

hel
 global network player authority PewDiePie guilt god Leis Play anael undead writ fanzentic meariatization Skii contest
 game rule system representation gameplay data WGW ble sing hob hils jeior face body fight trope pe lingame PS PVI digital
 religion gane analysis The Last of Us death resurrection funeral rules virtual identity curppriest genesis clai wedding
 simulation ludology narrative immersion community symbol salvation mag Xbox 360PVE



Ma Nishtana: Why is this Night Different? Photo by Gabriel McCormick.

Special Issue

Teaching with Games. Formative Gaming in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics

edited by

Tim Hutchings

Issue 19 (2023)

Teaching with Games. Formative Gaming in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics.

Introduction to the Special Issue

by Tim Hutchings, 1

articles

A Case Study of Teaching Complex Skills in Philosophy Through Games. *Are You Flourishing?*

by Karl Egerton, 19

Ma Nishtana: What is Jewish About Jewish Games?

by Jessica Hammer, Gabrielle Rabinowitz and Ben Bisogno, 52

Re-Imagining Christian Education Through Neurodivergent Fellowship, Play, and Leadership in Online Videogaming

by Erin Raffety and Maria Insa-Iglesias, 80

"This is a Zombie Apocalypse – it's an Entirely Different Situation." Teachers' Deductive and Inductive Framing of Digital Games in Ethics Education

by Tobias Staaby, 115

reports

Triple Fun! Pedagogy, Play, and Parent Involvement in Religion-Based Games

by Arwa Hussain, 144

The Aetherlight. A Case Study of the Formational Potential of a Game

by Philippa Isom, 158

interviews

Playing to Grow. Roundtable Interview on Games, Education, and Character

by Owen Gottlieb, Matthew Farber and Paul Darvasi, 178

Report

Triple Fun! Pedagogy, Play, and Parent Involvement in Religion-Based Board Games

Arwa Hussain

Abstract

Lil Banoon is an online venture started in 2021 by two sisters of the Dawoodi Bohra community, whose flagship products are two board games; *Triple Fun* (2021), and *Ilm Street* (2021). This paper will utilize an autoethnographic methodology, drawing on my own experiences of playing these games with my children, to show how games are being adopted for didactic purposes within the Bohra community. As a parent and educator, I reflect on the process of playing these games as a family, how my children perceive and learn through these two games, as well as the impact of these on parents and educators. I argue that such games foster creativity, provide children with opportunities to explore ideas, and improve developmental skills while also exploring the challenges of incorporating games into our religious curriculum. These games form just one part of a larger focus on the development of teaching aids for religious pedagogy within the Bohra community and Islamic communities in general. I present how the creation and dissemination of these religious games is located within a specific pedagogic and religious environment where Muslim parents seek to introduce new pedagogies to inspire a love of religion against Islamophobic and racist sentiments.

144

Keywords: Dawoodi Bohras, Ethnography, Islam, Pedagogy, gameenvironments

To cite this article: Hussain, A., 2023. Triple Fun! Pedagogy, Play, and Parent Involvement in Religion-Based Board Games. *Gamevironments* 19, 144-157. Available at <https://journals.suub.uni-bremen.de/>.

One of the biggest struggles for me as a parent has been concerning the religious education of my two boys. We belong to the Dawoodi Bohra community which places great emphasis on the religious education of their children. The Bohras are a

community of approximately one million, residing in more than 40 countries across the world (The Dawoodi Bohras n.d.). The Da'i al-Mutlaq is the head of the community, and the incumbent is the 53rd Da'i, Dr. Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin (The Dawoodi Bohras n.d.). Bohras have distinct cultural practices, food, dress, rituals, religious schools, mosques, language and script, and way of life. They also have a well-established system of elementary *madrassahs*, religious schools, and the four higher education institutes of Al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah (Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah n.d.), where children of the community are taught both secular and religious subjects by qualified teachers.

When I moved to Canada almost four years ago, my older son was four and had just started *madrassah*. There being no teachers in the community in Montreal, we started lessons online, which soon became an exercise in frustration. This was just a very initial stage of his religious education, where he was learning the basic Arabic alphabets, small *duas* (prayers of invocation, supplication or request) and so on, but most of it involved rote memorization and repetition. He was happy enough to listen to stories of the Prophet Mohammad, his companions, and other such religious stories, but everything else was just boring. As time went on, I soon realized that I had to do something as my child was starting to resent this learning and this resentment would bubble over into anything religious. This is when I turned to social media to find solutions. One of the first pages I came across was called Tarbiyat Teaching Aids (Mariya n.d.) by a fellow community teacher and mother in Alberta. These were simple, easy-to-use teaching aids specifically for the Bohra community which included printable files, visual posters and banners, and other activities and games that were meant to assist parents in the religious education of their children in more interactive and fun ways.

The distinct culture, language, and religious education system of the Bohras have resulted in many Bohra women developing resources catered specifically to the children of the community which include religious games, aids such as flashcards, banners, and activity kits. The materials are designed to foster creativity, provide children with opportunities to explore and express ideas, and improve developmental skills. Blogs and social media accounts showcase ideas on how to utilize these resources in daily religious education. The instructions incorporate existing learning pedagogies into religious education to develop an experiential learning environment aimed at nurturing and grounding religion into children's daily lives. The central curriculum followed in the community's madrasas and schools helps provide uniformity and structure in the creation of different products. At the same time, they facilitate the creation of online networks for mothers and families to share their experiences and exchange ideas and resources.

146

One such venture is Lil Banoon (2022) started in 2021 by two sisters based in Mumbai and the UAE whose flagship products are three board games and a board book. The games are *Triple Fun* (2021) (the focus of this paper), *Ilm Street* (2021) (*ilm* meaning knowledge); and *All Over Hind* (2022) (Hind being an abbreviation of Hindustan, the Persian word for India) and they were some of the first religious teaching games built for the community. The business is based on Instagram, but they also have a YouTube channel, and provide ideas through both platforms on how to tailor the games for different ages and how to incorporate them into education learning. The idea for this game was developed as part of a teacher training course at the Zainabiyah Institute of the community (a Bohra-run institute located in India which provides training for community teachers) as teaching aids which the sisters eventually developed into a game based on their own childhood experiences of playing board games with their parents.

Triple Fun is a card game that is modelled on *Monopoly Deal* (Hasbro 2008) which contains a pack of 91 cards, a reference card, and instruction sheet. The cards are three categories, the first contains numbers in Arabic from one to 30, the second category contains the corresponding names of the numbers in Arabic, and the third category has the names of the 21 Fatimi Imamsⁱ that are collectively called as the Aimmat Tahereen (The Dawoodi Bohras n.d.). It can be played two ways: tailored towards younger children is a memory game where children can match numbers to their correct number names, and second is the strategy game for older children to make card sets of three to beat their opponents while using action cards. The memory game is won by the player who makes the most matches at the end of the game.



Figure 1. Screenshot of *Triple Fun* from Lil Banoon's Instagram Page. © Lil Banoon.

In the second game called the *Triple Fun* strategy game, only numbers until 21 are used because there are 21 Imams whose names are known. The card sets constitute the number cards, the corresponding name card, and the name of the Imam who corresponds to that number in the reference sheet. Action cards consist of *Exchange a Card*, *Sneak a Card*, and *Just Say No*, which are self-explanatory. Each player can play up to three cards in each turn and can only have seven cards at the end of each turn, if they have none left, they can pick up five cards instead of two at the start of their turn. The player who makes three sets first, wins the strategy game.



Figure 2. Screenshot taken from Lil Banoon’s Instagram Page showing the strategy game cards. © Lil Banoon.

We first started playing *Triple Fun*'s memory game as part of our Saturday *madrassah* lessons with another friend. Both children are eight years old and at this stage

expected to know the numbers and the name equivalents, but they did not, so I had to help them read and remember. We started with ten numbers only to make it easier for them and help with memorization. Both children picked it up pretty fast and by the third round were ready to add the numbers until 20. They still needed occasional help to read the names of the numbers and reminders that they had turned over the correct pairs and thus could claim them.

My son also played the memory game with either me or his father a few times and only required occasional help with locating the equivalent name and number pair. However, he refused to play it alone which I thought would help reinforce the memorization, and instead preferred the competitive nature of the game playing against someone else. This preference resulted in his reliance on us to remind him of the pairs and not memorize them. The memory game also got boring after a while especially when they memorized a few of the number pairs but were reluctant to play further since they did not see the use of this memorization.

The *Triple Fun* game was more challenging and required a lot more parental involvement since the children did not have the names of the Imams memorized and nor were they willing to read themselves using the reference card provided for assistance, even if it was more engaging than the memory game. They enjoyed using the action cards and playing against each other but had to be guided in how to use them and reminded to use them strategically. They particularly needed assistance making the pairs because they did not remember which cards were supposed to go together. I also played alone with my son a few times but needing my help resulted in neither of us enjoying the game and thus discontinued the play indefinitely.

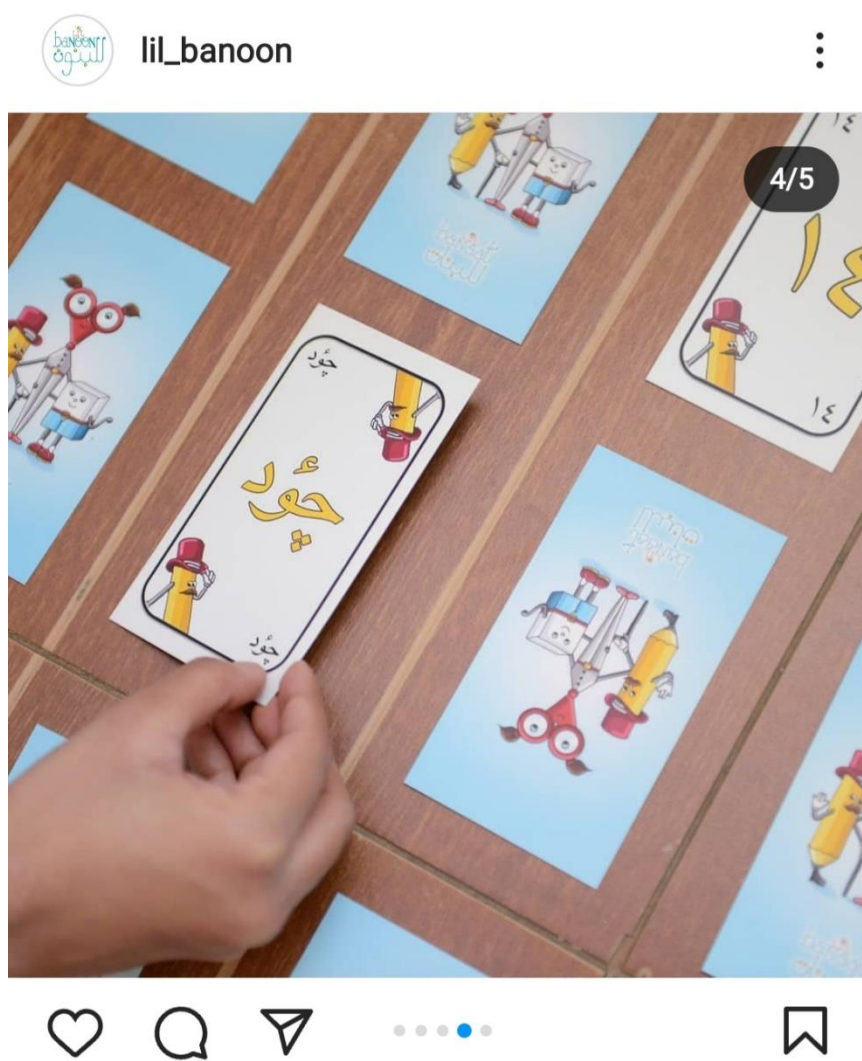


Figure 3. Screenshot from Lil Banoon’s Instagram Page showing the layout of the memory game and a card being turned over that says fourteen in the Arabic language. © Lil Banoon.

The *Triple Fun* game was particularly helpful in memorizing the order of the Imam’s names when my son started learning a particular *dua* that lists all of the names. The cards and the numbers helped him with visualization of the order, and he was able to memorize the *dua* very easily. He also struggles with recall after memorization and said that the cards helped him with the order and thus recalling the *dua* when asked to recite it. This use of the game has not been suggested by the makers but was something that we made use of for our religious learning.

A few struggles have emerged through the process of trying to incorporate games into our religious learning. This is a personal perspective where I see the potentials in the game and outline our challenges based on our positionality as parents. For one, the games often require a high level of parental/adult involvement which at times is not always possible, particularly in my household. The reliance on parents also takes away the enjoyment of playing the game from my child because he has to rely on the competition/other player to help him through the game.

Another challenge is that knowing this a religion-based learning game also takes away the joy of playing the game because my child tends to think of it as learning and not play. This understanding also comes from traditional pedagogies followed other times in this process of religious learning especially during the madrassah classes where play is not incorporated into the learning and thus my child does not make the association when it happens occasionally. I have only started using games in our learning for a few months so it will take time for him to associate learning with play when engaging in religion-based games. Bado-Fralick and Norris (2010, 7) agree that even though religious board games are often marketed as fun, their function of education, proselytization, or instilling moral values in children, results in play becoming work for children.

Another challenge is that the age recommendation for these games often does not apply to children whose learning has been delayed due to different factors. In the case of my son, since he has done religious learning only at home and through Zoom classes, which have neither been consistent nor regulated, has resulted in learning delays. At this stage where he would be expected to be able to read the name on the number cards as well as the names of the Imams, he cannot do so independently, which then leads to the struggles described above. Although I can see the potential

of developing his reading skills through the game, it can only happen if he is willing to put in the effort, and not rely on me for reading the cards for him.

Although, I am aware that incorporating more games into our religious learning would be of great benefit, finding the time to play them with my child is a struggle for myself. Other parents that I have talked to, including the two mothers who created this game, do not have these challenges. Based on reviews on Lil Banoon's Instagram page, their games are well-received and popular and both teachers and parents find them fun and enjoyable in teaching their kids about religious concepts. Many parents who homeschool, like Farida Baxamusa of @bringsjoy_official on Instagram (Baxamusa 2021), absolutely love the game and have incorporated it into their family game night. Her children are also young so while they can independently play the memory game, she mentions that they need help while playing the *Triple Fun* game. She finds that games like these really help in introducing new concepts and strengthening memorization for children through active engagement. A *madrassah* teacher, Ruqaiya (ruqkish 2021), also reviews the game adding that she often plays by herself in between work breaks as memory games are a great brain exercise. Many other *madrassah* and teachers in Bohra schools have found these games to be helpful in engaging children in religious concepts through play as shared in the customer review section of the Lil Banoon Instagram page.

There are a lot of other games and aids created by different Bohra women for religious learning. However, most of the games are either board, card, or dice games based on physical play and there are no digital games created yet, which can be attributed to negative views of screen-time. These women incorporate all aspects of life into their products with a particular focus on language learning. Their aim is to create a holistic lifestyle rooted in religion where children consider it as a natural part

of their lives. They allow children the time and space to consider religion as a natural part of their lives and embedded in every aspect of it. This also enables an acceptance that comes from love instead of coercion. Kika Productions is a content and product creator which also has a YouTube channel that teaches children concepts like cleanliness, gratitude, patience, and contentment through their rhymes based on religious guidelines. They also apply different teaching methods to religious learning such as incorporating sensory methods and nature hikes, and even focus on events like Earth Day or International Women’s Day as opportunities to teach children what their faith tells them about taking care of the planet or women’s rights.

Encouraged by the entrepreneurial orientation of the Bohra community, these women set up small online businesses preferring the social media platform Instagram due to its accessibility and vast reach to disseminate their products and ideas (Hussain 2022). The dissemination of these products is facilitated by the diasporic nature of the community which ensures a global market and enables cross-border collaborations. Most of the creators themselves are based in one or more countries and are often migrants who maintain regular ties to their home community as well. Most of them also have distributors from the community who approach them and stock products from multiple vendors which cut down on shipping costs for buyers and advertising costs for the creators. The annual gatherings of the community on occasions like the ten days of Moharramⁱⁱ and others which are attended by members from all over the world also provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to showcase their products at exhibitions or funfairs. They also provide opportunities for collaboration and networking with other Bohra women entrepreneurs, which then leads to the formation of strong online networks on platforms like Instagram (Hussain 2022). Although engagement is low on the platforms themselves, the creators say these online connections greatly help them, through word-of-mouth referral and in-

person exhibitions.

These creators, located among a wider network of Islamic games and teaching aid creators show that the creation of these stemmed from a need for parents to introduce their children to religion and the Arabic language in creative ways in societies where they are in the minority and provide content that aligns with their values. One such creator, Hafsa of the *Mama Teaches Me* blog, says on her page:

“For us, we don’t teach Islam as a subject – instead we try to nurture Islam into our way of life, so our children are grounded in who they are from a young age. There are so many ways our children can access their faith, but sometimes we might find age-inappropriate resources or stories with difficult language or Islamic concepts that are introduced way too early.” (Hafsa n.d.)

Another says that modeling religion and expressing our own love and joy for Allah is much more important than teaching religion to children through fear and wrath as exemplified in the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad.

154

Many of these creators are based in countries like India, the United States, Norway, Canada, etc. where insistence on secularism combined with Islamophobia was affecting the way their children approached and practiced their faith, particularly school-aged children, and these parents wanted to reinforce their own beliefs and cultural values. In an article on how Muslim parents are dealing with talking about this with their children, one parent says that their concern is that children might step away from their faith entirely in face of discrimination. With younger and younger ages being exposed to these issues, parents do not want to introduce religion through authoritarian pedagogies, which would only drive them further away. Another parent says that she wants to model the way her parents established the foundations of a solid understanding of religion and God which helped her deal with

being a veiled women around the time 9/11 happened. More and more parents opt for Muslim schools in order to accommodate ethno-religious identities and minimise harms of racism for their children. However, not everyone can afford these schools, which is why many parents rely on such teaching aids and resources for teaching their children (Zine 2008, 230).

This paper initially began as a review for a specific game but soon evolved into thinking about the reasons that games for religious pedagogy are needed by Muslim parents. Bado-Fralick and Norris (2010, 104-105) in their book *Toying with God* say that such games and toys are simply examples of contemporary lived religion in a post-modern world. Religions, including Islam, are part of the lived experiences of people and the sacred is not a separate realm. Play has always been a part of religious pedagogy and the phenomenon of teaching religious concepts through play within Islamic communities is one that deserves further study.

References

Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah, n.d. A warm welcome. *Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah*. Available at <https://jameasaifiyah.edu/about/a-warm-welcome/>, accessed 12 February 2022.

All over hind, 2022. [board game] Lil Banoon, Lil Banoon.

Bado-Fralick, N. and Norris, R. S., 2010. *Toying with God*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

Lil Banoon, 2022. *Lil Banoon*, [Instagram]. Available at https://www.instagram.com/lil_banoon/, accessed 12 February 2022.

Baxamura, F., 2021. *bringsjoy_official*, [Instagram] 5 October. Available at https://www.instagram.com/p/CUo15Egr6_a/, accessed 12 February 2022.

The Dawoodi Bohras, n.d. About the Dawoodi Bohras. *The Dawoodi Bohras*. Available at <https://www.thedawoodibohras.com/about-the-bohras/>, accessed 12 February 2022.

Hafsa, n.d. About us. *Mama Teaches Me*. Available at <https://www.mamateachesme.com/about/>, accessed 12 February 2022.

Hussain, A., 2022. Bohra digital entrepreneurship shows how religious communities can help women thrive. *The Conversation*. Available at <https://theconversation.com/bohra-digital-entrepreneurship-shows-how-religious-communities-can-help-women-thrive-191049>, accessed 12 February 2022.

156

Ilm street, 2021. [board game] Lil Banoon, Lil Banoon.

Mariya, n.d. *Tarbiyat teaching aids*. Available at <https://tarbiyatteachingaids.com/>, accessed 14 February 2022.

Monopoly deal, 2008. [board game] Hasbro, Cartamundi.

ruqkish, 2021. *This two-in-one card game is a great way to familiarise yourself with Arabic numbers and their respective lisan-ud-dawat number names*, [Instagram] 23 June. Available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQdRswCHr1v/>, accessed 9 November 2023.

Triple fun, 2021. [board game] Lil Banoon, Lil Banoon.

Zine, J., 2008. Muslim youth in Canadian schools: Education and the politics of religious identity. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 32(4), 399-423. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195968>, accessed 4 November 2023.

ⁱ The Fatimi Imams are considered as the direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed through his daughter Fatima and her husband Imam Ali bin Abi Talib which includes both their sons Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain, and the line continues through Hussain's descendants. They take their name from Fatima and are considered to function first from Medina and then later started what is known as the Fatimid Dynasty of Egypt. In 1132, the 21st in the line of the imams chose complete seclusion, and ever since, the *imamate* continues to be run in a line of succession from father to son. It is through belief in this line of succession that the Dawoodi Bohras are said to belong to the Shia Fatimi Ismaili Tayyibi branch of Islam (The Dawoodi Bohras, n.d.).

ⁱⁱ The first month of the Hijrical calendar; the first ten days of which commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam Hussain and his family and companions at the hands of the army of the second Umayyad caliph Yazid in the Battle of Karbala (10 October 680). This is a somber occasion for Bohras who try to gather together annually to attend the sermons with the Syedna in whichever location he may designate for that particular year.