

Burning Candles: Turkish Student Teachers' Experiences of South African (Teacher) Education

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ABSTRACT This paper¹ uses a life history methodology to trace the experiences of a group of Turkish students who are training as teachers in the South African higher education system. It analyses the influence of culture, wider societal formings and the role of philosophical approaches to the valuing of teachers, especially the faith-based Gulen Movement which challenges the dominant caricatured notions of Muslim identity and values. The constructions of the identity of Muslim as terrorist and fundamentalist are seen as a product of Western constructions of othering. The Turkish students' experiences of having been taught by teachers inside and outside the Gulen Movement schooling system allows them to identify their personal career goals of becoming teachers. Links between the reconstructive agenda of post-apartheid South Africa and the Gulen Movement become points of comparison. Their reflections of what marks the identity of student teachers in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and their views of engaging with practicing teachers in South African schools, provides perspectives on what teacher preparation is and could be in a transforming South African education system. Their insights suggest service to humanity through deep commitment and caring, but rooted in the notions of excellence and expertise in disciplinary knowledge. Their international insights provide a means to question the goals for our South African teacher educational curriculum and the training of teachers.

PART ONE: INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS TEACHING ABROAD

The loss of qualified teachers, who service schooling systems outside the countries within which they were trained, was initially identified as a serious concern by the Commonwealth Ministries of Education (Ochs 2003). This was especially so for smaller countries, where a loss of even a low number of teachers could impact on the sustainability of the national local schooling system. Small island countries, such as Barbados in the West Indies, noted the outflow of their qualified teachers into the international market place of more affluent countries such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (Joseph 2010; Ochs 2003; Ochs 2010). South Africa too voiced its concerns about whether it was producing teachers for the export market, as White student teachers were increasingly reflecting their interest in teaching abroad after they qualified (Reddy 2003).

In 2004 the Ministers of Education of the Commonwealth countries voiced their concerns about the "brain drain" of teachers into the more affluent world markets, and set in place an international protocol as a moral guideline for both host and source countries with regard

to teachers crossing borders. This protocol was officially signed by 54 participating countries of the Commonwealth, and has served to regulate activities of teacher recruiting agencies, comment on patterns of employment of host countries and encourage source countries to keep better data on exit patterns of their teachers when they migrate.

The "migratory teacher" or "transnational teacher" has become the subject of more recent academic study (Ochs 2003; Manik 2005; Morgan et al. 2006; Reid 2006). These studies have used traditional methodologies of tracking patterns of employment in the countries which recruit teachers, exploring through interviews the quality of experiences of teachers as they engage in the practice of teaching abroad, and pointed towards more socially just recruiting and employment contracts. Overall the pattern was one of teachers being exploited by the host country to service areas of schooling where local teachers were not prepared to serve. Contrary to expectations, the recruited teachers were not always young novice qualified teachers. In 2010 the Commonwealth Secretariat established an Advisory Council on Teacher Mobility, Recruitment and Migration, comprising representatives from the Commonwealth countries, international

organisations such as Education International and the International Labour Organisation, and education civil society. Among its aims were to “create and strengthen awareness and engagement amongst employers, recruiters, recruitment and credential agencies, qualifications authorities and teachers’ organisations of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP) with the assistance of relevant international, governmental, civil society and private sector organisations” (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010, p. 1).

Researchers from the range of signatory countries, as well as others from countries such as the USA, presented data from their studies about the lived experiences of teachers working abroad. It was emphasised that even 3 years after the signed accord, the goals of the protocol still needed focus. More fine-grained patterns and reasoning as to why teachers were crossing borders emerge from these studies. For example, Manik (2010) in her “undercover study” in the UK reported that young South African teachers saw themselves as emerging with a kind of “international passport” to service a range of countries beyond their home country. These participants reflected that they intended to return to South Africa in a “reverse migration”, but that they could envisage themselves soon choosing to experience teaching in another country again - perhaps in the Arab Emirates, in Singapore, or Thailand - after a short stint back in South Africa. For young novice teachers these experiences could be said to be formative in developing broader, more global conceptions of cultural educational resources, which could enhance the quality of their teaching. These migratory patterns have shown signs of racialised selection, and it is to be questioned why African teachers were not that easily recruitable.

Will these migratory teachers eventually return to the country which funded/subsidised their initial teacher education studies? Is this a loss of investment to the source country? Betts (2010) coined the term “survival migrants” for those Zimbabwean teachers seeking employment in inner-city Johannesburg, South Africa. The picture he draws is one of a strong xenophobic reaction from South Africans to these teachers who were, in their estimate, fleeing the adverse conditions of employment in Zimbabwe. The teachers experienced difficulty in securing

recognition of their qualifications by the South African educational authorities, and being able to gain employment was considered to be met with excessive regulatory control. Many of the Zimbabwean teachers possessed qualifications much higher than those of their fellow South African counterparts, especially in the sought after areas of Mathematics, Science and Technology.

The South African Department of Education has acknowledged the potential resource these teachers bring to a largely un- or under-qualified teaching force, and are aware that they could well return to Zimbabwe if the work conditions of the source country improve. These Zimbabwean teachers may well be regarded then as only a temporary source for the country. The teacher union movement in South Africa is officially supportive of these potential new recruits into their fold, but is aware that they may represent a threat to the existing workforce of teachers in the country (Maluleke 2010).

This paper aims to reflect on the movement of unqualified *student teachers* into South Africa. It differs from the above studies, which have focused on qualified teachers who attempt to seek employment in countries abroad. The group of teachers that is sampled in this study constitute a group of young student teachers from Turkey who have made a conscious choice to work in South Africa as part of their commitment to a faith-based movement which has inspired their entry into the teaching force. The paper traces the life history of these Turkish students, attempting to “get inside their heads” to narratively explore how and why they chose to become teachers in South Africa.

In order to understand the rationale for their choices it is necessary to explore the tenets of the Gulen Movement, which constitutes the experiential backdrop of the schooling patterns of these students while they studied in primary and secondary schools in Turkey. This will constitute the second part of this paper. The third part outlines the tradition of life history research, to suggest what kinds of learning can be gained through narrative reporting of the lived experiences of these student teachers. The narratives (part four) provide a foil to ask how international students (“the others”) experience South African teacher education and schooling (“us”). They reveal a set of philosophical, theological and cultural values which contrast with the

South African conceptions of what it means to choose to become a teacher, and what it means to be student teachers and to practice being a teacher.

The study hopes to assist focusing on the Constitutional values outlined by South Africa's new democracy, which heralds the celebration of diversity, respect and value for all humanity (Republic of South Africa 1996). The narratives sharpen focus on what could be the goals of a teacher education system in South Africa. We see ourselves again through the stories of others.

PART TWO: THE GULEN MOVEMENT

Fethullah Gulen is a Turkish activist, scholar and thinker born in 1941 who challenged the dominant caricatured versions of Islam that were emerging in the 21st century. He argued that many of the interpretations of what constituted Islam were based on rather superficial understandings of the key principles of the Islamic holy scriptures. He foregrounds the teachings of Islam as not based on acts of terror, as is being repeatedly associated with Muslims, especially since the fatal attacks on the US twin towers on 9/11 in 2001. He suggests a moral regeneration for all of humanity, to focus on matters of dignity, respect, tolerance and dialogue as hallmarks which will promote closer understanding of our common ground.

His writings have spanned several decades and influenced key religious leaders, who have drawn on the inspiration to create a faith-based organisation of volunteers who service society for the betterment of the quality of lives of all those around them (Gulen 2004; Gulen 2009; Gulen 2010). He advocates that we should become a "community of volunteers dedicated to the service of others" (The Journalists and Writers Foundation 2010). This "movement" has found expression in the formation of several groupings of like-minded volunteers, who range from academics, politicians, religious leaders, journalists and media specialists to sportsmen/women and artists. The basis of the "movement" is not religious evangelism but a deeper calling towards recognising the common humanity in us all. It assists individuals to consider how constructions of "other" have been developed.

Scholars reflecting on the work of Gulen at

a recent (March 2010) conference held in South Africa chose to represent his works as follows. Ridge (2010), recognising the complexity of the post-modern condition, suggests that binaries polarise individuals, communities and societies. The grand narrative-defining absolutes only serve to create greater boundaries between groups as rivals for succession; these in turn fail to recognise the complexities, subtleties and nuances of juxtaposition, interdisciplinary crossovers, and multi- and plural conceptions of being. He argues that Gulen inspires educationists to see the holistic linkage of body, mind and spirit as well as connectivity to the everyday world of community service.

Van Heerden (2010) clarified the notion of the often misunderstood conception of "jihad" from a theological worldview and insight from Gulen. He likens Gulen's understandings of jihad as linked closely to the Christian theology of St Augustine, who argues that "one realises one's true freedom in God". For Gulen, jihad is both an internal and external journey of finding connection with God and then enacting it with one's fellow human beings. It was for this reason that Gulen declared after the 9/11 bombings that these acts of terror cannot be a "Muslim act". He declared "terrorism cannot be a means for any Islamic goal, and a terrorist cannot be a Muslim, nor can a true Muslim be a terrorist. Islam orders peace and a true Muslim can only be a symbol of peace and the maintenance of basic human rights" (The Journalists and Writers Foundation, 2010).

Albayrak (2010) suggests that many misconceptions of Islam have been created by the West, which is ill-informed about the deeper conceptions of Islam. He suggests that Islam must be about an internal form of purification and seeking perfection to please God. Our external deeds are acts of service to God. Out of context quotations from the Qu'ranic texts promote slavish fundamentalism.

Michelson (2010) suggests that South Africa would indeed learn much from the Gulen Movement's conception of dialogue, which is akin to a deeper conception of democracy and based not on a "get rich" mentality or an entitlement culture intent on redress of past inequities, but on commitment and service. De Lange (2010) suggests a renewed civil society movement which recognises individuals across different boundaries, seeing each other from

different vantage-points. All these writers promote an understanding of the Gulen movement as “anti-essentialist” and pro-humanity. This philosophy of Fethullah Gulen 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 nondenominational education** which 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”. (The Journalists and Writers Foundation 2010) (emphasis added).*

The Gulen Movement has infused itself into many social strata of Turkish society and influenced the lives of the student teachers upon whom this study chose to focus. The movement now spans international boundaries and has set up schools and universities across the globe. The Gulen Movement began its work in South Africa through forming a faith-based organisation called the Turquoise Harmony Institute, promoting inter-religious, inter-cultural dialogue and which has established schools in Johannesburg, Cape Town and now in Durban. The student teachers in this study have chosen to migrate to Durban to study to become teachers here in South Africa. The movement does not believe in imposition of its value systems on society. It now works with STAR College staff, who have chosen to immerse themselves in teaching the South African curriculum. The student teachers represent the potential next generation of teachers who will service STAR College schools and other South African schools through preparing to become teachers in South Africa. Their enrolment in a South African teacher education institution is therefore noted. STAR College has gone on to produce among the top results in Mathematics, Sciences and Technology Education in the matric examination system.

PART THREE: LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH AND NARRATIVES

Within the tradition of life history research, the researcher is not as concerned with whether the details of the narrative as indicated by the research participant did or did not happen. The life history researcher is not a forensic scientist aiming to uncover the veracity of the “truth” of the statements the participants utter. Instead, the life history researcher is aiming to make sense of what and how the stories of the participants are told, with a view to understanding how they make sense of the worlds they encounter. In telling the stories of their lives, the research participants may choose to be nostalgic or to romanticise their telling. The life historian aims to work within the parameters of the telling of their tales, aiming to gather insights into what the shaping influences of the *experiences* of the participants are.

Polkinghorne (1995) comments that a distinction needs to be made between “lives as *lived*, lives as *told* and lives as *experienced*”. The first deals with the forensic truth; the second with the account of telling stories, and the third enters into the realm of making sense of the experiences we have in our lives. The choice of how to represent the experiential world of the participants is a creative act that is the responsibility of the researcher (Dhunpath and Samuel 2009). The narratives in this paper are written close to the dialectical variation of English as spoken by the participants, represented in first-person narration.

This paper is part of a life history narrative report on the lives of nine student teachers from Turkey as they embarked on the journey of becoming teachers, at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal (UKZN) Bachelor of Education undergraduate programme. These students represent all the international students from Turkey currently studying at UKZN’s Faculty of Education. The study involved detailed life history interviews with the student teachers which reflected on their experiences of choosing to become teachers. It reflected on their own home, community, and schooling experiences before they came to South Africa. In the case of the more senior student teachers in years two and three of their studies, the study probed their experiences of practicing teaching in the South African schooling system during their

Professional Practicum (or workplace learning) experience.

The interviews were translated into a coherent narrative which constituted what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as the “narrative analysis” phase: moving from the raw data of the interview into a sequenced narrative, most often represented in chronological or thematised order of events. These “first narratives” were then returned to the students to alter and adjust details which they felt should be omitted, or which misunderstood their life experiences. The “second reworked narrative” constitutes the reported narrative represented in this paper.

For the sake of brevity, only two of the nine stories have been depicted. The selection included one male and one female student, a first- and a third-year student. They also represent a student from urban Istanbul and a student from a rural setting. These students are interested in becoming teachers of Mathematics and Computer Science.

Following the detailed narrative is a reflection on the emerging lessons learnt in comparison with the South African context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this second form of analysis as the “analysis of narratives”. Next follow the narratives of the lived experiences of Turkish students (pseudonyms provided by the participants) as they become teachers in the South African context.

PART FOUR: THE NARRATIVES

Narrative One: Burning Candles (Murat)

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 came from outside Turkey, from the city of Tejen in Turkmenistan around 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 much 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 which prepared students to take the Olympiad Examinations in Mathematics. The teachers here were very 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 for the whole of Turkey for three years in a row in my secondary school. When I entered the international Olympiad Mathematics Examination I was the Bronze Medal winner. 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 USA, I was also accepted to study in 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 here in UKZN to become a teacher. This Trust is related to the Gulen Movement which supports learning to experience life in another country, learning that even if people come from different cultures, they can share and care. I wanted to experience life, life in another country. I wanted to know more about other people. My teachers had taught me that it is more important to be helpful to your community, to be helpful to others. It is not about myself only. It is about caring and sharing your knowledge. If you are helpful to others, you will be helpful to

yourself. Just have faith in God, because God is truth and in that truth you will find everything. God is everything because he founded and created everything.

I thought I could come to help to become a teacher in Africa. 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. We have to grow to respect education. I do not think that teachers here are very dedicated. For example, teachers here do not work for their learners and with their learners, especially after school hours, or on Saturdays; they want money if they offer tuition to the learners. I am surprised in South Africa that people are obsessed with earning money while they are teaching, which is inversely proportional to dedication in education. I am volunteering to be a teacher at a school on Saturdays, and I am surprised that parents want to know what kind of payment I want. My own teachers in Turkey worked hard for their learners without asking for any payment.

There are some lecturers here at university who treat us like their children: they love us, they care for us. Some university lecturers here are so kind and tolerant. They are for us.

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

It is my strong wish to climb this mountain of becoming a teacher here in South Africa. Many small stones will trip me up as I climb, but I will never fail to try to become a teacher who stands at the peak. I am the expert brightly burning candle, morally and intellectually strong, dedicated and loving my learners. It is my strong wish to succeed as a teacher.

Narrative Two: One Language, One Person; Two Languages, Two Persons (Zeyneb)

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 how I see why I chose to become a teacher here in South Africa. I want to grow, become more.

I was only an 18-year-young 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.

I think that being a woman who is educated makes you independent. You don't have to rely on others; you can achieve your own goals. But men are stronger; women are weak in nature. For example, it is difficult for women to be an engineer or a doctor. You are too busy earning money: when will you be able to raise your family and children? I know of some women who regret their choice of a career. They need to be there for their families. I think it is better for women to be a teacher. They can go home after work and take care of their children.

One day three women, Ferda, Tuba and Havva, who were customers of my dad, started talking to me in my father's shop. They said they could help me with my schoolwork, to become educated. They influenced me to like school. They were teachers in the school who were so dedicated. They always are putting others first. Being a teacher is about self-sacrifice: putting your learners first. My mother is also like this: always thinking of others. She is a strong woman who is not an egoist. She is there to help.

Schooling was not easy. I had to study hard in primary school if I did not want to end up going to a normal school. If you do not pass well in the Grade 8 tests, you can go into 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 trigo-

nometry functions, but we learnt five of them when we were in Grade 8. But some Anatolian schools and science schools are really learning advanced things like what 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. Why do we need to learn so many things: integrals, or derivatives, many, many things in Turkey?

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. The results you get are for ever.

In the afternoons and on weekends and holidays I went to study in the Tuition Centre during my secondary school years. Here teachers are dedicated towards getting their learners to pass the matric examinations. There is a small payment to study in these centres but the learners are given excursions, given group study time together. We sometimes even lived in a dormitory to focus on learning how to study. The teachers here were from the Gulen Movement. I would say that their most important values are friendship and tolerance. They teach you how to learn. There are many steps to follow to succeed in the secondary school. First you have to make sure you pass the April exam, then the June exam, and then only can you take the end of year examination. I worked very hard, but I was not fortunate to get very high points in 2005. I wrote the same test again in 2006. I passed the examination but I did not get good enough marks to study to go the university to become a teacher. It is hard to get into university - even more hard to get in to study to become a teacher in some prestigious universities than to become an engineer.

Then I met my father’s friend who was studying his masters here in a university in South Africa. He offered to take me to study in South Africa. I wanted to study engineering in the University of Johannesburg, my first choice. My second choice was to study teaching at UKZN. My third choice was Computer Science in UWC [University of the Western Cape]. My father’s friend talked about South Africa to my father and he encouraged my father to let me become

a teacher in South Africa. Teaching is a very high status job in Turkey and my father allowed me to do this. I am surprised that in South Africa teaching is not a high status job. Most of the learners I teach here in South Africa 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. The Prophet Mohammed’s son-in-law Ally says “for forty years I’ll be a slave of one who teaches me one letter”. We all respect teaching and education.

I do not think the teachers in the Gulen Movement forced me to become a teacher. I think I just saw how they worked, how they had a good relationship with their students. It is my choice to be a teacher

I am now in my third year of studying here at UKZN. I first taught during my teaching practice in a STAR College here in Durban. It was like I saw my teachers in Turkey: they are always encouraging their learners in this school. They even give the learners chocolates as rewards when they perform well. During the weekends I go to a braai with the learners at the school. 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.

In my second school I taught in during teaching practice, I saw a strict separation between teachers and students. There is even a corridor where students are not allowed to walk: it is only for teachers. Teachers in this public school were very unhappy with their learners. I also saw that teachers are sometimes happy in some classes with some learners, and not in other classes. One teacher was so friendly, even making jokes with one class, but she was a totally different person in another class. I understand it depends on the class. But I was happy with all the learners. In fact some of the learners said to me to tell their Mathematics teacher to retire. They wanted me to come and teach them. Some teachers in this school do not smile. They do not encourage their learners. But some teachers are friendly too. I am so sad for these other teachers. They do not know how to com-

municate with their learners. I remember when I came first to South Africa, I knew only very simple English. But now I am better, but I still need more practice.

I remember how hard it was for me to study at UKZN. After just three weeks into the first year, I was asked to stand up and talk with 98 students listening. I did not know to speak English that well. I was immediately homesick. But the students here are so wonderful. Waseela is my friend. She is always asking me if I want any help, if I need anything. While we were studying for our Educational Studies tests, she also assisted me to understand some of the articles we had to study. She is so helpful. I want to say that really all students are really helpful to us. They are hospitable. My Academic Literacy in English lecturer is always offering us help. I saw around me that some of my South African students were failing the module, but he said I was not going to fail. He encouraged me. I worked for 27 hours on my first assignment, but I got 40%. In my second assignment I worked for 3 days, but I only got 50%. In my reflective assignment I got 70%. So I got a DP [duly performed certificate] to write the examination. But when I got into the examination, I could not answer the question. We had to write an essay of about two pages. I did not know what to write in the exam. But I just wrote something. You see now I am succeeding. 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.

I know my mother misses me a lot, but when I went back home for a visit I explained to her that I have to serve this country. My conscience tells me I owe South Africa to give back. My mother respects my decision. She has become very quiet about this now. She knows that I want to be in South Africa. I hope that my mother and father will come to South Africa when I graduate here. It will be the first time for them to leave Turkey, but then they will come here and see that I have to live here.

PART FIVE: ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES

Common to both the Gulen Movement and the Constitution of new democratic South Africa (1996) is respect for diversity, the quest for

social justice, and the valuing of inclusive education as a means to realise the potential of all. The stories of the two Turkish students reflect that the infusion of the Gulen Movement into their lives via the exemplary role model of teachers has characterised their education and schooling system. Murat, the Olympiad scholar champion, argued that this example of teachers was ever-present in his schooling system. He suggests that he chose to become a teacher early on in his primary school because his teachers believed in him. His teachers were the “model portrait” of the country. He saw in his teachers the model citizen that respects and nurtures the potential of their learners. He was a person in whom teachers believed and this made him love school and learning. He accentuates the characteristic of teachers doing their job as a form of service to society. He suggests that the moral quality of the teacher was the first inspirational quality which he found attractive.

Teachers’ commitment to the job of assisting learners is the quality which he most remembers. Their actions of service beyond duty impressed him. He inherited a view that to be a good teacher is to have dedication, expertise and tolerance. This idealistic view of the teacher is also enshrined within the challenges that arose out of the former apartheid education system. The aims of the new South African system were to realise a quality of new citizenry based on respecting and valuing the active individuals who construct the new society. Murat’s assertions about what his teachers taught him begs us to question whether our learners are receiving this kind of role modeling from the kind of teachers they encounter in their everyday life.

Murat suggests that the quality of dedication to service is not simply a matter of social or civic responsibility. He suggests that to be a teacher is also about being an “expert” in the discipline that one teaches. He likens his learning in the Tuition Centre to the training of an Olympiad athlete: training to be the best, training to outscore and reach the heights of perfection. This pushing of students to reach not just mediocrity is something he has valued since it promoted him to become a world-class scholar. However, even in the achievement of these high ideals, Murat is able to remain grounded that his duty is to give back to society and to the teaching-learning process. He knows that he could have become an engineer, a computer

scientist, a world leader in the field of Computer Science and Mathematics, but he has chosen to give back service to the field of education. He sees education not only in terms of achieving high scores and marks, for which he has had rewards. He sees education as a means of engendering a quality of thinking, feeling and acting with those around one, committed to the act of development and service.

This inspiration comes from the quality of family members who valued education, as much as from the teachers who serviced his interest in the subject of Mathematics as he prepared to obtain high-quality marks for entry into university. He witnessed the commitment that his teachers in the Tuition Centre demonstrated. These 'Tuition Centres' were private schools organised alongside the usual public schooling system, run after-hours by the volunteers with expertise in the fields they tutored. Many of these volunteer teachers were not paid full-time salaries for their services. These tutors had often experienced teaching and learning in overseas countries, and their ability to know the wider world provided an inspiration to Murat. Some of these 'tutor teachers' were also simply university students studying subjects such as commerce, law, mathematics and science. He learnt from these tutors to step out of the parochial world of the immediate; to see himself as part of a broader humanity. His choice to go abroad and live in another country was fuelled by the inspiration that these teachers offered.

Zeyneb's story is a similar one which understands the patterns of gender inequalities in her society. She remains ambivalent about an egalitarian society which affords women equal rights. She sees the impact it has had on her mother, having not been educated. She sees herself as being rescued out of the patterns of gender inequity via the dedication and influence of three women teachers who were her father's customers in his tailoring shop. She recognises that many women choose not to face the challenges of living a conservative predetermined role in Turkish culture, but sees some security in accepting a traditional "weaker role" for herself as a future mother, whom she interprets to include being able to raise the family and children within a home. Having a teacher's working hours, she believes, will permit her time to fulfill her many ambitions: to be a mother, an inspiration to learners and an expert in her field.

Both Murat and Zeyneb signal the prime importance of being an expert in the disciplinary knowledge that one teaches. They signal that this disciplinary knowledge is not acquired through superficial interaction with the subject matter one is learning. They learnt from their teachers that mastery of the content of the subject is paramount. They recognise that this level of mastery in Turkish schooling has created a fixation of obtaining the university entry marks to pursue one's desired career. They both signal that obtaining the high entry points to be selected into a prestigious university is an important goal for a school-going child, otherwise mediocrity is likely to follow. The school exit examinations become a major driving force in the lives of the Turkish students, according to their reports, engaged with recognition that this is part of the broader valuing system that is attached to going to university.

In sharp contrast to the South African context, the selection to become a teacher is seen as a high-status choice, and the community values this. This is reflected in the broader university system's entry requirements, where the university entry points to become a teacher are among the highest. This valuing of the status of the teacher is a major contributing force to top-performing students making the choice to become a teacher. The status is not provided in the salary afforded to the teacher's job; the status is culturally imbued because it signals a social responsibility to open up the minds and potential of learners. This truly "educative" role of the teacher is seen as in itself the reward of being a teacher.

It is therefore noteworthy that both Murat and Zeyneb (and indeed the other Turkish students interviewed as well) are most surprised by the fetish that South African teachers have about being paid higher wages for their services as a teacher. The fact that the data were produced during the national teachers' strike action in August 2010 perhaps heightened their concerns. They understand that to be a teacher is a social commitment and responsibility of service. To be paid a top salary is not expected. In fact, Zeyneb is surprised that many teachers in the schools she taught in during Professional Practicum do not in fact enjoy their work. That they do not smile is a serious indictment she offers in critique of some teachers' everyday work. Murat is surprised when parents want to

offer him financial reward when he volunteers to assist learners for Mathematics tuition after school.

Murat finds truth in being a teacher to be a religious service as well. It is a realisation of bringing one closer to God in being able to assist a learner to acquire knowledge. Zeyneb argues that she has embarked on a mission of respecting the act of teaching as imparting of wisdom. Their commitment to being a teacher is deeply felt as an act of service. In their interviews and narratives they attribute this to the exemplary teachers with whom they engaged in their schooling, who ensured that their full roundedness as individuals was respected, who showed caring and sharing of knowledge and wisdom. Teaching, they learnt, was an act of service.

Coming into the university system at UKZN was not necessarily their first choice, since they had options to study in other fields or institutions. Nevertheless, they suggest that having engaged with the quality of lecturers and students in the South African teacher education system, they also came to see how open and hospitable the teacher educators and students were. They felt that being non-South African peaked an interest among others, and they were often asked questions about their choice to be in South Africa. This they interpret to be welcoming and of service to activating their poor English spoken language skills. They are most appreciative of the respect for religious diversity shown within the teacher education system. The students who surround them are interested in knowing more about them, and they find themselves in conversation and dialogue which they believe benefits everyone. They see the knock-on effect that this has on their learning, especially to speak English, and for this they are most grateful. They were impressed that their English language skills were improving so quickly. Interaction with first-language speakers of English in her practicum school proved to be a nervous first experience, but Zeyneb's competence in her subject of Computer Science and Mathematics allowed her to rise to the occasion, making her well liked by her learners.

The two stories reflect that studying in a higher education institution where one is not from the dominant ('us') culture does not necessarily result in an othering and marginalisation. The Turkish students suggested that their

deep philosophical upbringing in the Gulen Movement (seen in declaration and deed), with exemplary teachers as role models deepening their content disciplinary knowledge in their subject fields, has allowed them to negotiate being other in a strange country and new land. With their strong foundation, being other is translated into a resource rather than a problem. They find that their own openness to learning from others has allowed them to be quickly acculturated into the South Africa (teacher) education environment.

However, they still remain surprised about the relative shallowness of student teachers and some practicing teachers, who do not seem to have what they perceive to be the hallmarks of a good teacher: **competence** (expertise in the subject matter); **commitment** (making a conscious choice to be a teacher: engagers with wisdom and knowledge) and **caring** (a servant of the society). They believe that student teachers should be making a conscious choice to care for the learners and the learning system of schooling. Learning and teaching they recognise as being a task arising out of a passion to teach, but requiring discipline and dedication. This seems to suggest that they see the quality of South African teaching to be relatively superficial: lacking depth of professionalism. They are surprised that many student teachers in their classes may not necessarily want to teach, but have landed in the Faculty of Education simply because it was an access route into higher education, and/or that they were able to obtain a bursary to study at university. For the Turkish students this is likely to produce a mediocre quality of teacher. However, their reluctance to offer an overt critique of this is noticeable.

This suggests that the selection of teachers into the profession needs careful attention. Perhaps the sheer scale of under-qualified teachers in the present schooling system has fostered the view that teaching is for "just anyone". This has created a deterioration of the notion of what a competent teacher ought to be, and consequently a devaluing of the status of teachers and teaching. Raising the bar to ensure higher entry requirements into the teaching profession may have some positive effect, but needs to be supported by a wider social commitment to the responsibility of the teachers as knowledge producers and engagers with wisdom. If teaching is understood merely to be a job with a

salary tag, then it is likely to have only limited stature and value.

The Turkish students seem to suggest that the small messages of valuing the worth of individual learners (themselves included as student teachers) is a greater reward than any monetary gain. This has allowed them to make a strident commitment to continue to teach in the South African context. They know they can make a contribution, even in a small way. These students are exemplary role models for our South African student teachers and teachers, who see the development of teachers as based on a deep self-commitment, being experts in their fields, being loving and caring human beings, and valuing the small pleasures in life beyond monetary reward. What a lesson to learn from humble and dedicated students.

NOTE

- ¹ A version of this paper was presented at the University of Free State, South Africa in September 2010 as part of the inaugural celebrations of the Dean of the Faculty of Education. It has not been published previously.

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