

# Al-Bushra *Feature*



A Service of Dar al Islam



*Dr. Mohammad Shafi, Chairman of Dar al Islam, opened the conference*

## Educational Conference Draws International Audience

One hundred thirty five Muslim educators from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada met March 14 – 17 at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The conference was characterized by challenging presentations at a high intellectual level and spirited discussions among the fully engaged conference participants. This made for a scintillating atmosphere in which to face difficult and sometimes depressing realities. The conference examined issues ranging from the spiritual and moral development of children, through the consideration of the development of the Islamic Curriculum to the methods used by America's elite private schools to teach the students who go on to become the leaders of the nation. The conference concluded with a public forum at a packed Convocation Hall, the largest auditorium on the UT Campus, where a crowd of over 1700 gathered for an evening entitled "Beyond Schooling: Building Communities where Learning really matters."

The lecturers at the conference were John Taylor Gatto, Hamza Yusuf Hanson, Abdullah Trevathan, and Karima Alavi. John Taylor Gatto is one of the foremost voices for educational reform in the United States. Abdullah Trevathan is Head Teacher (principal) at the Islamia Primary School in London, which he founded together with the former pop star Cat Stevens, now Yusuf Islam. Karima Alavi is the Director of Dar al Islam's Teachers Institutes. There was also a panel discussion at the conference where representatives from

Montessori and Waldorf Schools together with representatives from the Home-schooling movement, outlined their alternative approaches to education.

The conference was organized by the Imam Zarnugi Institute on Education, a group of Muslim educators in Toronto. Institute logistics ran smoothly and the seasoned conference team worked tirelessly to insure its success. Dr. Mohammad Shafi, Chairman of Dar al Islam welcomed participants to the conference, and gave the final, ecumenical prayer at the public forum. Dar al Islam was a major sponsor of the conference. Something of the seriousness of the conference may be judged by the 200-page reading package sent to conference participants in advance of the conference in order to prepare them for the conference itself and to establish a common frame of reference upon which the conference presentations could build. Along with the reading package sent to conference participants was an article entitled "A Vision of Islamic Education," by Dawud Tauhidi. This article was an edited excerpt from the work sponsored and guided by Dar al Islam on the Tarbiyah Project.

Beyond the motivational and networking benefits of the conference, a new vision of Islamic Education in North America began to emerge. This vision is new only in the sense that it is very different from the existing models of

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Audience filing into Convocation Hall

## "Beyond Schooling" Fills Convocation Hall

Convocation Hall was filled by capacity crowd who turned out on a snowy Saturday night to hear Hamza Yusuf and John Taylor Gatto address the topic "Beyond Schooling: building communities where learning really matters." Mr. Gatto spoke for just under an hour, weaving together the threads of the historical development of modern compulsory schooling to show its fundamental incompatibility with the development of truly educated individuals. Imam Hamza Yusuf placed the issues of education in a moral and spiritual context and delivered a stirring call for action and individual responsibility. Both talks were enthusiastically received.

Mr. Gatto's address amounted to an abstract from his 310,000 word *An Underground History of Schooling*, to be published in the spring of 2001. He showed how the gathering momentum of the Industrial Revolution and Social Darwinism combined in the 1870's with educational techniques imported from Prussia resulted in the notion of compulsory schooling. The Captains of Industry, Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Rockefeller and Henry Ford made use of academics at Harvard and other Institutions to detail both the rationale and methodology of this new approach. The move to compul-

sory education was a fundamental shift away from emphasis on educating the individual to fulfill his potential towards training the individual to be a compliant tool of industry and government. In order to succeed at this task, the removal of the children from the home for extended periods, the extension of childhood beyond puberty, segregation of children by age groups, and stratification of age groups by numerical ranks based on --Assessment Tests were seen as essential. Mr. Gatto's presentation painted a complex picture of the roots of the system that has resulted in the educational malaise of today.

Hamza Yusuf noted the disturbing violence in contemporary schools, the lack of respect of elders, and the short attention spans of today's youth. He spoke of the manner in which schools and television serve as methods of social control. He also called attention to the responsibilities of parents towards their children, and set the educational project in a moral and spiritual context.

Both talks were enthusiastically received. Mr. Gatto was impressed with the Muslims he met during his participation in the educational conference and at the public event. As he walked out into the hall just before the event to have a look at the crowd, he expressed his surprised pleasure at seeing such a large gathering on a Saturday night to consider an intellectual topic. He remarked with a wry expression that he thought only rock concerts drew crowds of this size.



## Distinguished Educator Addresses Muslim Conference

During the Toronto conference, John Taylor Gatto addressed Muslim Educators in sessions on “The Educated Person,” and “Teaching the Leaders: How America’s Elite private schools teach their students and what we can learn from them.” He also addressed a public forum on the history of compulsory education in the United States and Canada, as well as taking part in a panel discussion on issues including assessment, deschooling, corporatization of education, home schooling, and the effects of technology.

Mr. Gatto was named three times as New York City Teacher of the Year. He climaxed his teaching career as New York State Teacher of the Year. He quit teaching on the OP ED page of the Wall Street Journal in 1991 while still New York State Teacher of the Year, claiming that he was no longer willing to hurt children. Later that year he was the subject of a show at Carnegie Hall called “An Evening With John Taylor Gatto,” which launched a career of public speaking in the area of school reform, which has taken Gatto over a million and a half miles in all 50 states and 7 foreign countries. He has been included in Who’s Who in America from 1996 on. In 1997 he was given the Alexis de Tocqueville Award for his contributions to the cause of liberty.

His books include *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (1992); *The Exhausted School* (1993); *A Different Kind of Teacher* (2000); and *The Underground History of American Education* (2001).

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Islamic Schools patterned after state-run schools with simply the addition of classes in Arabic and Deen. Its roots are in our own classical tradition, which emphasized the knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and prosody in the language arts, and of mathematics and astronomy in the sciences. Our classical model emphasized physical education in the form of swimming and archery and horseback riding, all of which have fundamental life-lessons to teach. Our classical model recognized the importance of the mother as the first madressah. As Hamza Yusuf pointed out: “Imam Ali was home-schooled!”

The enthusiasm of conference participants was such that the initial planning for follow-up conferences began even before this conference concluded. The intention is to call additional non-Muslims active in the educational reform movement in the United States to assist us in creating a new model for Muslim education. Muslim representatives from California, Chicago, and New Jersey were all requesting to be chosen as the site for the next conference. John Taylor Gatto, our distinguished guest educator may have best summed up the conference. He said that he travels extensively making presentations of his work, most recently to China. He said that never has he had the pleasure of working with such an intelligent, awake, and engaged group of educators. He was clearly touched by his experience among the Muslims.



*Abdul-Rehman Malik, Co-Cordinator of the conference speaks with Dar al Islam's Karima Alavi before one of*

### Conference Sessions

- What is at Stake and Why are we Here?
- The Spirit of Education: Teaching and Learning the “Living Tradition”
- Defining Institutional Value
- Teaching in the Footsteps of the Prophet
- The Magical Child: the Spiritual and Moral Development of Children
- Developing the Islamic Curriculum
- The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Survey of Mainstream Curriculum Resources on Islam
- Rediscovering the Seven Liberal Arts
- Reflection on an Educated Person
- Educating the Heart: Community Service as Curriculum
- Teaching the Leaders: How America’s elite private schools teach their students and what we can learn from them
- Open Panel Discussion
- Charting the Future of Islamic Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



# Beyond Schooling

Building Communities  
Where Learning Really Matters

Wednesday, March 14 - Saturday, March 17, 2001

Sponsored by Ihya Productions, Dar al Islam and the Zaytuna Institute in conjunction with the MSA at the University of Toronto



*Abdullah Travathan, Head Teacher of London's Islamia School, speaks with Sr. Inayet Sahin, who is taking her Master's Degree in Educational Philosophy*



*Dr. Shafi speaks with student during a break.*



*Hamza Yusuf converses with John Taylor Gatto before a Panel*

For more information about Dar al Islam, contact us at our Virginia Offices (703) 385-9383 or our Abiquiu Program Site (505) 685-4515. Additionally, we receive email from both our web sites: [www.daralislam.org](http://www.daralislam.org) and [www.islamamerica.org](http://www.islamamerica.org).

## Internships Awarded

During the course of the education conference in Toronto, two sisters enrolled in the Graduate Institute for Education at the University of Toronto sought internships with Dar al Islam. Omaira Alam and Sabreen Bhalagamwala must complete a month-long internship at an institution working within the education field as part of their required curriculum. After reviewing their resumes and interviewing the sisters, Dr. Shafi agreed to the internships

Both sisters are active in Islamic activities. Sister Omaira has attended several Deen Intensive programs and serves as the Vice President of the National MSA in Canada. The sisters will be working at the Fairfax offices of Dar al Islam during the month of May 2001. They will assist us with a meeting being held that month of women supporters of Dar al Islam, coordinating our activities with those of the nascent Council of Islamic Schools in the Washington, DC metro area, constructing a web-site for a national Deen-Intensive working group, designing a regular internship program for Dar al Islam, and other activities.