

The other and I: Turkish teachers in South Africa¹

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Introduction

Eighteen years into a new democracy after the official relegation of apartheid in 1994, South Africa is rightfully asking questions about the paths we have chosen leading to the project of reconstructing our society. The ideals of post-apartheid at all levels of government were directed towards realising a new society where the vagaries of power, privilege and domination were to be challenged in the interests of realising 'a better life for all', which became the rallying cry of the elected African National Congress (ANC) as political

leaders of the new country. Several iterations of the curriculum for schools have shaped the 18-year history, each aiming to refine the targets in relation to the specificities of under-developed human, geographic, class and racialised contexts. However, there is growing unease about whether policy itself is adequate to engender deep quality change in the education system, or in the society in general. If policy is limited in this potential, can alternate theoretical and philosophical considerations assist us to realise a better dream for the future? What potential do philosophical movements such as the Gülen Movement (see Box 1) offer in relation to realising a better quality education system?

Box 1

The Gülen Movement

Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941) is a Turkish activist, scholar and thinker. The aim of the 'movement' is not religious evangelism but a deeper calling towards recognising the common humanity in all of us. It assists individuals to consider how constructions of 'other' have been developed. As such it is 'anti-essentialist' and pro-humanity. Gülen's philosophy is best captured through this summary:

The movement agrees on the principle of positive outlook and proactive engagement for betterment of the society and community as a whole. The movement pays particular attention to providing and encouraging inclusive and non-denominational education that is enhanced through pastoral care, mentoring, intercultural and intercommunity dialogue and partnership at all levels of society. The movement is non-hierarchical and non-adversarial: it does not function as a political party, nor does it compete with any other political party. It does not contend with any grouping, political or religious, for mass appeal, and it does not have a 'manifesto' of claims against the state, nor make any demands of the state or any agency thereof (Journalists and Writers Foundation, 2010).

The Gülen Movement has infused itself into many social strata of the Turkish society and has influenced the lives of those student teachers on whom this study has chosen to focus. It began its work in South Africa through forming a faith-based organisation called the Turquoise Harmony Institute, which promoted inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and has established schools in Johannesburg, Cape Town and now in Durban.

Source: Samuel, 2011.

A call for new approaches

Throughout history we have seen the divisive effects of inter-religious or inter-cultural conflict, which often culminates in the construction of the 'other' as enemy, as the source to be evangelised and converted (made 'one of us') or to be the subject of violence. In the modern-day world, interfaith dialogue is heralded as a solution to bring about compassion, collaboration and co-operation. Karen Armstrong (2000) identifies a rise of fundamentalism within various religions and an absence of respectful dialogue. She argues against a false sense of libertinism where individual interpretations of any given situation allows people to justify their actions even if these infringe on the rights of others. This may be seen as an expansion of the philosophy of constructivism that itself was a rebellion over the highly regulated notions of behavioural psychology that dominated the early 1960s. The youth then were rebelling against any attempt to be regularised and ordered. It was an age of 'freedom'. Armstrong argues that to return to a scriptural resource and give a literalist interpretation can be seen in religious circles as an attempt to find some stability.

Today, as in the 1960s, a new generation is expressing disillusionment about the present powers' inability to realise appropriate interventions with respect to being custodians of our economic, environmental and equity agendas. New movements are emerging that suggest the failure of the state as a political organ to act beyond self-interest or the interest of economic capital forces. The unemployed feel betrayed by the lack of attention to their being cast on the fringes of society. The environmentalists increasingly are arguing that we are actively contributing to the degradation of our planet. Activists all over the world are calling for a balance between motives of 'people, planet and profit'. The 'Arab Spring' in 2011 has also urged new ways of managing society.

One way of meeting these calls for new approaches is through the education system, which can imbue young people with a better understanding of others and the world at large and teach them how to live in peace and harmony through mutual appreciation. A school that exemplifies this idea is Cemal Karacan STAR College in Durban, South Africa.

Cemal Karacan STAR College

In Cemal Karacan STAR College there is harmonious interaction and co-existence of many faiths, cultures and social classes. The school balances the dual responsibilities of a locally situated (South African) curriculum infused with the ingredients of an imported (Turkish) philosophy. Instead of being exclusionary and exclusive (like most wealthy middle-class schools), STAR College embraces the goals of serving the community selflessly and inclusively, and epitomises post-apartheid democratic ideals.

This school was set up under the auspices of the Horizon Educational Trust in January 2002, and was the third such school established by this Turkish organisation to foster working relationships between Turkey and post-apartheid South Africa. Initially called Star Primary and High School and consisting of just 20 pupils, the school was rebuilt in 2009 with 28 classrooms and renamed the Cemal Karacan Star College after its patron's father. It currently houses approximately 550 learners, of whom 30 are in residence facilities in dormitories on the campus. Half of its teachers are South African and half are recruited from Turkey. The school also houses three of nine Turkish student teachers who are currently studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It hosts students mainly from the Indian and African race groups across different Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths.

Since its enrolment of matriculants (school-leaving level), the school has consistently achieved a 100 per cent pass rate and 100 per cent university entry rate, with 78 per cent of its first group of matriculation students receiving an 'A' aggregate and with an average number of distinctions per learner of 3.4 (Cemal Karacan STAR College, 2010). The students have continued to excel in national and international competitions such as the Mathematics and Science Olympiads. In 2009, the school was awarded the title 'Best Performing School in Mathematics and Science Olympiad' in the country.

But instead of evaluating a school or system in terms of the output factors alone, or in terms of input factors (such as, for example, the quality of its physical and financial resources), we also need to describe the lived experiences of the participants who constitute the school through their actions. The inauguration of the school coincided with the national agenda of reconstruction of education in post-apartheid South Africa. It is well known that apartheid education was deliberately orchestrated to develop different racial groups at differential levels to service the iniquitous demands of a class-based society (Motala and Pampallis, 2001). Africans were therefore exploited by being offered the lowest level of trained human resources, limited physical and financial resources and school settings far removed from access to quality (Kallaway, 1984). It is no surprise that when formal apartheid was dismantled in 1994, quality education was equated with the more affluent white schooling system. Despite many overtures towards recognition of the re-culturation of post-apartheid schooling, even black parents

(i.e. African, Indian and coloured parents) were complicit in upholding the dominant traditions of former 'whites-only' schooling, albeit in a physically 'de-racialised context'. They even resisted hiring teachers of colour within this schooling, equating quality provisioning with white teachers (Amin, 2004). Race apartheid came to be replaced by class apartheid in these migratory patterns (Chisholm, 2009).

STAR College deliberately opted not to set itself up as a school for the elite, even though its campus is located within a middle-class suburb. It chose to recognise that academic excellence would be its hallmark. However, excellence alone is not its only rationale, as shown in an interview with the principal:

The starting point is education, which is most important to create the kind of relationship between different communities, different nations, so that they can share their experiences ... They can understand creating peace and harmony on the road ... If you want to get into dialogue with people in a society ... the most important thing for people is their children. And if you can give good service to their children, then they will appreciate what you have done for them; they will get into dialogue without prejudice (Interview A, 3).

Inter-disciplinary dialogue

The teachers in this school could easily have chosen careers that yielded high returns in industry, business or commerce. They are highly educated with qualifications at masters and doctorate levels. Not all of them are necessarily qualified professional teachers but each is, as one teacher called himself 'a scientist of his subject'. The maths teacher notes that:

First of all algebra and geometry have a different mind map. That's why it's helpful for learners to understand it. Now, for example, in the South African syllabus maths is maths. Sometimes you are teaching algebra and then you are teaching angles; and then you are teaching another part of algebra; and then you are teaching trigonometry. So they are confusing them. They are learning too much stuff and they don't put it into folders. This is something you have to classify [for] them ... Geometry is more visual and algebra is more abstract (Interview F, 2).

Similarly, the science teacher argues that the choice of subject separations between biology, chemistry and physical science is artificial as they all involve levels of experimentation and abstraction. Increasingly, he says, different combinations of these disciplines are required in specific fields such as chemical engineering or biochemistry.

Here, the interviewees are arguing for a dismantling of the disciplines into deeper specialist areas. They recognise the interconnections between the disciplines but suggest that the deep knowledge of each discipline is being lost in the way in which the curriculum is organised and delivered to students. The joy of the disciplines and their interconnections are lost. The teacher recognises that often the lack of an adequate supply of teachers qualified in maths and science prevents any enactment of the ideal. Therefore, STAR College chooses to operate beyond the normative requirements of the official curriculum, drawing on teachers' deep knowledge of the interconnections between the different

compartmentalised subjects and disciplines. This is an enactment of inter-disciplinary dialogue that could be seen as yet another interpretation of the valuing of the purity of different cultures, religions and faiths while recognising that joined-up thinking could potentially yield greater benefits.

Teachers crossing borders

The model of teacher professional growth emerging from an analysis of the teacher interviews challenges traditional notions that the process of development of teachers begins after their initial/pre-service teacher education qualification (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Traditional models of teacher development foreground the value of early induction into the profession usually offered by senior dedicated staff members whose task is to acculturate the novice teachers into the school operations (Hargreaves, 1994). The teachers in these interviews, however, suggest that their 'induction' into the profession began during their own schooling years, where the strong role models of teachers surrounded them and influenced their decision to become teachers (see boxes 2 and 3).

The Turkish student teachers who are living in residence at STAR College (not yet qualified but in their second or third year of study for a four-year Bachelor of Education degree) have chosen to leave their country of origin and travel to live and work in a foreign country, often with little financial support beyond the allowances of bare accommodation, food and transport costs to attend

university. In return, they offer formal tuition during the study times in the dormitories almost every evening and at weekends. They are becoming teachers on almost a 24-hours-a-day basis. The staff also ask them to serve as teaching assistants to help with the pressures of marking assignments and tests. For the novice student teacher, this is providing practice teaching in a way that is far superior to the limited engagement that most of their peers would receive in the formal teacher education curriculum.

Among those interviewed, teachers have experiences of teaching in Korea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as having taught in different schools in South Africa. The network established by the 'community of volunteers' notion of the Gülen Movement infuses how teachers are recruited to teach across Gülen-inspired schooling. The teachers all report personal interconnections with the community of STAR College before they embarked on a journey to work in South Africa. These support networks become a 'home away from home', allowing for the retention of the cultural values of Turkish society in cuisine, celebration of religious festivals, communal sharing and social activities. Travelling across borders into these support-networked communities makes the journey a lot more acceptable.

Conclusion: Who benefits?

These forms of engagement across international borders are also a way of re-educating the wide global community about the varieties

Box 2

Murat's story: Burning candles

I want to be a burning candle. I want to bring light into the world of others because I have knowledge to give them. I know that my light will burn itself out. But as a teacher I will have given off that light to another candle, my learners. Then the light will go on. It will not burn out.

I come from outside Turkey, from the city of Tejen in Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea. My first school was in a small rural village and my teachers loved me. They knew that I was a very good student. They knew that I must progress. I was very interested in school and I loved my teachers. They gave me a passion for being a teacher. Teachers must be a model portrait for their country; they must show learners how to be citizens of the society, how to respect, love and value the society we live in. Teachers must have three main qualities: dedication, expertise and tolerance.

My teachers in my schooling taught me that teaching is about assuming that your learners are your own children. Teachers must show you how to learn. Learning takes a long time. Learning is hard work. In secondary school I moved away from the rural school and went into a bigger city school. My teachers were real experts. They knew how to train me as an expert. This training helped me develop my intellectual self. After school hours I went to a special school that prepared students to take the Olympiad Mathematics Examinations. The teachers here were so dedicated and professional. This was the place I had my first inspiration to become a teacher. They train you here to be the best. I became

the national gold medal winner of the Olympiad Mathematics Examinations in the whole of Turkey for three years in a row in my secondary school. When I entered the international Olympiad Mathematics Examination, I won the Bronze Medal. I am proud of myself and my teachers.

In my secondary school I applied to go to the top universities in the world. I was fortunate to be accepted by Princeton University in the United States and by a top university in Singapore. But I had financial problems: my family could not afford to send me to study abroad. My father is just a farmer, my mother a teacher. But I wanted to go abroad. I wanted to go outside Turkey. I wanted also to become a teacher, like my teachers. I heard about studying here in South Africa. I was interested especially since I knew the World Cup was going to be held in South Africa and I could be here. I heard about the Horizon Trust, which was prepared to sponsor my studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to become a teacher. I thought Africa was poor, but since I have come here I realise the country is not that poor. But it still needs a lot of development. I feel that South Africa is only beginning a new life. It is a very young country. I know that it has had the experience of colonialism struggles, but there is so much more to be done. People here need to have a lot more dedication for education.

Teachers are like a double-helix DNA: they are always linking morality and expertise; dedication and education knowledge. They spiral around the child and support them to grow.

Source: Samuel, 2011.

of conceptions of Islam that characterise our present world. They allow for a rekindling of the conceptions of an anti-terrorist notion of Islam to reach wider audiences. This is one of the great forms of creating a global identity, an agenda that has been a part of Turkish history across the centuries. Yet, we need to recognise the reality that global networks are unlikely to find root in many communities, especially in the developing world. One of the lessons from the study was how teaching in the developing world was characterised by overcoming obstacle upon obstacle to a global discourse: immigrant laws that make visa and study work permits a near impossibility; red-tape bureaucracy that breeds suspicion of the foreigner; and a tendency to see anything that emerges from outside one's parochial gaze as irrelevant.

I hope that this article has shown that it is possible to combine a campaign for academic excellence and a moral agenda. STAR College has worked with often common-sense understandings of the goals of education and schooling, but has shown that it is possible to move beyond the rhetoric of 'deliberative social action'. Too often our schooling policy reforms are guided by 'political symbolism' (Jansen, 2001): a declaration of the right things to achieve but limited understanding of how we will get here. Quality teaching and learning involve engendering a culture of thinking, feeling and doing. We all need to move beyond simply elaborations of ourselves. We can become of service when we recognise the other in the I.

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Box 3

Zeyneb's story

The Turkish expression 'one language, one person; two languages, two persons' does not translate well into English. What it is trying to say is that if we learn to communicate with other people outside our culture or language, we become bigger, greater, better. This is why I chose to become a teacher here in South Africa. I want to grow, become more.

I was only an 18-year-old girl when I left Istanbul to come to South Africa. My parents were surprised that I chose to make this decision. I was not a very talkative, outgoing person but now I talk a lot. My parents are so supportive of me, respecting my decision to become a teacher. I have one older sister and one small brother and another small sister. My father is in the textile business; he is a tailor. My mother was not fortunate enough to go to school. Her father died when she was three years old and her family did not think she needed to go to school. Today she is very hungry for education. She sees herself as behind all the others in the neighbourhood because she is not educated. I know she is teaching herself to read now.

Schooling was not easy. I had to study hard in primary school to get into an Anatolian high school. If you do not pass well in the grade 8 tests, you go to a normal secondary school where you will not get quality education.

Our level of education is more advanced than in South Africa. For example, in South Africa in Grade 10 they only learn three trigonometry functions, but we learned five of them when we were in Grade 8. Some Anatolian schools are teaching advanced things that students study here in engineering or architecture at

university. We have to learn too hard in Turkey. It is too competitive to get into high school or to university. But I like Turkey because you can write your university entrance examination many times. For example, if you want to study to become a doctor, then you can take your 'matric' examinations again until you get the good grades to get into the university. But in South Africa, you write matric only once, and the results you get are for ever.

I am surprised that in South Africa teaching is not a high status job. Most of the learners I teach here do not want to become a teacher. They say that the money is less and they can't really teach learners. But I think teaching is a prestigious job. It's not about the fact that we need so many points to get into university to become a teacher in Turkey. Everyone thinks teaching is a good job.

I am surprised that some South African teachers actually tell students to 'shut up': this is most impolite. I think learners must be relaxed and comfortable and they will be polite and helpful. I think teachers and learners must be friends.

I remember how hard it was for me to study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. After just three weeks into the first year, I was asked to stand up and talk with 98 students listening. I did not know how to speak English that well. I was immediately homesick. But the students here are so wonderful. I want to say that all students are really helpful to us. They are hospitable. I owe South Africa because I studied here and my English is improving. I need to serve South Africa in return for my education here. I will teach South African children.

Source: Samuel, 2011.

Samuel, M. (2011). 'Burning Candles: Turkish student teachers' experiences of South African (teacher) education'. *The Anthropologist*: 83–94.

Endnote

- ¹ Adapted from the keynote address at the conference 'The Culture of Co-existence and Mutual Understanding: Exploring Fethullah Gülen's thought and action', 18–19 November 2011, Abuja, Nigeria. The paper is dedicated to Father Garth Michelson, a Catholic priest who inspired interfaith dialogue during my formative years and whose relationship with STAR College was the inspiration behind the paper. He passed away a few days before the presentation. The paper is being considered for publication (July 2012) by the South African journal *Education as Change: Journal of curriculum change*.

Professor Michael Anthony Samuel is the former Dean in the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He was a member of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education (MCTE) tasked with developing a National Framework for Teacher Education South Africa (2003–2005). He currently serves on the Advisory Council for the Commonwealth Secretariat on Teacher Mobility, Recruitment and Migration. He has participated in a number of international studies supported by the UK Department for International Development (DfID): on teacher education reform in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago; and on who sits at the margins of schooling in India and South Africa. In 2011, he was awarded the Turquoise Harmony Institute's national Ubuntu Award for Contribution to Education in South Africa.