teachings advise children to give great respect to their teachers, parents, and other adults. He also advised them to seek knowledge gradually, without rushing through it; and that the lifelong goal is to pay attention to the primary object of knowledge, which is the Islamic faith and principles. Happiness in the next life must be the essential aim of any learning.

Parents as Educators

The fundamentals of modern education assert that, "parents must be willing to participate in activities that enhance their role as educators of their own children" (McNergney & Herbert, 1998, pp. 267-268; see also Bennett, Finn, & Gribb, 1999, pp.18-19; Tarazi, 1995, pp. 89-132; Hamby, 1992, p. 63; Beshar, 1995, p. 93; Covey, 1991). Bennett (1992) reports the outcome in a particular school district in New York, where parents from a particular ethnic group were buying

second sets of textbooks for the parents and children to use at home, especially by the mother. In this way, she would be able to facilitate the child's learning. The children in this group excelled in their schoolwork. Even students who began the school year unable to speak English were at the top of their classes by spring. Here, Bennett emphasizes that the "parent is the child's most important teacher, the child's all but indispensable teacher" (p. 66), a theme that is repeated throughout his writings.

Strom (1974) developed the Parent As A Teacher (PAAT) inventory, which is an instrument that can be used to measure critical aspects of a parent's attitudes and behavior that influence child development. Strom (1978, p. 44) proposes that, "the Parent As A Teacher inventory is a composite attitude scale in which individual parents of preschoolers or primary [grade] students describe feelings about aspects of the parent-child interactive system." Strom (1989) reports observing that parents have been led to believe that they are not qualified to teach their children, suggesting that it is professional educators who support that theory. He asserts that, "educators' admission that parents can teach is long overdue," (p. 40) and cites the evidence that preschoolers need not be "removed from their homes to educate them" (p. 42). Strom and Slaughter (1978) describe several learning opportunities for children.

In *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali suggests a protocol to be observed by teachers and students. This study applies the guidelines in this protocol to both parents as educators and children as learners, because good manners organize and foster the growth of families. Even though Al-Ghazali did not specifically direct these concepts be applied to a family's education, his recommendations for teachers and students, which inculcate morality, can serve as guidelines for family members to fulfill their rights and duties.

From a socioeconomic perspective, Al-Ghazali suggests that parents from rich families teach their children the excellence of giving and to be generous, while children from less affluent families should be taught that it is mean and disgraceful to be greedy and not to depend on the generosity of others (Abul Quasem, 1978, p. 98). The *Qur'an* mandates that all people are held to the same moral and behavioral standards, without regard to affluence, and that good manners and morals are as important for the poor as they are for the rich.

The one who does not know that they are poor thinks that they are rich because of their modesty. You may know them by their mark, they do not beg of people at all (2:273).

Al-Ghazali (1997) recommended that these lessons be introduced to children in the home and incorporated throughout the learning experience. Parents cannot wait until the child reaches school and depend on the teacher to convey these lessons, because by then the child won't be socialized to co-exist in the classroom. Functional theory emphasizes the harmony, order, and stability of social contexts. From a theoretical perspective, many of Al-Ghazali's arguments concerning family education resemble those of a functional theorist. Functional perspectives explain how systems stay in a state of equilibrium. When those in higher socioeconomic classes use their resources to help the needy, this redistribution is the natural inclination to return to an equal state.

The parental influence on the child starts very early in life and affects every aspect of the child's being. In *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali directs prospective mothers to eat properly to obtain the most nourishment for themselves and their children. In order to create the optimal environment for the child, Al-Ghazali even advises that if it is necessary to engage a wet nurse, the woman should be pious and consume only lawful food, because that will affect the child's development. The

Prophet Muhammad believes that children take inspiration from their names, and Al-Ghazali encouraged parents to give their infants good names to reflect positive characteristics.

As with teachers, parents should advise their children as much as they can and dissuade them from evil ways with care and caution; with sympathy, and not with rebuke and harshness. The object of education is to gain nearness to God by following the divine precepts of Islam, and the parents should tell this to the child from the beginning. Parents should use soft, encouraging words to inspire their children to love learning and to teach them good manners. They need to protect their children from inappropriate associations. Al-Ghazali recommended using exhortations and traditional stories to emphasize the value of doing charitable works and to teach basic Islamic legacy.

As with teachers, Al-Ghazali notes that the parents' reputations must be impeccable in order that the child perceives the parent to be a good and consistent example. The child is a reflection of the parent; unattractive and undesirable traits in the parents will be mirrored in the behavior of the children. In order that parents be qualified to perform this function, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that it is important to get "rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God, and to constant recollection of Him" (Watt, 1996, p. 54).

A hermeneutic analysis of Al-Ghazali's works reveals that the majority of his arguments are grounded in the immutable sources of Islam, the *Holy Qur'an* and the Prophetic legacies. He asserts that all moral manners aim to purify souls as individuals, and to reinforce social ties for the family as a whole. For parents to have a compelling impact on the development of their children, they need to observe the child's manners carefully in order to tailor punishments and rewards to the specific acts.

Al-Ghazali affords fathers more authority than mothers, especially in terms of educating the child. He discusses alternative educational means, such as fear through warnings and rebukes (Gil'adi, 1992, p. 64). These methods give the mother less authority regarding punishment and rewards. One example of this philosophy is what leads to such comments as, "Just wait until your father gets home..." This is a particularly ineffective concept if the father travels or is out of the home when the child commits the offense.⁵

Although Al-Ghazali proposes that the father bears primary responsibility for his children's intellectual and spiritual education, in Islam it is the responsibility of both parents. The Prophet Muhammad repeats the instruction that the mother be involved in the child's education: "Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges. The ruler who has authority over people is a guardian and is responsible for them, a man is a guardian of his family and is responsibilities for them; a woman is a guardian of her husband's house and children and is responsible for them" (in Al-Bukhari, 1999). Thus, it is important for all family members to respect and value the contributions of the other family members.

To summarize Al-Ghazali's perception of parents as educators, one finds that families need to provide an adequate learning environment that is also a nurturing place with clear religious purpose. Family education must be based on a fundamental concept of parents' responsibility. Parents are responsible for training their children and implanting in their hearts and minds the seeds of good traits. These enable them to practice the obligatory devotional acts such as praying and fasting in order to become conscious of their own choices. Parents need to safeguard their children by preventing them from hearing vile anecdotes and associating with

⁵ Al-Barjas (1983) suggests that Al-Ghazali's intent was not, in fact, to limit the mother's authority over the children, but rather that each parent approach discipline from a different direction. He proposes that Al-Ghazali

bad friends: “A boy should be directed not to join bad company” (Al-Ghazali, 1978, Vol. 3, pp. 75-76).

To explain his understanding from a different perspective, Al-Ghazali (1951) compares the role of an educator to that of a farmer (*harith*). The farmer takes the undeveloped resources (dirt, seeds, water) and combines them to make food. In this same fashion, the parent/educator takes the child/student and the lessons and puts them together to convey knowledge and help the child to grow. As part of the process, the farmer removes the weeds and thorns and dead leaves to help nurture the growing item. When the parent/teacher fosters appropriate interpersonal relationships, corrects inaccurate ideas, and demonstrates what is good and what is not, this further nurtures the child’s good character. The primary responsibility for children’s education and integrity falls on the shoulders of the parents, and the parents will reap what they sow. If they neglect the child’s upbringing – that is, do not remove the weeds – they will bear the burden of the sin of neglect (Al-Ghazali, 1978, Vol. 3, p. 77).

Children as Learners

In childhood alone, Muslims recognize that children progress to maturity through many discernible steps. An ethnographic text analysis identified a wealth of literature in Islamic Arabic resources devoted to children and childhood (Gil’adi, 1992). Classical dictionaries show that the Arabic language includes some 40 different terms to describe infants and children and the various stages of their development. Al-Ghazali used some of these terms in his writings to

meant that the father should be the person who metes out the punishment, and that the mother should use reasoning skills, to balance the impact of discipline imposed on the child.

talk about these life phases.⁶ This indicates the richness of Arabic language and that Muslim educators were aware “of the uniqueness of children and some stages of their development might have their roots also in the indigenous Arabic culture” (Gil’adi, 1992, p. 117).

Al-Ghazali recommended that the teacher/parent consider what the student is capable of learning. Therefore, we should consider the abilities of the student in terms of these phases when developing or assigning curriculum to young students. In terms of individual differences, parents should remember each child’s ability and capacity for learning. In this light, children should not be taught things that are beyond their comprehension. Al-Ghazali encourages educators “to speak to men by way of illustrations and examples as they were ordered to speak to men according to the degree of their intelligence” (Al-Ghazali, *Ihya’*, Vol. 2, p. 25).

Roded (1994) notes that transmission of knowledge from adult to child within the family, especially for the education of girls, was not uncommon in medieval Islam, and that the transmitters were both men and women. She comments that this was a natural occurrence because of the proximity of the relatives, and that many of the young women who began their education at home were so fascinated by learning that they subsequently sought further education with other teachers.

Summary

If we were to compress all of Al-Ghazali’s ideas concerning the master-pupil relationship and, by parallel, the parent-child relationship, we might choose the *hadith* that Al-Ghazali brought to the people: “Whoever does not respect elders and be kind to children does not belong

⁶ Some of these terms are ‘*janin*’ (infant), ‘*ghulam*’ (about seven years old), and ‘*bulugh*’ (adolescent). For more

to us (Muslims)” (Al-Bukhari, 1997, p. 157). All of Al-Ghazali’s teachings, advice, writings, and philosophies are based on this idea that older people are valued for their wisdom and need to be respected, and that children need to be treated kindly so that they will model us as adults and grow up to be kind to their children, just as Prophet Muhammad respected elders and showed kindness to children. The cycle repeats itself generation after generation.

We have shown that the master-pupil relationship can be superimposed over the parent-child relationship, so that, in most cases, what Al-Ghazali recommended for teachers and their students could also apply to what he would have recommended for parents and their children. For example, Al Ghazali makes note of how teachers are models for their students. In the same way, we can adapt this statement and say that parents are models for their children. Further, he would say that teacher, and thus parents, must practice the kind of behavior they want their pupils (children) to model.

Even though Al-Ghazali lived hundreds of years ago – and the companions of Prophet Muhammad even before that – the basic concepts of the *Qur’an* remain the core of Islam, with the *hadith* providing daily guidance for parents, teachers, and children. The most critical concept that Al-Ghazali offered for all professions, not just teaching, is to do all things sincerely. Be genuine in all you do. In education, this gives the opportunity for both the teacher/parent and student/child to experience unconditional love in a win-win situation.

Chapter 2

COMPARISON OF KEY FEATURES OF AL-GHAZALI'S PROPOSED MASTER-PUPIL AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS TO THESE RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY KUWAIT

Background

The educational institutions in Al-Ghazali's day were much different than the schools in Kuwait today. In medieval Islamic countries, boys were taught in the mosque and other school settings, and girls were educated mostly in their homes. Today in Kuwait, both boys and girls attend public and private schools and have comparable academic and elective opportunities, although the students are still segregated by gender. Children attend coeducational kindergartens in separate facilities, but once they progress to elementary school, girls attend classes in all-girl schools and boys attend classes in all-boy schools. Kuwaiti girls have a somewhat different secondary level curriculum based on the assumption they will marry and have children, so they are offered more domestic courses such as housekeeping, child development, and sewing, although these subjects are also taught at home.

Table 1

Genders in Education: Numbers and Percentages of Students, Teachers, and Classrooms in Kuwaiti Elementary Schools (Grades 1-4), 1995-96 School Year.

Students

<u># Male</u>	<u># Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% Male</u>	<u>% Female</u>
46,809	47,035	93,844	49.9	50.1

Teachers⁷

<u># Male⁸</u>	<u># Female⁹</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% Male</u>	<u>% Female</u>
2,367	4,646	7,013	33.8	66.2

Classrooms

<u># Male</u>	<u># Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% Male</u>	<u>% Female</u>
1,560	1,549	3,109	50.1	49.9

NOTE: In the 1995-96 school year, there were 483 males and 2,672 females enrolled as incoming college freshman education majors at Kuwait University. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education and Higher Education recently decided not to accept new elementary education majors of either gender because there are more than enough elementary teachers to fill the current teacher positions.

Traditionally, male Kuwaiti students have had exclusively male teachers and administrators and females had female teachers and administrators. Today, because many

⁷ The source document for the information on teacher headcount (KNCESC, 1996) indicated that there were 6,993 total elementary teachers in this school year. The source document for the information on number of students and number of classrooms (KMP, 2000) indicated that there were 6,989 total elementary teachers. This difference of <1% is not considered significant for the purpose of this comparison.

⁸ Of the 2,367 male elementary teachers, 1,678 (70.9%) were Kuwaiti and 689 (29.1%) were non-Kuwaiti.

⁹ Of the 4,646 female elementary teachers, 4,171 (89.8%) were Kuwaiti and 475 (10.2%) were non-Kuwaiti.

employed females in Kuwait prefer to be teachers, some male elementary schools do have female teachers and administrators, in which case the entire staff and faculty would be female [Kuwait National Commission for Education, Science, & Culture (KNCESC), 1996; State of Kuwait Ministry of Planning (KMP), 2000] (see Table 1). School administration is national (Kuwait Ministry of Education and Higher Education) and curriculum is standardized nationwide.

The Master-Pupil Relationship

Al-Ghazali felt that setting the 'rules' for the relationship, so to speak, enabled everyone in the relationship to work together well, since each one knew what was expected of himself and others. With that in mind, he addressed a relationship that was dear to his heart: that between a teacher and his students. Al-Ghazali's model for student-teacher relationships is still being used in modern Kuwait. Because Al-Ghazali's faith, language, and culture are similar to those of the Kuwaiti people, many of Al-Ghazali's models are still acceptable today. Parents are still required to teach their children Islamic ways from birth, and many Kuwaiti teachers interact with their students as if they were their own children.

Al-Ghazali recommended that teachers not only be intellectual models for their students, but that they have strong moral and social relationships with them as well, both inside and outside the school. Saif (1990, p. 70) mentions that, in modern Kuwait,

...when teachers enter the classroom, they carry with them not only their books, papers and chalk, but also many socially influenced beliefs, thoughts, and expectations about suitable [behavior], values, and careers for boys and girls.

Saif concludes that these expectations have a great influence on the master-pupil relationship. But this relationship has undergone a dramatic change. Formerly, teachers were closely scrutinized – not only professionally, but also personally – before being hired. Students were expected to hold the teacher in very high esteem. Today, there is more of an emphasis on professional development and less on moral character. This is not to say that students need not respect their teachers, but there is less of a sense of reverence (Ashraf, 1985). One might ask whether the contemporary master-pupil relationship is disintegrating or merely in a state of metamorphosis? Is this relationship collapsing altogether, or merely shifting to meet the needs of cultural change?

In Al-Ghazali's era, the teacher maintained strict control over the learning experience and did not invite the involvement of the parents. In Kuwait today, although the parents are not as involved as much as in some Western cultures, the parents do interact with the teachers. They expect to be kept informed about their children's learning, and they support the teachers' efforts.

In Al-Ghazali's day, once the class was in session, nobody would think to interrupt until class was over unless there was an emergency. The *shaykh* was the authority and anyone seeking his attention would have to wait until the session was over. This is an interesting contrast with education today, where teachers in Kuwait and many other countries note that there is a seemingly continual stream of interruptions from administrators, other teachers, parents, and students, and that they consider a day with few of these disruptions an ideal day.

The master-pupil relationship in the middle ages was different than today. In Al-Ghazali's era, *maktab* students had one *shaykh* (teacher) during their studies. The *shaykh* might have over 300 students, but he would still recognize them and sometimes even have affectionate nicknames for them. He knew his students so well that he could often predict a likely outcome

of the student's life. For example, Al-Ghazali once reported that he had left a young man named Ali ibn Al-Musalam in Al-Sham (Damascus) who had been accompanying him on his travels in Damascus. Al-Ghazali predicted that once this student reached adulthood, he would receive glory and prestige as a teacher. As Al-Ghazali predicted, Al-Musalam did, in fact, become a teacher in the same place that Al-Ghazali had taught and was also assigned to other schools, and eventually Al-Musalam became a grand *mufiti*¹⁰ (one who is qualified to deliver a legal judgment). Although modern Kuwaiti teachers make every effort to get to know their students, they have a great deal of administrative work that occupies their time, reducing the amount of time they can spend with students out of the classroom. In modern Kuwait every classroom has more than one teacher,¹¹ too, so it is difficult to sustain a close relationship between teacher and student.

Al-Ghazali directed that teachers of one subject not belittle or disparage the value of other subjects. Although certainly not a universal practice, there are teachers in Kuwait today who disregard this concept and denigrate the value of other areas of study. For example, there are some teachers who believe that music is not an appropriate subject, and who openly discourage their students from participating in music lessons. Some of the more conservative Muslims avoid music, and that is their right. But they have been known to make disparaging remarks to students whose parents are less conservative who are allowed to attend music classes. When a teacher tells a child that something the parent allows is bad, it can be confusing to the

¹⁰ The classical Islamic literature indicates that there were many terms used in Islamic administrative jargon to refer to different levels of achievement, some of which are no longer in common use. These terms designated the rank and knowledge level of students, teachers, and policymakers. Some examples are *mufiti* (someone who delivers a legal judgment), *mu'id* (a repetitor), *mufid* (one who imparts useful knowledge), etc. (see Makdisi, 1981).

¹¹ Kuwaiti children do not have a single teacher for all subjects, as in the US. Different classes are taught by different specialists (math, language, etc.).

child, so the teacher should either keep controversial opinions private or take them up directly with the parents.

The Parent-Child Relationship

As mentioned above, many of Al-Ghazali's ideas concerning the parent-child relationship are still admired in Kuwait today. Parents try to be kind and good role models for their children. In Al-Ghazali's time, it would appear that the parent-child relationship was stronger than today. The father was responsible not only for building the character of his children, but also for helping them to develop skills during their early years. Parents often learn from their children, and children naturally emulate their parents (Muessig & Allen, 1962). The parents' level of education also had a great influence on children, both then and today (Saif, 1990).

As did his medieval Roman peers, Al-Ghazali and other Islamic medieval thinkers advocated that fathers were primarily responsible for their children's education, although he didn't deny the mother the opportunity to participate in the learning experience. In Kuwait today, while the mother usually has more time to devote to their schooling than the father, the education system in Kuwait requires that both parents be involved in their children's education (Al-Houli, 1999).

Summary

Al-Ghazali's educational philosophies encompass more than just schooling; rather, they speak of a search for learning. Culturally, there are many similarities between Al-Ghazali's cultural ideals and life in contemporary Kuwait. The values are essentially the same, and are reflected both in school and at home. Logistically, however, there have been some changes as Kuwait's educational system expands in the modern era. The qualities sought in teachers, for example, correspond closely to those admired in Muslim teachers through Islamic history. For example, in the 1996 *National Report on the Development of Education in Kuwait* (KNCESC, 1996), the published criteria for hiring teachers included that the teacher be of good morals and repute, have good oral and written communication skills, and be healthy.

Today, there is more of an emphasis on professional development than before, but this does not compromise the intent to hire faculty who are morally and personally admirable people. The Ministry of Education (KNCESC, 1996, p. 165) notes that, "Pre-service training...will not enable him to carry out his work adequately for the duration of his service. Consequently, in-service training constitutes an important factor in promoting the teacher's standard, ensuring his development and raising the level of his profession." There have also been technological advancements in education that Al-Ghazali could not have foreseen. The key observation, however, is that in those areas where changes and improvements have been made, the new ideas do not conflict with Al-Ghazali's teachings. This ability to modernize without discarding the older resources is what keeps education in Islamic countries consistent.

Chapter 3

COMPARISON OF KEY FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY MASTER-PUPIL AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN BOTH KUWAIT AND THE UNITED STATES

Background

The concept of public access to free education is important in both Kuwait and the United States. Both countries strive to provide an affordable, comprehensive education for their children. In the US, this education extends through high school, and in Kuwait the government subsidizes all education through an undergraduate college/university degree. Both countries also have private schools, but for the purposes of comparison, we will include only public educational institutions in this study. For the purposes of this section, and because adults' influence is greatest in younger children, this section will focus on education and family life for elementary-age children in both Kuwait and the US. This paper will only consider those aspects of the Master-Pupil relationship in the US educational system that are universal, since there are almost as many approaches to teaching as there are teachers in the US.

The Context of the Educational Experience

In Islamic education, moral and spiritual development is more important than strictly intellectual pursuits. In Kuwait, even in a seemingly unrelated class, such as biology, not only is the usual material presented but support for the concepts being taught are provided from the Islamic religious texts (the *Holy Qur'an* and *ahadith*) whenever possible. Al-Ghazali (in Bazzun, 1997) mentioned that the teacher should 'up-bring' the learner, then teach him. In Kuwait, the government entity that oversees the educational process is the Ministry of Upbringing and Teaching, and the overall mission of this ministry is to oversee both the moral and intellectual development of the entire child throughout the school day. In the United States, there is a separation of church and state, so values are still taught, but there is no connection made to religious or spiritual themes. Students are encouraged to be of good character and display such traits as fairness, self-control, responsibility, honesty, and compassion. Bennett (2000) advocates incorporating these personal virtues in all areas of curriculum and that these characteristics should be expected of all teachers and students throughout the school day.

From an ethnographic point of view and analyzing classical Islamic literature, one might conclude that Kuwaiti teachers have a great Islamic legacy, which offers many features to apply to various situations. There are many stories in Islamic history about the teacher/parent-student/child relationship that have been in place for many years. This enables Kuwaiti teachers to evoke their roots and teach them to their students using a variety of media (e.g., storytelling, videotapes, booklets, etc.). In *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali offered many stories from throughout Islamic history to support his assertions. In the United States, teachers have a comparatively short history to draw from, so they have fewer historical stories to call upon.

Another interesting observation is that US teachers tend to be more casual in their relationships with their students. At the secondary level, some teachers even allow their students to call them by their first name, and others invite students into their homes. In the more formal Kuwait educational environment, you would never find a student addressing a teacher by first name – even if the student is older than the teacher. In Islamic culture, young students address their teachers as *shaykh* (teacher). Students are directed to show respect and deference to the teacher in such practices as always walking behind the teacher. These concepts have been in practice for centuries and have been clearly stated in Islamic classical educational literature (see Al-Nawawi, 1988, p. 368).

In the US, educators have a wealth of support systems available to them. On the federal level, there is the US Department of Education. This federal organization publishes a wide variety of resources and materials on virtually any subject a teacher or administrator could need. There are also departments of education and other governmental organizations at the state, district, and local levels. Professionally, teachers are supported through unions, professional organizations, and curriculum developers. Schools often have parent-teacher organizations to facilitate parental involvement in the school and its programs. There are also many educational programs offered by private entities, such as reading and storytelling time in children's bookstores and libraries. These public and private organizations have a great influence on family education and they support parental involvement in early childhood education.

In Kuwait, there is the national Ministry of Upbringing and Education, and schools are functionally operated at the district level. The textbooks and curriculum are developed at the national level, but the government publishes very few other resources to aid the process. There are only a handful of organizations to support educators and parents.

Single Gender versus Mixed Gender Classes

Kuwaiti children attend public and private schools and have comparable academic and elective opportunities, although the students are segregated by gender. This segregation is established due to religious requirements, and is uniform throughout Kuwait and many other primarily Islamic countries. In the US, virtually all public schools are coeducational; the gender make-up of the class is established by local demographics. Some courses may be segregated by gender (e.g., physical education, health education), but federal law mandates that all classes and opportunities offered to one gender have to be offered equivalently to the other. This includes after school sports and other extra-curricular programs. Faculty, administration, and counseling staff may be male, female, or both, and are hired on the basis of qualifications without regard to gender.

There is some concern that males and females in certain US classroom environments are being treated differently, sometimes in subtle ways. This is not to say that it happens in all classrooms, but there have been observations of students encountering different responses from teachers (see DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; and others). DeMarrais and LeCompte note that there is some concern that this is manifested in disciplinary techniques, quantity and quality of master-pupil interactions, and differences in communications, and that this is unrelated to the gender of the teacher. "School interactions reinforce the social messages that females are inferior" (DeMarrais & LeCompte, p. 315). Because males and females are educated separately in Kuwait, students do not encounter these differences in master-pupil interactions, although they still experience subtle gender-related messages.

Saif (1990) pointed out examples of segregation and favoritism issues in Kuwaiti teaching materials. For example, in one math problem, a man buys a car, not a woman, while a woman goes shopping, not a man (Saif, p. 75). The message is that the tradition is that the male is the important person in life and the woman is relegated to domestic roles (reflected in the examples used in math textbooks), and this value system goes back to much earlier times – even before Al-Ghazali – when patriarchy was not questioned. All of the math texts Saif cited were written by men and approved by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education.

Teacher Roles

Some Islamic teachers “tend to regard themselves as authority figures rather than as partners in a learning experience” (Szyliowicz, 1995, p. 418), and some Kuwaiti teachers hold this same perception. Teachers mostly rely on rote memorization, and a good student is not the one who presents his own ideas but the one who can repeat the content of the lecture or textbook verbatim. This is admittedly not the most effective or successful approach for all subjects, but many researchers are concerned that other educational methods featuring more student-teacher interaction will compromise the essence of Islam of respect for authority figures which needs to be maintained in education.

Kuwait’s fourth graders earned the lowest scores among the 26 nations participating in the math testing on the 1995 TIMSS, and Alabdilajader (in Al-Qabas, 1999), an educational researcher in Kuwait, places much of the blame for this poor outcome on teaching methods which emphasize and evaluate students’ memorization rather than their ability to use what they have learned. Teachers do not generally encourage students to be resourceful or use the libraries

or computers to seek information. There are few public libraries and organizations that encourage students to learn and practice their educational experiences. Lack of technology in the educational environment is also creating difficulties for both students and teachers.

In the United States, students are not encouraged to just absorb information like a sponge, but to seek it, process it, and apply it to varying situations. Dewey (1997) and McNergney and Herbert (2001, pp. 390-391) report that “teachers want students to analyze and synthesize data to construct knowledge about a specific concept or idea,” and emphasize that students are “not passive recipients of information; rather, they are active ‘creators’ or ‘inventors’ of knowledge. Burns (in McNergney & Herbert, 2001, p. 398) suggests establishing a learning environment which stresses helping children be effective learners; giving students choices, which helps motivate them; focusing on facts and emphasizing reasoning, which are not mutually exclusive; and talking less so that the children can talk more. One can see many educators in the US practicing the old proverb “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” (in Freeman, 1998, p. 60). Thus, US students not only learn facts, but they also learn to be resourceful and self-sufficient. This is a sharp contrast with Kuwaiti teachers, who merely provide the information to the students, who are expected to memorize the material; they don’t learn how to manipulate the data or how to apply learning from one situation to another. The Kuwaiti teachers may, in fact, be familiar with the proverb, but it is not evident in their teaching style.

Kuwaiti teachers have far fewer opportunities to actually interact with the students. There are generally no question-answer periods and no exchange of information between the teacher and students. Because much of the rest of the teachers’ time is committed to administrative work, there is very little time for teachers and students to get to know each other.

This contrasts not only with the US model, but also with a recent study published by the US Department of Education (1999) on the educational system in Germany, which observed that a warm and friendly relationship between teachers and students exists when students spend most of the school day with one class teacher and, thus, have many opportunities to develop a close relationship. Contemporary Kuwaiti elementary students study the conventional courses, in the same class group and room, but have different teachers for different subjects, unlike the US elementary model, where there is far more master-pupil interaction and teachers teach all subjects. It is noteworthy that some US researchers (e.g., McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996) suggest that the single-teacher model may not work for all classroom environments. They cite teachers who mention that sometimes diversity in the classroom challenges policy adherence because the teacher is so involved with adapting the program to meet all of the students' cultural needs that communication with some students is compromised. This would not be a problem in Kuwait, however, because of the essentially homogenous culture.

Classroom and Home Activities

In Kuwait, students are the recipients of the information and the teacher is the deliverer of information. The students are not encouraged to either teach each other or learn from each other. In the US, even in kindergarten the children often take turns presenting information, such as discussing current events or explaining little experiments they have conducted. Good communication techniques and openness to input and feedback on the part of the teacher give the child more opportunities to learn.

In teaching children, many parents in both the US and Kuwait expect their children to be given homework as part of the learning process. And both countries have overachieving parents who do their child's homework because they are high achievers themselves (Al-Houli, 1999, p. 98; McNergney & Herbert, 2001). Teachers in both countries emphasize that the work needs to be done by the student, however, encouraging the parents to help not to do the work itself. Children learn through meaningful practice. Both at home and at school, the adults need to model the behavior to teach the children to be resourceful and diligent, one step at a time, so that when these children become adults, they can take care of their daily needs. At home, this also teaches the child to be a responsible citizen.

Parental Involvement in the School

Many educators note that parental involvement in their children's education contributes to a stronger parent-child relationship (Lareau, 2000; Al-Houli, 1999; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). In the US, it is not uncommon to see parents volunteering in classrooms, the school library, and other places in the school facility. Many parents take advantage of these opportunities in order to have a chance to interact with their child's peers. For those parents who want to be involved but not directly in the classroom, volunteering to work in the library at their children's schools allows the parent to participate in the educational environment while maintaining an observer's perspective on the experience. This still supports stronger parent-child educational relationships, as well as parents' education (McNergney & Herbert, 2001).

A national report on the development of the educational system in the state of Kuwait (KNCESC, 1996) mentions that teachers have observed a weak connection between home and

school, and that parents are less involved in their children's education. They attribute this to a lack of programs to attract and encourage parental involvement in school affairs and, in some cases, a lack of confidence on the part of the parents that they are able to contribute to the education process. Al-Nashmi (1995) notes that some Kuwaiti parents seem to be retired from educating children. The concept seems to be that their job is done and that it is now the schools' responsibility to teach them.

While the invitation to participate in US public schooling is extended to "parents," for the most part this means the mother. The US Department of Education actively encourages fathers to participate, and even suggests programs and practices to nurture paternal participation (US Department of Education, 2001). Some of the barriers men perceive to participating, such as employment responsibilities, are difficult to overcome. The government also acknowledges that distance can be a factor because they assert that the children in 82% of divorced families live with the mother, which impedes the fathers' ability to interact with his children on all levels, not just at school. There is also some concern that availability is not the only factor determining parental involvement. Researchers have noted that the gap between parents' intentions (i.e., I'd like to participate) and their actions (i.e., I am able to participate) can also be sourced in lack of knowledge (real or perceived) and lack of skills (real or perceived) (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996).

Lortie (1975) found that teachers, for the most part, welcome the involvement of parents in the educational experience, particularly if a student is not doing well. The teachers do, however, emphasize that they prefer to remain in control of the classroom experience and dislike spontaneous involvement, which they see as disruptive. The teachers in Lortie's study also saw communication with parents as essential to the education experience.

Kuwaiti parents are far less involved. While parents are welcome to sit quietly and observe from the back of the classroom, there is no interaction with the child or classmates. There are virtually no opportunities for parental involvement at school facilities except as a field trip chaperone or PTA member. Thus, Kuwaiti parents have fewer opportunities to learn about their child's friends. This concept of familiarity with the associations maintained by one's children is very important for Muslim parents. In both the US and Kuwait, mothers are involved in their children's school experience more than the fathers, mostly because mothers are more available than fathers. Because of Kuwaiti culture, however, teachers often prefer to interact with the parent who is of the same gender as the teacher (Al-Houli, 1999).

Summary

Both countries have evidenced their commitment to affording a comprehensive education to the general public, although the priorities and practices sometimes differ. In both countries, students come away from high school, for instance, with about the same intellectual knowledge: math, language, science, physical education, and so on. The differences are that the Kuwaiti students also receive a thorough introduction to their religious practices, traditions, and history. The primary religion in Kuwait is Islam, and it is incorporated throughout the educational experience. In the US, by contrast, there is not only no national religion, but the law prohibits overt religious practice as part of a public school education.

By the time they complete high school, Kuwaiti students have been educated in single gender classrooms since first grade. All academic and extracurricular activities are segregated by gender. The teachers and administrators in the school are usually of the same gender as the

students, although there are all-male elementary schools with all-female faculty and staff. In the US, children generally attend whichever school is closest to their homes, without regard to gender, and virtually all classes are coeducational. Extracurricular activities are either coeducational (e.g., those where gender and ability are less important, such as a language club) or equivalent activities are provided for both males and females (e.g., where physical ability could deter participation, such as an athletic team).

Teaching styles are very different in these two environments. Kuwaiti teachers are seen as providers of information and students are the recipients. Although there are a few Kuwaiti teachers who allow the children to work in small groups, the majority just stands in front and addresses the students until class is over. In the US, teachers are seen as showing the way to the knowledge, but not just giving it to the students; students learn to seek and process the information for themselves. Breaking into small groups to work cooperatively on projects is a common part of the school day in the US.

Both countries encourage the parents to be involved in their children's education. This includes helping with homework, providing extra learning opportunities, and chaperoning field trips. In the US, it is common to find parents volunteering in the schools and interacting with the students throughout the school day. In Kuwait, however, teaching is primarily left to the teachers and the parents are involved at home, helping with homework and projects.

Teachers and parents in the US have access to an abundance of governmental, professional, and community organizations to facilitate the education of children. There are many US educational organizations devoted to supporting both teachers and parents to enhance and personalize their relationships with their students and children. Although the concept of

supporting early childhood and family education is just as important in Kuwait, and the field is growing rapidly, there are far fewer of these resources available to Kuwaiti parents.

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