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# Becoming a teacher in the developing world

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## **BECOMING A TEACHER IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

## **ERRATA SHEET**

**Though we spent considerable effort attempting to ensure the correctness of this book, a name Mary Anyango Oluga erroneously appeared which we would like to rectify. The correct name of the author is Anne Musalia. Please note this change on the following pages:**

**Content page: chapter 7  
Page 13: paragraph 4  
Page 87: author's name  
Page 176: End of paragraph 2  
Page 177: paragraph 1  
Page 180: paragraph 1  
Page 182: paragraph 1**

**Editors  
Ayesha Bashiruddin  
John Retallick**

**DEDICATED TO TEACHERS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our interest in exploring teachers' lives began as a journey in 2003, when we started teaching a course called "Teacher Learning" to MEd students at AKU-IED. As the course evolved and SSR was introduced to study teachers' lives, a number of teachers' autobiographies were written. Last year we discussed how we might make these available to a wider audience and hence we decided to publish them in a monograph.

We are extremely thankful to all the MEd students who agreed to have their voices published. They are knowledgeable and experienced teachers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Central Asia, East Africa, Syria and Afghanistan, who shared with us their stories of becoming teachers in the developing world.

We are thankful to Aysha Sajjad for final editing and layout of this monograph. We are also grateful to reviewers, who provided useful feedback on the monograph.

Finally, we appreciate all the support and funding provided by Research and Policy Studies (RAPS) at The Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, Karachi, Pakistan to enable this monograph to be published.

Ayesha Bashiruddin

John Retallick

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

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Dr John Retallick was Associate Professor at AKU-IED for 5 years from 2001 to 2007. Prior to that he was at Charles Sturt University, Australia for some 25 years where he specialised in both undergraduate and post-graduate teacher education along with conducting many inservice courses for teachers from the NSW Department of Education. He obtained his PhD from Deakin University in Australia in 1989 with a focus on critical theory and the supervision of teachers' work to improve the quality of teaching. During his appointment at AKU-IED, John focused on teacher professional learning, educational leadership, qualitative research including action research, distance education and building learning communities. Dr Retallick has presented papers in international and national conferences and his recent publications include: Retallick, J. & Farah, I. (Eds.) (2005). *Transforming Schools in Pakistan: Towards the Learning Community.* Oxford University Press: Karachi and Retallick, J. (2005). *Managing School Success: A Case Study from Pakistan. Leading and Managing.*

**INTRODUCTION**

**SELF-STUDY AND BECOMING A TEACHER IN THE  
DEVELOPING WORLD**

**AYESHA BASHIRUDDIN**

This anthology of autobiographies aims to contribute to our understanding of how individuals make choices of becoming teachers and how they develop throughout their careers. It does that by putting together perspectives of teachers from developing countries and celebrating the uniqueness of each voice thus transforming their embodied knowledge into public knowledge.

This self-study research has made some methodological contributions; it has inaugurated a new domain of experimentation in Pakistan. Others (e.g. Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Loughran & Russell 2002) have used SSR in the West as teacher learning strategy but it was for the first time that it was introduced in a developing country (Pakistan). Thus, as a teacher educator I have contributed to the reform movement by introducing it to students at AKU-IED. The students had not been involved in this kind of self-study research, which gives priority to the teachers' voice and thus opens up a new way of understanding teachers. It was also for the first time that writing about Self was used as a mode of inquiry and of professional development. Thus, such initiatives need to be taken by teacher educators to introduce new research paradigms. We as "Teacher educators need to continuously create spaces within teacher education programmes that are dedicated to practicing and to discussing the crucial role of reflection with beginning professionals. Concurrently, when teacher educators engage in dialogue with their colleagues about critical learning experiences, future teachers and teacher educators are enriched personally and professionally" (Mueller, 2003, p. 82).

This inquiry suggests that a thoughtful use of self-study research integrated into a Teacher Education programme can be a viable and empowering form of professional

development for teacher educators and teachers. My own reflections on the process will shape the SSR strategies for the future. In this respect my self-reflection can be valued as an important activity in the process of developing a SSR workshop and of thinking about exploring how new ways can be developed to facilitate SSR. For example, as a teacher educator following the interesting experiences of teaching self-study research, I have initiated a research/study group at AKU-IED by the name of “Auto/biography in Teacher Development”. The main aim of the research/study group is to encourage research in the area of auto/biography in teacher development. It aims to bring together teachers and teacher educators working in a wide variety of settings who are interested in various kinds of biography and autobiography, the relationship between different genres of representing text and lives, and interrelationships between biography and autobiography. It also aims to introduce the concept of autobiography in teacher development and raise awareness of its effective use in teaching and research. This research/study has “generated a new landscape for professional dialogue among teacher educators and both new and experienced teachers” (Russell, 2002, p.9). It is providing a forum for teachers and teacher educators to make a substantial contribution related to the theory and practice of teacher education, autobiography as a research design/practice, and the professional development of teachers and teacher educators. The group, which consists of faculty members at AKU-IED and two MEd students are in the process of doing a collaborative SSR entitled: “Becoming Teacher Educators”. This has implications for both experienced teachers and teacher educators because they need “opportunities to develop capacities for reflection, collaboration, research, critique, and assessment” (Wood & Lieberman, 2000, p. 256). Furthermore, since AKU-IED has an online discussion forum so the students who are leaving the campus will be able to work collaboratively in the research and continue to forge personal and professional relationships in this community of professionals.

As Feldman (2003) points out, “Self-study recognises at least implicitly that to improve our teacher education practices we need to change our ways of being teacher educators” (p. 27). I, as a result of this SSR, developed teacher education curriculum. I

also developed an E-book<sup>1</sup> entitled “My Story, My Identity. MEd Course Participants narratives of becoming teachers”. Out of 35 narratives written by students I have selected 6. They are 2 from each of the three countries represented in the MEd class, i.e. East Africa, Central Asia and Pakistan. I have raised some critical questions for stimulating reflection and discussion after each narrative. I used this e-book in the Teacher Learning course and it is an example of the curriculum developed from the knowledge generated by teachers. This, as Tamamu (2004) points out, has encouraged the students whose stories are used in the book and have introduced SSR to wider audience, i.e. the students and the teacher educators at AKU-IED. It is possible, as shown in this study, to introduce SSR into academic environments and that the teacher educators can become curriculum developers. They can continuously develop curriculum from teacher-generated knowledge and not depend on experts “out there”. Such efforts can create an enriched, diversified and enthusiastic community of self-study researchers.

Getting involved in SSR has generated interest in students as well. A student from the same MEd class undertook a study entitled, “Self-study research as a teacher learning strategy in teacher education: perceptions and experiences of master of education course participants at AKU-IED” as his MEd dissertation, which he has recently completed (see Tamamu, 2004). I worked closely with him as a supervisor of this MEd dissertation. It further helped me in understanding how SSR can be incorporated in teacher education programmes. This teacher is from East Africa and on his return has the desire to involve others teachers in carrying out SSR. He states:

This was a pioneering study on SSR at AKU-IED. Since the purpose of SSR is to “illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20), I hope my study will generate interest and trigger a dialogue that will eventually lead to successful adaption of SSR in teacher education. I hope to try out the findings of this study in my own context (Tanzania) and would like to challenge other students to do the same, since this study was just the beginning and not in any way the end. (Tamamu, 2004 p. 75)

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<sup>1</sup> Available at website <http://akuiedweb/mystory>

I have sown the seeds of SSR and I hope that further work in this area will be taken up. I have hopes that since all the students in the MEd programme come from diverse backgrounds and countries they will take this in their own contexts and further develop and adapt as they see appropriate which would further extend the community of researchers.

### **Selection of Autobiographies**

The fifteen autobiographies are written by teachers from different developing countries and regions: four each from Pakistan, East Africa, Central Asia and one each from Syria, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

These autobiographies are chosen from a total of ninety nine autobiographies developed by MEd students of three cohorts (class of 2004, 2005 and 2006) in a Teacher Learning module/course in which they were engaged in understanding teachers' lives through self-study research. There was a criterion used for selecting these particular autobiographies from the total number collected. First, all the autobiographies were divided according to the different developing countries and regions within Pakistan because the intention was to include the voices that represent all the countries and regions present in the MEd class.

In some categories the number of autobiographies was higher and in some very low, depending on the representation of the students in each category. The highest category was that of Pakistan because most of the students are from Pakistan and the lowest were from Bangladesh, Syria and Afghanistan.

There was a criterion set for choosing only fifteen autobiographies, which is as follows:

- Critical incidents, reflection and analysis. This included the richness, quality and analysis of the critical incidents described by the authors in their self-study.

- Representation of the educational system. Since, we were looking at the developing world contexts, we also looked how the authors have placed themselves in the contexts of the educational systems in their countries or regions.
- Coherence and representation. Here we looked at the language, expression and coherence in the text that they had developed and also how they represented their journey of becoming a teacher, which might be through a metaphor, an idea, a poem or any other artistic device.

Then in each category there was one final selection and one backup selection. This was done so that in case the authors of the first category refuse to get their autobiographies published then the backup could be contacted. In all the cases the authors of the final selection agreed to get their autobiographies published. In fact, they felt privileged that their voices were being acknowledged and would be shared with wider audience.

Once the autobiographies were chosen, special consideration was given to the fact that they were edited in a way that the critical moments and the meaning of the stories, voices and forms of representations were not lost as the intention was to represent the voices of the authors and not that of the editors.

MEd students at the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED), in Karachi, Pakistan are all experienced teachers from diverse contexts. The Institute for Educational Development of the Aga Khan University was established in 1993 as a teaching, research and policy studies institute. Its goal is to encourage change in the context of “a continued and deepening decline in the quality, effectiveness, relevance and outreach of education systems in Pakistan and elsewhere in the developing world in the face of growing numbers of children and shrinking resources.” Students who join the MEd programme are not only from Pakistan but also from Bangladesh, Central Asia, East Africa, Syria and Afghanistan. Its graduate and professional programmes are planned and implemented with assistance from its partner universities, which are the

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and the Department of Education Studies at the University of Oxford.

The involvement of these students in self-study research began with my own belief that teachers, especially in-service teachers, have valuable knowledge to share and they understand their own learning. They are thoughtful persons capable of making decisions and solving teaching problems (Ayers, 1993; Thiessen & Anderson, 1999). Teachers develop their knowledge through their practices and through reflection upon those practices (Britzman, 1991; Clandinin, 1993). I also feel that “research is personal which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one’s own self-realisation” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.13). This belief has also manifested itself in my own experience of engaging in self-study research (see e.g. Bashiruddin, 2002; Bashiruddin 2006 and 2007). To put these beliefs and experience into practice I devised a workshop in which students were involved in self-study research as a way of self-realisation and professional development.

The students were given the following task to guide them in self-study research:

Becoming a teacher is a journey with significant learning experiences. Write an autobiography in which you capture the richness of your experiences and beliefs as a teacher. Identify important people or critical incidents that have significantly influenced your understanding of professional development as a teacher. Then, critically analyse those experiences and beliefs in terms of how they have shaped you as a teacher that you have become a learner of teaching. While constructing an autobiography keep in mind the guidelines identified by Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar in the article “Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research”.

The aim of engaging MEd students in self-study research was twofold. Firstly, it was to develop their understanding that writing about Self is a new method of inquiry, a way of knowing and a method of discovery and analysis (Richardson, 2000). Although self-study research is a new and emerging kind of research, it is unique in a way that

there is no other research that shows how self-study can be carried out in teacher education programme (Bashiruddin 2006). This monograph representing voices from many diverse educational contexts could be a pioneering work in the area.

In a writing workshop students were encouraged to go through a process of discovery and find their own voice and identity as teachers. I involved them in a process of writing through which they could voice their ideas, read each other's stories and develop their own stories.

The workshop gave them an opportunity to discover their authentic self. This included the intellectual, emotional and spiritual (Palmer, 1998) along with the gender and racial identity (Brown, 2002; Hamilton & Guilfoyle, 1998) and the body and its dress (Weber & Mitchell, 2002). The authentic self is evident in many of the autobiographies included in this monograph. As the autobiographies are embedded in their context they concur with the view of self-study research as “a methodology for studying professional settings” (Pinnegar, 1998).

This approach to self-study research involved reflective writing, which the students were already familiar with because many courses at MEd level involve them in reflection. Self-study research was a step forward because mere reflections do not constitute self study research. According to Russell & Korthagen (1995), “Self study is about the learning from experience that is embedded within teachers’ creating new experiences for themselves and whom they teach...our goal may well be the reinvention of learning to teach, enabling others to understand learning from experience by showing them how we do it ourselves” (p.6). As evident in the lesson plan of the workshop in Appendix A, I shared my own story of becoming a teacher and then involved the students in the process which I found useful for myself. The students had to write reflections on the ‘critical incidents’ and make meaning of what the stories mean to them, why are they significant and produce them in a narrative text. Self-study is a process that engages both recollection of ‘critical incidents’ and reflection process. The students were engaged in a process of doing self-study research during the workshop. In the workshop, a step by step instructions were provided (please see the outline of the workshop in Appendix A). The

self-study research involved them into a process such as thinking and developing annals<sup>2</sup> and chronicles<sup>3</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly 1994), thinking about the ‘critical moments’, reading other autobiographies, understanding how teachers learn by reading relevant literature, which they were encouraged to cite in their autobiographical writing.

The students were also introduced to self-study research which showed various forms of representations, such as use of metaphors, poetry and paintings (See e.g. Bashiruddin 2002; Beattie, 1995; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Konrad, (Eds.) 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, D.J. 1999). This was based on my belief that we represent ourselves as we conceptualise ourselves, “the meaning that representation carries is both constrained and made possible by the form of representation we employ. Not everything can be ‘said’ with anything” (Eisner, 1993; p.9).

This was to allow them to be aware of the ways in which they can represent themselves using literary devices but it was not made mandatory for them. The students were intrigued and their creativity was piqued, they came up with multiple ways of representing themselves, which is evident in their representations in most of the autobiographies in this monograph.

Secondly, engaging in self-study research gave the students an opportunity to develop professionally. It was a form of professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2002) in which they were able to “experience the content of [their] own enquiring I and [could] make sense of this content” (Whitehead, 2000; 873). This was done by developing understanding of self as teacher by tapping into their past. This kind of a process of writing stories of experiences has been used by others to encourage teachers’ professional growth in teacher education programmes (Raymond et al., 1992; Kelchtermans, 1993) and in improving teacher education practices (Loughran & Russell, 1997). Through exploring their past they were discovering themselves and making sense

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<sup>2</sup> “An *Annal*...is a line schematic of an individual’s life divided into moments and segments by events, years, places, or significant memories. The construction of an *annal* allows researchers and participants to gain a sense of the whole of an individual’s life from his or her point of view. *Annals* also allow individuals to represent visually something of the topography of their life experiences, the highs and the lows, the rhythms they construct around their life cycles.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994. p.419).

<sup>3</sup> “After the participant has constructed an *annal*, we ask him or her to tell stories, to construct *chronicles* around the points marked on the *annals*. Frequently we involve participants in creating *annals* and *chronicles* as a way of scaffolding their oral histories, of beginning the process of having them re-collect their experiences.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994. p.420).

of their professional worlds and thinking about significant change within themselves and in the worlds in which they live. Thus, engaging students in the process of self-study research was helping them to think of it as a process of continuing professional growth.

### **Quality and Validity**

There is an ongoing debate on the quality and validity of biographical genre in general and of self study research (Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar, 2001; Feldman, A., 2003) in particular. On the one hand this form of research has been acknowledged as one of the prominent “work [s] in the new scholarship of education” (Zeichner, 1999, p.11). On the other hand justifications of its quality and validity are in question. Some researchers have pointed out that it is difficult to determine what it means to be involved in self-study research. Taylor (1981) explains this by saying that it does have a common sense appeal because it explores the question from a teacher and teacher educators perspective of ‘who we are?’. Another very pertinent question often raised by critics is ‘when does self-study become research?’ Quoting Mills (1959) Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar (2001) suggest that ‘self’ is central in the self-study research and what needs to be accomplished is through evidence and analysis of self in relation to the understanding of public discourse; to the issues of time and place; how biography is linked with history and the context in which the stories are developed. According to Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar (2001) “Quality self-study research requires that the researcher negotiate a particular sensitive balance between biography and history.... There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and others who share the practice setting” (p.15).

‘What makes self-study research valid’ is a question asked by many researchers. Feldman (2003) in his article “Validity and Quality in Self-Study” tries to answer the question in some ways. First of all he states that since there are very few measurements made in qualitative research some researchers such as Eisner (1981, 1991) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) came up with other means of measurement which are believability, credibility, consensus, and coherence. Phillips (1987) argued that the qualities developed by Eisner and Lincoln and Guba may be convincing but they still do not show that what

is presented in self-study is true, they perhaps need to be more than believable, the question that he raises is ‘how do we make our readers believe that they are true?’.

Self-study researchers have been trying to answer the question of validity of their studies (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, Munby, 1995). Some researchers suggest that self-study is akin to literary form, personal reflection or professional development (Northfield & Loughran, 1997); some categorise it as an educative activity (Munby, 1995).

The question that Feldman (2003) raises is: “why validity as well as quality is important in self-study, and what can be done to make self-studies more trustworthy” (p.27). One of the answers he provides is that to make self-study a part of existentialism, which focuses on “who we are as teacher educators, the decisions that we make and the actions we take that construct who we are, and the acceptance of our responsibility for who we are” (p.27). This according to him “leads us to study ourselves, not as naval-gazing but to understand the way we are teacher educators and to change our ways of being teacher educators” (p.27). He also points out that our scholarly work should have “direct effects on teachers, students, and schools. Therefore, it is political work and has implications for policy-makers. The self-study of teacher education practices is also moral work because it has a normative, teleological component. According to him we don’t want to just study our practice, we want to improve it in particular direction that will affect what happens in our colleges, universities, and schools. This adds a pragmatic component to our work we have a moral obligation to not only assess its value or quality but also its validity. As a response to this debate Feldman (2003) has made 4 suggestions through which he states we can increase our validity. First of all by providing “clear and detailed description of how data was collected” (p.27) and by providing “the details of the research methods used” (p.27). Second, by providing “clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data” (p.28) because “it would add to the validity of the representation if readers had some knowledge and insight into the way the researcher transformed data into an artistic representation” (p.28). Third, triangulate the data “beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study” (p.28). Finally, by providing evidence for the “value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators” (p.28).

Therefore while the students engaged in self-exploration and the writing their autobiographies they were asked to keep in mind the 14 guidelines identified by Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar (2001) in their article “Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research”. These guidelines were given to the students to read prior to the class and discussed at great length. They were made responsible to follow them for which they were given various tasks while they were writing such as reading and analysing self-study research papers, writing reflections by answering specific questions, reading and responding to their own writings and that of their peers.

The four suggestions made by Feldman (2003) were helpful for me to develop a workshop for the students because in the process they had to show how they were constructing annals in which they had to identify the critical moments, and then write chronicles by developing stories in a form of data. Then the students were given a chance to share their outlines in which they had also to talk about their intended form of representation. In this sessions critique was done to enable students to choose what they want to represent and what to leave out.

### **Ethical Procedure**

An ethical procedure was followed when the students were engaged in self-study research. All the three MEd classes were given a brief introduction of the intention of using their autobiographies for publication. They were then given a consent form (see in Appendix B) and were also told that it was not compulsion and that they could sign if they wanted to. In class of 2004 thirty three out of thirty five students signed the form. In class of 2005 thirty three out of thirty four signed the consent form and in the class of 2006 again, thirty three out of thirty five students agreed. This makes the ninety nine autobiographies mentioned earlier. The students who did not want to be part of this research were neither asked why they did not want to be part of this research nor pressurised in any way. One or two came to me to say that they did not feel comfortable even if pseudonyms were used to reveal their lives to others. Authors of selected autobiographies published in this monograph were sent letter of consent (See Appendix C). All of the students accepted to be authors of their own autobiographies. Most of the

letters were sent through email because many students had left AKU-IED. Most of the students sent their consent through email. Some students who were still in Karachi or at AKU-IED gave hard copies of letter of consent after signing them.

### **The Autobiographies**

Part I of this monograph has four autobiographies from different parts of Pakistan. Shahida and Gulab come from the Northern Areas of Pakistan. In their autobiographies they have depicted the educational culture of the areas where awareness and access to education and poverty make it difficult for families to educate their children. Their autobiographies show that their parents valued education even though they themselves were not literate and lived in small villages; they made every effort to educate their children. Both Gulab and Shahida found ways of moving to a bigger city like Karachi where they could have better opportunities of getting further education. They continued their education and started their life as teachers in Karachi.

The other two autobiographies depict city lives of Pakistan where access and awareness of education is not so much a problem. Both Humaria and ZillaHuma in their autobiographies do not show it as a problem. Instead, their stories are of opportunities of getting a good education and a number of opportunities to develop themselves as teachers while they were teaching in schools in the form of workshops and courses, which helped them develop better teaching strategies.

Part II takes us to the world of four East African teachers. Kausar, Mary and Esther come from Kenya and Andrew from Darussalam. All of them come from large families.

Kausar's story narrates her parents influence on her choice of the profession. Her father, who had great respect in the community, was a teacher and her idol. Her story narrates her journey of becoming a teacher through formal and informal learning experiences such as education in a teacher training college, learning from teaching and reflecting on her own experiences as a student, and also meeting expectations of her students and their families.

Andrew's story shows that his experience of village life and his father as a teacher did not inspire him to become a teacher. He did not want to be a teacher because it was seen as a profession with low esteem in his area. But when he entered school he started admiring his teachers and started dreaming to become like them. He developed as a teacher through getting formal education both in his own country and abroad. His informal experience of being a student and later a teacher were powerful experiences, which were of great value as a teacher.

Mary's autobiography shows that she came from a well to do large family. She aspired to be a nurse like her mother but her admiration of her own teachers led her to become a teacher. For this she had formal education (BEd) though it did not prepare her for school teaching. Likewise her teaching experience did not help her much because of the outdated curriculum, lack of support from senior colleagues and indiscipline of the students. Despite all this she wanted to prepare herself to be a better teacher and so she pursued further formal education.

Esther also belonged to a village but she was fortunate that her parents gave her all the support that she needed in school. She wanted to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher because teachers were given a lot of respect in her society. To achieve this dream she engaged herself in formal education to develop her content knowledge. She was also engaged in an informal way of professional development through using innovative teaching strategies and reflecting on teaching.

Part III focuses on the stories presented by teachers from Central Asia. Davlatnazar, Farrukhsho and Maisara are from Tajikistan and Jamal is from Osh in Kyrgyzstan. Davlatnazar's autobiography reveals that he chose to become a teacher because he was influenced by his teacher and because his parents also encouraged him. Whatever he learnt from his teachers he taught to his friends, which was a step towards becoming a teacher. To pursue his career in the teaching profession he joined the Dushanbe Pedagogical University (DPU). In the university he got several opportunities to learn formally and informally, from his teachers and his peers. He further developed his professional knowledge and skills by attending workshops, working with a mentor and by

guiding other teachers in the capacity of a principal of a school. After the fall of Soviet Union the only hope to teach came when AKES schools were established in his area.

Farrukhsho's autobiography shows that he had informal preparation for teaching from his parents and by imitating his teachers. After graduation he learnt to put theory into practice. While teaching he got opportunities to develop and improve his teaching by teaching in the school, by consulting his critical friends and by attending workshops and training courses and later by mentoring.

In her autobiography Jamal points out that she was born into a family of teachers and becoming a teacher was an obvious decision for her. Her mother in particular inspired her to become a teacher. Later other teachers provided role models and helped her to fulfill her dream. She was still in her third year of university when she started teaching in her father's school. There she learned about teaching and managing other school matters from her father. Later she worked in a university and had a chance to participate in teacher training courses. She implemented what she learnt from these courses in her classes and shared them with her colleagues.

Maisara's autobiography reveals that she had an experience of school through her siblings' experiences of school; teaching and learning even before she went to a school. She was inspired by many teachers and wanted to become a teacher. She learnt to teach the way her teachers taught her. She had also seen her mother teaching and being respected by the community. She learned to teach on the job and by getting her mother's advice. Her principal was also very supportive and mentored her. Later, the masters at AKU-IED gave her many opportunities to learn, reflect and teach.

Part IV, V and VI unfold the world of teachers from Bangladesh (Tasleema), Syria (Tehama) and Afghanistan (Abdul Wahid). In her autobiography, Tasleema proclaims that teaching is her identity. She was inspired by her mother who was a teacher. She learnt from her formally (when she taught her) and informally (by getting her advice throughout her career). Tasleema began teaching in a school and her formal education continued throughout her professional life. It was after her MSc that she had a full-time job as a teacher. This was in a school, which gave her a lot of

opportunities to develop as a teacher such as working in a team and working with mentors. After joining AKU-IED she feels that her knowledge and skill have been enhanced as a teacher and teacher educator.

Tehama, in her autobiography, compares her primary school teachers to her mother because they were loving, caring and encouraging. She admired her teachers and wanted to become a teacher so she joined a university in Damascus to get a formal degree in education. Later she also did professional development courses, which gave her practical experiences of teaching. Her teaching in various schools in Damascus gave her experience and confidence to teach. She was then appointed as a counselor in a secondary school and there she developed as a professional in a different way. She was there to teach and guide the students.

Abdul Wahid's autobiography shows that initially as a child he did not like school and teachers because teachers punished him. Later in high school he found teachers who were kind and friendly and they inspired him to become a teacher. This experience taught him the roles and responsibilities of a teacher in an academic setting. He moved to Karachi, Pakistan in 1998 because of the political unrest in Afghanistan and became a teacher in a primary school. Then he had an opportunity to join AKU-IED where he got opportunities to further develop himself professionally.

After reading the stories the question that one might ask is:

What are the important themes that emerge from these autobiographies in relation to becoming a teacher in the developing world? This question is considered in the conclusion of this monograph.

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**PART I**  
**TEACHERS OF PAKISTAN**

## CHAPTER 1

### THE LOST SAILOR GETS ASHORE

GULAB KHAN

Going back to the past to find meaning in my present professional life has been a deeply meaningful exercise. For me it was like tracing back a voyage that did not achieve its initially set destination but resulted into an entirely unimagined professional landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995). My parents wanted me to be a doctor; I did not know what I wanted to be and fate made me a teacher. I never wished or aspired to be a teacher. Thus to narrate the contours of my professional life's landscape, I am using a metaphor - 'lost sailor gets ashore on an alien island'. I think this metaphor is particularly useful because it encompasses all the phases of my life, which are synonymous with the sagas of a lost sailor on a long voyage who arrived on an initially unknown island. I hope, this "journeying backwards in order to move forward" (Beattie, 1995, p.1) would make a meaningful narrative of my life consistent with Bullough and Pinnegar's (2001) guidelines. I further hope that by the time the reader finishes reading my story; the metaphor would have delivered its purpose of making this reading a productive exercise. Here begins my story with my early childhood.

*What is life but a sailing ship in forward motion  
Self-directed, succeeding and failing at the mercy of the ocean  
Overcast skies or sunshine, calm waters seem to be the norm  
(Shahriari, 1997)*

I was born to a poor agrarian family of nine sisters and one brother. The early years of my life (from 1973 to 1990) were the least turbulent ones. I was like a sailor who had no inkling of the kind of waters in his coming voyage. I had no idea at all of what I was going to be in the future except for some occasional remarks from my parents that they wanted me to be a doctor or an army officer. Lack of career counseling at school and

at home made it difficult to choose a future career for myself. Counseling services should be provided to every child in their early stages of life to enable the harnessing of their potential in fields best suited to their capabilities and interests. In this brief backdrop of the early years of my life I see myself as a visionless, oblivious sailor, not knowing what lay ahead in seemingly placid waters.

### **The Troubled Sailor in Strong Currents (1991-94)**

*To not set sail is like refusing to be born  
The first storm that hits the shore, the ship will be tor.  
(Shahriari, 1997)*

I vividly remember the events of 1991, which made me leave my home and village and embark on a new chapter of life's voyage. After completing 10<sup>th</sup> grade from a government high school in Gilgit<sup>4</sup>, and experiencing some academic setbacks, I left for Karachi for further studies. Four years from that moment I was completing my B.Sc.<sup>5</sup>

These four years were highly uncertain for me as I was struggling, in a highly haphazard fashion, to fulfill the dreams of my parents. There was no one around to help me identify a career by analysing my potential. I wanted to cry loudly but couldn't. Covert cries did not help me and after failing to get into a medical college, I finally decided to pursue higher education in volatile financial conditions.

### **Storm, Thunderstorm, and Pouring All Around (The Lost Sailor, 1995-1999)**

*Yet out of nowhere, appears a dreadful raging storm;  
Like a twig going up and down with the monstrous waves  
(Shahriari, 1997)*

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<sup>4</sup> A small city in the north of Pakistan

<sup>5</sup> Bachelor of Science

When financial pressures on my family, which were hitherto quiescent, soared up to unbearable heights my parents could not finance my further studies. By not being able to get admission in any medical college or any army officer commissioning institution, I had shattered their dreams. These were huge set backs to my self-esteem and confidence. The only way out was to do a postgraduate degree with a local university in Islamabad so I went for a masters programme in chemistry.

There was great learning in the university days. University was replete with learning opportunities. Apart from providing a strong conceptual understanding in one of the most rigorous science subjects, it nurtured my inner abilities to mature into a responsive, confident and responsible human being. The moments at the university were providing a chance to develop certain aspects of myself as a teacher such as listening and speaking to students in a way in which they would feel valued and respected. For the first time I saw teachers working positively towards students' future development. I must give credit to my university professors, whom I looked upon with great amazement and I envied them for their huge banks of knowledge along with their humility. They developed in me certain characteristics of being human, which helped me face many impending challenges of my life. I believe those were days which prepared me to be a teacher though I did not realise it then, and that preparation helped me get ashore on the island, which makes the central theme of this autobiography.

Near to the end of the master's programme, I was once again caught up in a quagmire of '*what's next?*' Despair engulfed me like a sailor caught up in a storm in the middle of the ocean. Back at home, I heard that my parents were under severe financial pressure and my sisters' and brother's education was in jeopardy. This turmoil forced me to give up all the struggles that I had mustered for my higher education. After completing postgraduate course, I called off further studies and reached home in May 1999. My parents, sisters, and brother were jubilant to see me at home. They considered me a savior but for me there was little reason to agree with that. They did not know that I was a lost sailor in the midst of turbulent waters.

### **Sailor Washed onto an Alien Island (1999-2000)**

In the final semester of MSc<sup>6</sup> at the University in Islamabad, I applied for a position of teacher of chemistry in a private school in Gilgit. While I was at home endlessly thinking about my own as well as my siblings' future, and despair loomed all around me, I received an interview call from the school. The school needed a replacement teacher for chemistry because the permanent teacher had left for her home on long leave. I appeared for the interview. During the interview, the Principal of the school had asked me how I was going to teach without any experience of teaching. I responded by saying that I had strong content knowledge and a learning experience of sixteen years and that I would draw upon those two resources to cope with the challenges of teaching. He smiled at my naivety but because of my apparent enthusiasm to do the job, and probably influenced by my fluency in English, he appointed me as a substitute teacher for chemistry. I began my life as a teacher under the shadows of doubt, fear and challenges.

I had never aspired to be a teacher. Harsh treatment by my early childhood teachers had developed a certain kind of abhorrence in me towards teaching and teachers. The low economic status of the profession, which John (2003) and many others consider a misery of the teaching profession was another factor to add to my disapproval of teaching. Though my university teachers had been instrumental in causing a shift in attitude towards teachers, I still dreaded teachers and teaching in certain subtle and inexpressible ways. This makes me believe that teachers have a very strong influence on students' future career choices. Hence, for me, entering teaching was a decision based more on economic survival than on inspiration, although the economics of teaching was deplorable. Thus I, as a lost sailor, was pushed to the alien island of teaching by circumstances not under my control, and I immediately faced challenges of survival.

### **Sailor Inhabits the Vast and Rugged Island (2000...)**

I saw a double edged sword hanging above me: the fear of return of the teacher whom I had replaced and hence recurrence of the economic crisis on one hand and

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<sup>6</sup> Master of Science

challenges that the new profession (the vast and rugged island) offered on the other, put me in a difficult situation. I worked day in and day out to prove to my students and the school management that I could be a good teacher. The hard work then paid off in some strange and interesting ways. I started getting explicit as well as implicit messages in the form of gestures of approval from students that I was teaching very well. Senior teachers started talking about the positive reactions of students about me. This gave me some satisfaction that I was doing the job well but the fear of return of the first chemistry teacher haunted me all the time.

It had been almost eight months since joining when I got the news that the teacher whom I replaced had resigned and the school needed a teacher on contract basis in my subject. I appeared as a fresh candidate in the new interview and written test and got selected. The salary offered was in five digits, which was a better economic incentive to remain on the job. Furthermore, the students' response and appealing atmosphere of the school with its collegial staff attracted me to remain in the school, thus paving a way for me to take up teaching as a life long career. This inspiration resulted in my permanent stay at the island and hence regularisation of services at the school. I must say that the feeling of recognition in the form of students' approval, and management's encouragement in material and other ways is very important for a teacher to decide to choose teaching as a profession.

### **Some Initial Mapping of the Island**

Gradually, I saw the tough times, the depth of the profession and the demands of it. I was without a proper mentor. The Principal was extremely involved with the external affairs of the school and was not able to give much time to observe and give feedback to teachers. I remember only one instance when he came to my class, on my request, to give me feedback regarding my teaching. I was the only teacher in my department and this gave me a sense of ownership, which further buttressed my commitment to stay in the profession. I believe it is very important for a teacher to have such a sense of ownership.

In all the initial mayhem of teaching, I drew upon the strength that I had gathered in my university life to maneuver through unexpected situations. I faced difficulties with confidence; the belief that I could do it kept me alive in the face of adversities and hardships of teaching. With all that confidence, strength, and sense of ownership and approval from different stakeholders, came the *will* to innovate in classroom. This *will* made me “embark on a series of...experiments by diversifying...instructional materials, ...methods of evaluation, ...modes of grouping of students or their instructional sequences” (Huberman, 1993, p.7). Although the innovations and experiments were not big ones, they made a difference in my teaching style. My classes saw the transition from a purely lecture-based teaching to more and more interactive approaches such as project-based constructivist approaches.

For example I heard from my cousin, who was a teacher at that time, that a good teacher is one who has a student-centered approach. I took that idea into class and tried to approach it by providing more chances to students to interact with each other through discussion on various topics and arranging quiz competitions. Increased student participation posed a challenge to classroom management but I continued using that approach according to the need of any lesson. Thus, I was able to appreciate that a student-centered approach is something which makes students confident to make better use of their discourse abilities. I believe the approach further helped students make their learning more sound and authentic as it engaged them in an enjoyable process of discovery and exploration of different ideas. Similarly, the demonstration method was another strategy that I started using in my classroom after I saw some other teachers implementing it in their science classes.

But in all this series of experiments I always felt a need to attend any formal professional development course. I needed to justify the experiments “in terms of students’ learning” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p.165). The next section deals with some in-service engagements in my professional development (PD).

### **Some Formal and Informal Learning on the Island**

While I was trying to grapple with what Feiman-Nemser (1983) calls the “induction phase” (p.157), and going through different experiments, an in-service professional development chance came up. I was able to attend a milestone workshop on project-based collaborative learning in science conducted by IAP<sup>7</sup>, a joint venture of Phillips Academy, Andover, USA<sup>8</sup>, AKU-IED<sup>9</sup>, and AKESP<sup>10</sup>. Before the workshop, though I tried to adopt a student-centered approach in my teaching, I still subtly shared the belief with Bashiruddin (2002) that pupils should work individually. The workshop enabled me to completely shed that belief, as did Bashiruddin, and I gave more autonomy to students to make learning an enjoyable process for them. The response that I got from my students was very positive, and I could see that project-based, collaborative learning was making students develop a sense of ownership and control of their learning process.

By the time I had integrated the new method into my teaching I was well into my profession and saw no need to switch to a different profession. My continuous stay in the profession provided me with further opportunities of professional development. I got an opportunity to attend a mentoring workshop at PDCN<sup>11</sup> Gilgit, which provided me with skills to work with junior colleagues and help them out in their entry situations. This workshop provided an opportunity to do a mini action research (Khan, 2002) in my classroom on the theme of team teaching with one of my junior colleagues. Furthermore, the workshop acted as a catalyst to enhance reflective practice in teaching, which helped me a lot in improving my teaching practice.

Soon after that mentoring workshop another chance of PD came up. I successfully completed a computer course in September 2002, conducted by Intel<sup>12</sup> in Islamabad. That training helped me to make better use of technology and computers in classroom teaching. Furthermore, I integrated both IAP and Intel trainings, which made implementation of the former swift and easy for myself as well as for my students. Intel

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<sup>7</sup> International Academic Partnership

<sup>8</sup> United States of America

<sup>9</sup> Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development

<sup>10</sup> Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan

<sup>11</sup> Professional Development Center Northern Areas

<sup>12</sup> Microprocessors’ manufacturing company

training also provided me with an opportunity to contribute towards computer literacy in school by training all the teachers on the lines of Intel training. Training the teachers proved to be a good chance to use and improve my mentoring skills that I had gained in the mentoring workshop at PDCN.

There were opportunities of interaction with fellow teachers in the form of professional development (PD) meetings where teachers used to share their experiences or anchored discussions on relevant educational themes. In those sessions I was exposed to many new ideas and theories related to teaching. For example, Bloom's taxonomy of thinking and constructivism were theories, which I came across for the first time in those sessions. In retrospect, those sessions were a step towards making 'communities of practice' (Shamim and Farah, 2005), a reality in school. If such small initiatives are taken seriously and consistently I believe schools can be converted into what Retallick, Cocklin and Coombe (1999) call 'learning communities'.

Apart from teaching, I started to involve myself in certain other responsibilities such as controller of school examinations, secrecy officer to prepare and conduct placement tests at pre-ninth and higher secondary level, and in-charge Hiking Club of the school. Such involvements made me feel valued and respected and those feelings were enhanced when the school accepted my advocacy, with the help of my colleagues, of students' rotation in classrooms. Based on the experience of an observation visit to the International School in Islamabad I felt that students should move from class to class instead of sitting in one room throughout the day. All welcomed the innovation and it proved to be a positive step towards enhancement of student learning as it helped teachers to develop environments in classrooms suitable for particular subjects. This was an indication of my increasing 'self-interest' and 'sense of accomplishment' (Weiss, 1995) that I was positively contributing towards students' learning in a pleasant environment.

### **Exploration Continues...**

The exploration of the island continued. To dig deeper to get to the hidden treasures of this island I appeared in the placement test for the MEd programme at AKU-

IED. I successfully met the requirements of AKU-IED and got admission in the programme. Here I am now, no more a lost sailor, feeling secure and at home, writing my autobiography and sharing with you my nodal learning moments.

AKU-IED has done its initial job of clearing my notions of teaching and learning. The first semester and half of the second semester of the programme has served its purpose of strengthening my conviction that teaching and learning are two integral endeavors of human beings. CTL<sup>13</sup>, EI<sup>14</sup>, TL<sup>15</sup>, SIC<sup>16</sup> and many other such courses are immensely adding to my learning and understanding of the professional landscape of the island of teaching. With all this learning comes the satisfaction that I am no more a stranger to this island and that I belong to it as much as it belongs to me. Clandinin (1993) voices my feeling that “the more I think about it the more I realise how emotional my life is going to be in this profession. But, I would not want it any other way” (p.27). My destiny is here, with me, now and nowhere else.

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<sup>13</sup> Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

<sup>14</sup> Educational Inquiry

<sup>15</sup> Teacher Learning

<sup>16</sup> School Improvement Course

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**CHAPTER 2**  
**MY JOURNEY TOWARDS THE HORIZON**

**SHAHIDA SULTAN**

*I was stirred by twinkling stars and galaxies  
I often wondered fascinated by the vast horizon  
I wanted to climb up the mountain to touch the sky  
I asked again and again, could you touch the sky standing on the mountain?  
But I was told it was higher and higher beyond my reach  
One day I set off towards an unknown destination  
Traveled aimlessly, not knowing  
Where I was going and why?*

*Then an angel held my hand and took me up and showed me the dreams  
I was enlightened with knowledge, filled with joys of learning  
The journey was pleasantly full of roses around me  
Then suddenly I lost the track of my destination  
A thick fog engulfed my way, traveled in uncertainty in the darkness*

*My angel came to my help again  
Showed me the right path with a shimmering light  
With ups and downs I moved ahead,  
Slowly and steadily towards the horizon*

*My journey took a new course then, a tougher and harder one  
The thick smog overwhelmed my way again  
I had lost the track; ups and downs were painful,  
I felt as I would collapse, I thought of retreating several times  
Then some inner force, kept me going on*

BECOMING A TEACHER IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

*All of a sudden it was dawn; I could see the new hope of moving forward  
I kept on moving, pioneering the way again with my angels' help  
Then I found the right track, challenging yet rewarding  
The journey continued in leaps, far away on horizon, the sun was shining  
Giving me the gleaming light and the right course*

*Then began my journey of hope  
I saw the caring angels, extending their helping hands,  
Lest I should fall down  
This assured me of my destination, inspiring me  
Not only to touch the sky but also to soar into the sky  
Not alone but hand in hand with my comrades, to join the cosmos of knowledge*

Who I am as a teacher? This question unfolds my professional knowledge landscape composed of diverse people, things and events in different relationships, which have shaped me as a teacher - this landscape is narratively constructed having a history of moral, intellectual, emotional and aesthetic dimensions (Clandinin and Connelly, 1999).

To tell my autobiography, I am using the metaphor “journey towards the horizon”, which has become significant to me as I reflect on my nineteen years of experience as a teacher. It provides a pathway on which I have traveled and will continue to travel in the process of my professional growth. It has a beginning rooted in my childhood and a destination where there is a long way to go.

While writing my autobiography, I constantly move “backward and forward, inward and outward” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Beattie, 1995) in order to extract meaning from my past experiences, in the light of my later experiences. In this process, I am taking a moral and rational stance, consistent with Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2001) guidelines for self-study, to ensure the worthiness and truthfulness of my autobiography. As a result, I am reconstructing my knowledge and gaining new learning, which is going to be valuable for myself as a teacher and teacher educator.

After reflecting on my own autobiography, I believe that self-study research will open a new dimension for teacher learning in my context. Teachers have “personal practical knowledge” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Beattie, 1995). Through writing and sharing their autobiographies, teachers can reconceptualise their knowledge and perceptions about teaching and learning. Thus, teachers can combine both their personal practical knowledge and the knowledge they gain from formal courses. I believe that self-study research gives us self-awareness, which enables us not only to combine the knowledge but also to transform our practices in pedagogy.

At this stage I must acknowledge the intellectual inspiration and stimulation I have gained from the autobiographies of Bashiruddin (2002), and Tamamu in this monograph, and MEd participants. In fact, their stories enabled me to make sense of my journey of professional development. Similar to Bashiruddin and Tamamu, I also prolog my autobiography with a poem, “My journey towards the horizon”.

*I was stirred by twinkling stars and galaxies  
I often wondered fascinated by the vast horizon  
I wanted to climb up the mountain to touch the sky  
I asked again and again, could you touch the sky standing on the mountain?  
But I was told it was higher and higher beyond my reach*

I was born in a valley surrounded by the ranges of the mighty Karakoram mountains where nature would fully manifest its beauty in unique seasons along with flowing rivers, high waterfalls, spring springs, silver moon lights, and sparkling stars. I was deeply fascinated by the twinkling stars at night and wished to reach the horizon to touch them. This was my early inspiration for achieving something though I did not know what it would be. I loved swimming, swinging and climbing up the trees and hills. This exposure had inculcated in me the strength to face the challenges later on in my life. With my peers I would play with clay and make doll houses. I would plant flowers, water them and anxiously wait for marigolds and roses to bloom.

I remember the time when I was surrounded by the warmth of close relationships and by the sites and sounds of everyday village life. Cultural celebrations, community gatherings and the unity among the people gave me a strong sense of connectedness. Within our family, education was valued highly. My father loved me very much and took deep interest in my education. My mother was a bit strict but both valued our education more than anything else.

*One day I set off towards an unknown destination  
Traveled aimlessly, not knowing  
Where I was going and why?*

In 1974, I was enrolled in a school where we had one teacher and six classes. We had no proper building. In summer we sat under the shade of trees in a nearby neighbors' garden while in shivering winter, when it was minus 15 degrees, we squeezed ourselves into one room in the premises of the Jamat Khana. Our teacher would give us a lot of text

to memorise, which I couldn't do well. To escape from punishment we would often cheat our teacher by standing next to her chair and while she was following each line in the book we would sneak a look at the book. Although, I was not bad in numeracy and literacy, I could not link it with my real life.

One lesson is still vivid in my memory. When I was in class three, one day a visitor taught us a story from our Urdu book about “the nightingale and ant”. He translated it for us in our own language. I understood it and enjoyed it very much. Before that, for me learning was as if I was going on a journey with a blindfold on my eyes and could see nothing. Now I realise that learning is about constructing meaning, it is about exploring new things. If any lesson has these characteristics, it interests the children.

### **Journey of Lower Secondary Education**

*Then an angel held my hand and took me up and showed me the dreams*

*I was enlightened with knowledge, filled with joys of learning*

*The journey was pleasantly full of roses around me*

In 1979, our primary school was upgraded to a formal middle school. A new building was constructed. New and competent male teachers were appointed and the school was equipped with adequate teaching materials. Our head teacher was a very creative, committed and qualified person. We were involved in many learning activities. For example, I remember dissecting flowers in science, reading maps in social studies, drawing charts, reading books in the new village library, and making dishes in home economics. Moreover, we participated in debates, speech competitions and so on. These three years provided me with a very strong foundation of knowledge and will always remain remarkable in my life. I loved my school and was never absent even if I was ill. I was intellectually enlightened and started dreaming highly about my future. I made up my mind that after class eight, I would study science and go for medicine. In fact, I was inspired by the young female doctors from Karachi who would come for our health examination. I realise that for girls, women role models are very important.

## **Barriers in the Journey**

*Then suddenly I lost the track of my destination*

*A thick fog engulfed my way, traveled in uncertainty in the darkness*

I wanted to get further education but there was no access beyond class eight. I could see village people fighting with poverty and I saw my own parents struggling day and night to fulfill our needs since my elder brother was doing his engineering in Lahore and younger brothers were studying in the town schools and were staying in the boys' hostels. However, there was no female hostel where I could go and still there is none for girls in the town. These feelings compelled me to do something at least to support my own generation and me in the future. It is true that time and place shape life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In my area, female access to higher education is still a big issue due to which we badly lack female human resources. I wonder how to address this issue.

Since there was no option for me to continue my education, my parents decided I should get married. In May 1982, I set off towards an uncertain destination with vague visions and dreams in mind. I went to Karachi with my husband as he had a job there. This new place, particularly the confidence and the freedom of women, fascinated me a lot. Soon I adjusted myself into the new culture. My husband and my brother, who was already in Karachi, enrolled me in a high school because of my passion for earning. However, I could not continue my studies as I was expecting my first baby. But I did my matriculation privately with quite good marks in August 1984. I must acknowledge my husband's moral support, which has enabled me to strive for my career ambitions.

*My angel came to my help again*

*Showed me the right path with a shimmering light*

*With ups and downs I moved ahead,*

*Slowly and steadily towards the horizon*

In summer 1984, we returned back to our area to escape from the scorching heat of Karachi. The community there approached me to teach their daughters, since there was no female teacher in the school. Drawn by the request of the community, I joined teaching in one of the primary schools of my present organisation, in December 1984.

Without any training or orientation I started teaching. I was assigned to teach science and Urdu. In the beginning I forced the children to memorise the text. Perhaps that was my early influence, I taught the way I had been taught in my primary classes (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Bashiruddin, 2002). However, gradually I moved towards practical teaching in science. I would take children outside the classroom and let them observe different things. For example, I remember that the students observed the life cycle of the frog. We tried to observe the life cycle of the fly as well but our experiment did not work. I learnt that children could understand science very well in this way.

Without any proper training how did I move towards practical teaching? Perhaps it was a natural and “intuitive” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983) shift for two reasons. First, the school was located in a natural environment where we had all sorts of flowers, insects and plants around us. Second, perhaps my formative experiences in such an environment had a pervasive effect on my teaching.

Once an inspector visited our school and was very pleased by the responses of the students in science. However, I did not plan my lessons and neither did I have any clear objectives for my lessons. Now I realise that most often I would leave my students with confusion and many questions, though our efforts bore fruit when our school won an academic excellence award for three consecutive years.

We did not have many opportunities for training then. Between 1986 and 1990, I attended only two courses, one week each, on teaching of science and Urdu. However, they were mostly based on content knowledge. Furthermore, in our school teachers would not discuss any issues regarding teaching and learning. Shulman and Shulman (2004) inform us that vision, motivation, practice, reflection and community are key characteristics of teacher learning. I had, to some extent, the four characteristics but I was

practicing them in isolation rather than in community. Thus, due to no guidance and feedback my learning process was very slow.

In terms of my own education and development, I had been a student, a teacher as well as a mother simultaneously. Performing these roles effectively was not an easy job. I did my FA and BA privately for which I would study late at night. It used to be very tough particularly when the children were on breast-feeding. I would go home from school in break time and always would be fifteen minutes late, which was quite unprofessional. Later on when I became a headteacher of a high school I was quite sensitive to this issue and made the timetable in such a way that female teachers could get adequate time to feed their babies, without disturbing their routine teaching. I believe that awareness and sensitivity to the women teachers' practical needs is very essential to help them perform better.

In 1992, I did my BEd from the College of Education, Karachi as a regular student. I found my teaching practice very helpful where I was able to consolidate my lesson planning skills. However, the college lectures were so boring that most of the time I would fall asleep. In 1993, I joined primary teaching back in my school but I realised that what I had learnt was the lecture method that did not match with my primary classroom teaching. Feiman-Nemser (1983) calls it a mismatch between formal teacher education and real classroom teaching.

### **Exploring the Inner Teacher**

In May 1993, I was transferred to a school in the town, which was the first high school my organisation had established for girls. The school needed qualified female teachers so I had to move to the new place. Now it was time to say goodbye to my students after almost 7 years in the school with them. I remember the tears flooding down on my cheeks. Children, like little angels, were looking at me with uncertainty and with tears in their eyes. Even for my colleagues the moment was heavy. That was the moment when I realised who I was and who I wanted to be and it deeply touched my soul as a teacher. Now thinking back on my early inspiration by the stars, I feel that these little

children were like those twinkling stars that I wished to touch in my childhood. But I know that I am far away from this dream. It is not easy to make a difference in one's life.

*My journey took a new course then, a tougher and harder one  
The thick smog overwhelmed my way again  
I had lost the track; ups and downs were painful,  
I felt as I would collapse, I thought of retreating several times  
Then some inner force, kept me going on  
All of a sudden it was dawn; I could see the new hope of moving forward  
I kept on moving, pioneering the way again with my angels' help*

In my area female access to higher education remains a dream. Therefore, we have a shortage of competent female teachers. As I was the first woman teacher in the whole of my system to have the formal degree of BEd I had no option but to take up the challenge of moving to this far away school and teach secondary classes.

At that time I faced many difficulties in my family life. First, we suffered financially as our expenses had drastically gone up due to house rent and other expenditures. Secondly, looking after the children was a problem as my relatives who could care for them were away. However, because of my husband's moral and material support we were able to manage the crisis.

I confronted many challenges in my school as well. Teaching English and social studies to secondary classes was not an easy job for me. I would prepare my lesson plans and notes till late at night. I did not have any reference books and there was no one who could help me with connection. I taught almost nine periods daily and there were other responsibilities as well such as maintaining discipline and looking after the school assets, which I hated to do. Above all, the school culture was very bureaucratic. I felt that our appraisal was used to find out our weaknesses only, not to help us improve. I was very frustrated and quite often I thought of quitting the job and going back home. But I could not do so as I had developed a moral relationship with these teenagers and loved teaching them. I wanted to help them achieve their dreams. However, from the bureaucratic school

culture I learnt an important lesson; trust and collaboration are vital for the professional growth of teachers and effective teaching and learning. I also learnt that appraisal should be used to help teachers in their professional growth rather than to defeat them.

The result in my subjects was good in the board exams. I was gaining respect from my students and parents. I made my teaching interesting for students by group discussions and debates though my focus would be mostly on exams.

Then my journey entered into a pleasant phase, when, in 1996 a consultant joined the school for a period of one year. To a great extent the consultant transformed the school into a learning community by fostering collaboration among the teachers. We had various professional development opportunities, such as workshops and meetings. In fact, I learnt a lot from this mentor. I learnt that school-based expert support was very helpful for our professional development.

I also got the opportunity to attend a six week training course from the British Council, Lahore where apart from improving my language proficiency, I learnt some interactive ways of teaching English. I implemented them in my classroom and this enhanced students' participation and made my lessons interactive. However, my main focus was on the completion of the syllabus and preparing students for exams as a requirement of the Board.

In 1996, I was promoted as the acting head of the school and I worked for a year in this role. However, as a young female head I had to face much resistance from my male colleagues who were older than me. I realised that this role was very challenging and required effective leadership skills and professional competency, which I was lacking.

### **My Journey of Teacher Education**

*Then I found the right track, challenging yet rewarding  
The journey continued in leaps, far-away on horizon, the sun was shining  
Giving me the gleaming light and the right course*

We were offered teacher trainer positions in a newly launched programme for the enhancement of English language and pedagogical skills of teachers funded by the European Commission (EC). I qualified for one of the positions. This journey was the most fulfilling one, in terms of gaining knowledge about teaching and learning of English language. Here, I had the opportunity to work with volunteer teachers from overseas. We planned and conducted training courses for English language teachers of primary schools. In this reciprocal learning process, I learnt a lot from the teachers' experiences through discussing various issues on teaching English. There was not a single moment where I was not learning. After each session I conducted, my colleagues would give me feedback and I tried to improve next time. My sessions were equally appreciated by the course participants. As I was the only local woman in the trainer group I had to work even harder to prove that local women can also be confident and competent facilitators. Our project director was a very kind, caring and supportive person. I was inspired by her teaching and leadership style.

In 1998, I joined the Field Education Office as a field based teacher trainer, which is my present position. However, because of the lack of the staff I was responsible for providing both the academic and administrative support to primary and middle schools in my region, which was a highly demanding role. I learnt that training teachers in the central office was different from bringing changes in the real classroom situation. The teachers faced many issues in the classroom such as lack of parental support, burden of teaching due to the shortage of teachers and lack of basic teaching materials. But the most challenging thing for me was to gain teachers' trust in the beginning. In fact, previously, our inspectorate had mostly focused on disciplinary issues (John, 2004). The authoritarian approach had created a huge gap between teachers and the central office staff. Nevertheless, I can confidently say that I was successful in gaining their trust and I built up a positive working relationship with the teachers. We worked collaboratively to resolve any issue. Moreover, I was also successful in initiating and institutionalising mothers' involvement in their children's education in my region. I developed a concept paper on that issue, in which I recommended an extension of the

programme to other areas as well. It was approved and became a part of the second phase of the EC funding project.

In 2002, I worked with the British Council as a training consultant to train primary English teachers of government schools. I was given remuneration almost six times more than what I get now. This improved our financial condition and enabled us to send our daughter to a good college. But most importantly, it enhanced my confidence as a teacher and prospective teacher educator as I realised that my contribution was highly valued. Also, I learnt a lot in this new context from my peers in terms of teacher training and development. When I compared both systems I could see a huge difference in the quality of education in my own education system and the government system. I strongly felt that the government schools needed to work rigorously and seriously to improve the teaching and learning situation. My consultancy was extended though I returned to my parent organisation where I was needed. By returning, and declining a very a prosperous future, I was paying a tribute to my parent organisation for enabling me to get such a high career.

### **My Journey of Intellectual Development**

*Then began my journey of hope  
I saw the caring angels, extending their helping hands,  
Lest I should fall down  
This assured me of my destination, inspiring me  
Not only to touch the sky but also to soar into the sky  
Not alone but hand in hand with my comrades, to join the cosmos of knowledge*

Now here I am at AKU-IED with a burden of several questions and issues about pedagogy and teacher learning in my context. I have embarked on the journey of my intellectual development and I am optimistic that this journey will enable me to accomplish my vision of improving schools in my area. My teaching practice in the first semester was a unique experience. I would confidently say that the insight I gained from

my teaching practice through reflection was more worthwhile than my eighteen years of teaching without reflection. In Educational Inquiry I learnt critical thinking skills. In the second semester, I am gaining new perspectives on school improvement, leadership and teacher leaning. But now I am not alone in the journey as I am among the learning community who is ever ready to care for me. AKU-IED will serve to be my horizon providing me the light and the right path. Now this collective, challenging, yet rewarding journey will continue towards the horizon of knowledge.

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## CHAPTER 3

### MY LEARNING LIFE CIRCLE: A LONG WAY TO GO...

HUMAIRA KHOKHAR

When I think about some of the significant features of my learning life, I place myself in the middle of a circle. This learning life circle consists of the chords of my dreams, feelings, ideas, hopes for the future, academic achievements, learning moments, successes, experiences and the purpose of my life – teaching. I see this circle becoming broader day by day, so it has infinite boundaries. The diameter of this circle is ‘teaching’, which joins me with each chord of my life. My learning life circle is based on the nodal moments and experiences, which led me to become a teacher. I agree with Fuller and Bown (n.d.), cited in Parkay and Stanford (1992), “the experience of becoming a teacher needs to be acknowledge for what it is: complex and demanding” (p.1). In this paper, I will reflect on those learning experiences which are very memorable for me.

#### **Chord of Deciding to Become a Teacher**

I never had any idea of what it is to be a teacher before going to school, because there was no teacher in our family. When we came to our native city, I got admission in a new school in class six. I faced many difficulties in adjusting to a new, environment, syllabus and teaching methodologies.

It was a government school where teachers had traditional ways of teaching. Most of the teachers and students were relying on rote learning. I still remember my science teacher who did not make science concepts clear to us. In each thirty minute period, she would read from the textbook for twenty minutes and the remaining ten minutes were for us to memorise the lesson. From this experience I did not get a good impression of teachers.

Around that time my eldest sister started to teach me at home. She developed a friendly relationship with me by asking questions like ‘what happened in class today’? and ‘what did you read today’?. This helped me to develop trust in the teachers. When she joined school as a teacher I got an opportunity to observe her at work. I found her very competent, regular and sincere as a teacher. She never compromised on the studies of her students. I always found her better than my own teacher because she would spend time on topics for students’ understanding. It was not only for me as a sister but I observed the same with the children who came to our home for tuition.

Gradually, I was really inspired by my sister and decided to become a teacher like her. This decision has grown up with me since then. It led me to focus on teachers’ lives and their teaching skills in the school and college periods. Thence, this decision strengthened with promotion in each class.

I learnt two significant teaching skills from my teachers in this period; a teacher must be soft spoken rather than shouting and a teacher must be cooperative to solve students’ problems. I decided that I would adopt these skills if I became a teacher. Students in their pre-service phase of learning to teach, adopt the ways of their cooperating teachers (Friebus, 1970 cited in Nemser, 1983). I never liked the teachers who just teach for the sake of teaching and not for the sake of students’ understanding.

On passing my BSc<sup>17</sup> I realised that a very important learning door of my life was opening. That phase made me learn many things, such as experience of working together, working under the guidance of a teacher, which made me achieve maturity and sensitivity. At that time, I decided to use my learning in a practical way by joining a school as a teacher. I continued my education by taking admission in M.Sc<sup>18</sup> Economics.

### **Chord of Joining as a Teacher**

I joined Aga Khan School without any professional degree as it was not a requirement to join the school. Although I was appointed as an English teacher, I had no

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<sup>17</sup> Batchelor in Science

<sup>18</sup> Masters in science

experience so I was given some periods of class nursery. Before I stepped into my first classroom as a teacher, I thought teaching was mainly instruction, partly performing, certainly being in the front and at the centre of classroom life. I thought so because I saw my teachers like that. But, after stepping into the real classroom I found it very challenging and different.

My fellow teacher of that time never guided me about teaching skills or shared syllabus with me. That might have been due to my lack of experience or for being the most junior in the school. I had to teach English letters with sounds as well as writing and I faced difficulty because I had not been taught in this way. In the school the phonic sounds of 'a' and 'e' were different to my knowledge. However, instead of helping and guiding me, my co-teacher made it a joke in the staff room. I became very upset and embarrassed as I was new and didn't know that teachers worked individually with no culture of sharing. At that time, I realised that teachers must be cooperative to support colleagues and students. I found this period very challenging. The first year is the critical year in learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 1983).

My head teacher talked to me about this. I explained that I didn't have the class syllabus that's why I could not teach accordingly. She gave me appropriate material and started to observe my lessons. Her attitude really encouraged me and made me struggle to prove myself as an efficient and competent teacher. I spent two very challenging months in that class. This was the exploration phase (Huberman, 1993) of my career during which I discovered some real teaching issues, such as the importance of working with colleagues etc.

### **Chord of Becoming an English Teacher**

Gandhi, cited in Beattie (2001), said, "If I have the belief that I can do it I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning" (p.8). My head teacher observed me once a week. At last, my struggles gave me positive outcomes in the form of nomination as regular English teacher.

At that time the school's English teaching policy was turned into language skills from the traditional memorisation methods. It was because of the new school management and also low English proficiency of the students. Then a new struggling and challenging phase started in my life as an English teacher. I had daily two periods of English in each class so it was highly demanding for planning and content knowledge.

I planned set days to teach English language skills. In the beginning I was not very successful in improving children's writing, listening or comprehension skills. I realised that the students were not habitual users of English so they needed some time to adjust. I also revised my planning and changed some of my teaching strategies e.g. more practice time and fortnightly tests.

My efforts and children's interest resulted in improvements in reading comprehension skill and grammar rules in second term. My headteacher kept on observing my lessons and gave me very useful suggestions in this regard, such as the use of group work, to enhance the speaking skills of students.

This was a learning period for me. I learned to plan lessons based on English language skills. It was also my first step to develop myself professionally. I became motivated to bring change in my style of teaching grammar. I also started to emphasise students' learning to spell correctly, which was neglected before. According to the class level, I started to introduce spelling rules in my classes and this methodology really helped the students. After teaching the whole year and with some experience and pain, I learned that teaching is instructing, advising, organising, guiding, managing, disciplining, interacting and listening.

In the same year I also got an opportunity to attend a fifteen-day AKES, P<sup>19</sup> teachers' training workshop at Hyderabad. I attended English sessions and learned how to make interesting and useful worksheets for the students. I prepared worksheets for my classes for the first term. After that I prepared worksheets for other classes too.

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<sup>19</sup> Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan

The principal asked me to work with ECD<sup>20</sup> section for developing English workbooks for the whole year. We worked in a team and developed the books for classes prep to one. This experience was a step to promote a collaborative and cooperative culture in the school as pre-primary teachers continued to work together afterwards.

### **AKU-IED<sup>21</sup> Learning Circle – Life Long**

“The important thing about art is not what it gives us, but what we become through it” (Oscar Wilde). My teaching life provided me a chance to work for education and I joined AKU-IED for the MEd<sup>22</sup>. My purpose in joining this programme is to develop myself professionally and improve my teaching skills with better understanding of the classroom situation. I feel I love learning to teach. Now when I have passed the first module, I feel that MEd at AKU-IED has really helped to enhance my skills. I am saying so because when I took a session during semester break at my school, my colleagues gave me encouraging feedback.

As a teacher educator, I have planned to motivate and help my colleagues so that teachers can fulfill their real roles and as a result students can learn. Now, my learning life circle is blooming and becoming gradually richer. I am hopeful that AKU-IED will help me accomplish the aim of my learning life.

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**CHAPTER 4**  
**MY PATCHWORK QUILT**  
**ZILLAHUMA**

I am recalling my journey as a teacher and in the process I am also revisiting my personal life because I cannot separate my personal life from the professional one. Mills (1959, cited in Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001) comments that public issues must be understood by relating them to individual lives. Therefore, I feel that my story, though it is personal in terms of the experiences I have gone through, deals with the very public issue of teaching. I have picked up bits and pieces of my life and experiences and have stitched them together. I call it the patchwork quilt of my life. It is multi-colored, bright and vivid in places and dull and devoid of color in other places. I am going to hold up my patchwork quilt for you to identify similarities, while at the same time you may appreciate the experiences that are unique to my story and make an effort to understand them with deeper insight. So let us share the story of its making and then perhaps you'll be able to hold up your very own patchwork quilt against mine and appreciate the uniqueness of each.

**Meaningless Arrangement**

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” so wrote Charles Dickens. I recall these lines when I revisit my first experiences of being a teacher. I was born in a family that valued education. My mother had been teaching for thirty long years and my father considered education his top priority. I read profusely and collected books as other people collect stamps. People all around expected me to become a teacher; like mother like daughter they would say and that infuriated me.

My experiences in school and college were happy in terms of the friendships I developed but none of the teachers inspired me, in fact I seldom gave them a second thought. I was an average student probably because I never took any interest in the course

books and always spent time reading novels and short stories. Like many other young people, I never gave a serious thought to my future. Thus, call it fate or chance; I joined the teaching profession after graduation. My purpose was to kill time and what better way to kill it then with something that paid as well. Shulman (1986) quotes Bernard Shaw, “He who can does. He, who cannot, teaches.” I think those words are an apt description of my state of mind at that time.

Can you visualise the first few patches in my patchwork quilt? Some dull, some grey and a few bright, all existing together in a meaningless arrangement that made no sense. It looks like a jumble of colors and patterns, each lost in a chaotic array of companionship. They symbolise the first couple of years of my teaching career. I taught what I knew to those trusting, innocent faces seated in the classroom. The only interesting thing was that I taught literature, which was and still is my passion. I wanted my students to learn to appreciate it as much as I did, so I started to read out selections from classics that, to my delight, my students enjoyed. But the principal commanded me to stick to the syllabus. I obeyed but continued the reading sessions at home. Though the students had not been exposed to classic English literature, they began to develop an interest in it. I will not say that this one experience changed my outlook on teaching, and that I suddenly became a dedicated teacher. But I feel that those critical events brought about a very subtle change in my thinking towards the profession of teaching. Though at that time I couldn't identify the criticality of these events but now, after such a long time I realise that those very early experiences of teaching had a profound effect on my feelings regarding teaching. It implies that teachers need to be aware of the impact of certain events on their perceptions regarding teaching and teaching practices and that further outlines the importance of reflective practice. It is only through reflection that we can recognise the significance of classroom experiences; otherwise we will realise their importance only very late in life.

My class teaching was very traditional and conventional. I taught the way I had been taught and hardly ever thought of my students as individuals who deserved to be treated differently. My classrooms were very ‘disciplined’ as I didn't allow the children to talk unnecessarily. Interestingly, I could not relate the sessions at home to teaching and

saw them as social interaction. I had never experienced it so I thought teaching was strictly limited to classrooms. In retrospect, I would say that I modeled my teachers by teaching the way they had taught me. Unconsciously, I applied the same strategies that they had used, for instance I kept my classes disciplined by restricting interaction among students. Feiman-Nemser (1983) comments that teachers imitate the practices of their teachers. In my current role as a coordinator, which includes induction of new teachers, I find this to be true since most novice teachers tend to teach very traditionally, as per the practices in many schools in our context. Many of them come with the belief that teaching is the easiest profession. All that is required is to maintain discipline, pass on information and mark students on the basis of tests. I believe that classroom experiences along with support from the school and in-service training contributes a lot towards teachers' professional development.

My patchwork quilt was getting bigger, with life adding colors of different hues and shades. I came across various experiences in my workplace and was a witness to many critical incidents that not only shaped my personal life but also added to my professional development.

### **Emerging Patterns**

Five years down the line I was still teaching, the reason being that I had developed an interest in my profession and derived satisfaction from it. Initially, teaching was no more than an activity that had been taken up with boredom but now it had become meaningful and helped enhance my understanding of my own capabilities and interests in life. Thus I started to look for new horizons in this profession. I started to attend courses and workshops all around the city, at places like the Teachers' Resource Center and the British Council.

But one factor that left an everlasting imprint on my development as a teacher is the classroom experiences I encountered. I wasn't always successful in what I did and I faltered many times; I was very enthusiastic and thought of having an exemplary classroom. I planned my lessons around activities and tried to give my students

opportunities for expression but I was disillusioned very quickly. My students were also getting frustrated by the rapid introduction of one strategy after another and were disruptive as well. I was enthusiastic but was still a novice in the field, going through a trial and error period. I was not only teaching but was also supposed to learn how to teach. Wildman et al., (1989, as cited in Feiman-Nemser, 1983) state, “new teachers really have two jobs to do – they have to do the job they were hired for and they have to learn to do that job” (p.1). Upon reflection, I realise that my teaching practices did not address their needs. I taught with zeal but my intentions were at variance with what my students required. I find this to be true for almost all new teachers; they begin with enthusiasm and high expectations but are soon disillusioned. Feiman-Nemser (1983) comments that new teachers bring “idealistic and unrealistic expectations” to teaching. I think that pre-service and in-service programmes need to be structured so that they enable the teachers to enter their classes with realistic goals.

To add to the difficulties I was facing, a senior staff member who was supposed to stay in my class as a silent observer and provide me with feedback regarding my teaching practices was supervising me. What she did was just the opposite. She intervened in my class to the extent that my students started to see her as the class teacher and me as her helper. My enthusiasm as a beginning teacher took a back seat and things got so bad that I started thinking of quitting the job. At this critical moment, a colleague stepped in and became my critical friend and mentor. Feiman-Nemser (1992) contends that experienced teachers should help new teachers survive. She observed my classes, gave me feedback, encouraged me where she thought I was doing well and helped me evaluate and analyse my practices in terms of my students’ needs. In my opinion this is a very important aspect of teacher development; as Feiman-Nemser (1992) suggests beginning teachers need a mentor to take advice from. Experienced teachers can support novices and provide them with learning opportunities by sharing experiences and helping them learn in the process. This is my perception of teacher educators; they must provide the foundations on which new teachers will build up their knowledge.

With help from this colleague, I developed confidence and started to recognise my students as individuals, when previously I had categorised them broadly as bright,

average and dull. This paradigm shift didn't happen suddenly, it took time but taught me a lot of lessons about life and teaching. I started to look at my students as individuals like me who had their own needs and learning styles. This realisation made me accept the fact that I was responsible for my students' learning and I couldn't just shrug them off if they did not do well. It was a very busy time for me since I invested all my time towards my students, even my snack and resource time was spent with them. I had to take my corrections home and whatever had to be prepared for the classroom displays had to be done as well, thus I stayed up late at night. My classes improved with time and my students began to appreciate my teaching, more importantly they showed me that they liked me and enjoyed my classes. I settled into the routine of being a teacher and the support from my mentor and from the school encouraged me to give my optimum to teaching. I felt motivated and gathered the courage to take decisions, in everyday situations, in the best interest of my students. I view this as reconstruction of my teaching practices and beliefs. I strongly feel that schools, which render assistance and support to their teachers and provide well-structured, need based in-service training programmes lay the scaffolding for future professional development.

I think this was a very important turning point in my life. This was the time when I gave serious thought to the profession that I had taken up with such disinterest. Feiman-Nemser (1983) writes that most learning with reference to teaching takes place on the job. Though I had been through a lot of courses and workshops by this time, I think I benefited most from classroom experiences and interactions. My readers may also find this true and many teachers will perhaps agree with me that novice teachers construct their learning as regards to their teaching practices inside the classrooms. This does not mean that training courses are not needed; in fact teacher training needs to produce teachers who are competent in terms of pedagogy as well as content. Teachers must be aware of the theories, content and methodologies, and all these must be aligned to classroom realities.

All those critical incidents in my life made me re-visit the previous years and I realised with surprise that I had come a long way. The young girl who had started with apprehensions and no purpose in life had matured into a woman who could now realise

the importance of all those experiences and identify the moment or moments that had changed her. At this point in life, I stopped thinking of any other career and finally decided that teaching had become my passion. I identify this as the ‘stabilisation phase’ that Huberman (1993) talks about, in his words I finally ‘decided to commit’ myself to the profession of teaching.

### **The Design**

The patchwork quilt got bigger and bigger, with life adding various bits and pieces to it. I became much more confident and felt at ease with my profession. My teaching practices improved, not only in terms of class management but also in terms of the quality of learning that took place. I developed the courage to take risks in class, and approached my students individually and accepted the responsibility of enhancing their learning. This happened gradually, over a long period of time. But I can now see how it changed my perspective on life and made me a better teacher. It happened because I improved both my content and pedagogical knowledge and my focus shifted from ‘I’ to ‘they’. But for this radical change to happen, teachers have to be very persistent and more importantly, they need to work in an environment that is supportive and encourages them to learn to teach. Schools should provide learning opportunities not only to their students but also to their teachers. This implies that our schools must reconceptualise and restructure teacher training by meeting the needs of teachers, but an obstacle to this is the fact that most schools in our context do not view teacher training as their responsibility and leave it to the teacher training programmes and colleges. The assumption is that new teachers will bring expert content and pedagogical knowledge as a result of having gone through training programmes. As a teacher educator it is our responsibility to initiate teacher development programmes in our places of work, keeping in mind the needs of teachers so that the outcomes are productive in terms of not only professional development but also their impact on students’ learning outcomes.

Time passed quickly and it was a surprise for me to be called into the principal’s office one fine day to be informed that I was to work as coordinator of the middle section of the school. The job entailed monitoring and mentoring teachers and

students, looking over the curriculum, interacting with the administration, teachers, students and parents, and teaching in the classroom. Being a coordinator meant all this and much more. At first I found it strange and challenging, as I had to take myself out of teaching and focus more on management aspects and teacher monitoring. I learnt to reconceptualise many concepts related to teaching and learning; I also learnt to keep the student as center point around which all things moved. I started evaluating teachers' practices with reference to students' learning. I had to provide 'enabling conditions' (Feiman-Nemser 1992) to help the teachers add on to their learning as teachers. In my opinion, teacher trainers need to develop a relationship based on mutual confidence and trust. They need to establish an environment conducive to learning in which all collaborate to learn from each other. Thus I thought of myself as a life long learner and picked any good or valuable idea that they put forward.

I worked in this position for five years and was still working as a coordinator in 2003 when I was asked if I would like to do the MEd at AKU-IED. My first impulse was to say no but at home everyone encouraged me to take up the challenge. The very next day I delivered my consent to my principal and went through the routine of observation, interview and test to qualify for the programme. I hope to learn more about my profession and to become much more competent as a teacher and a teacher educator. Although the participants of the course are from different contexts and cultures, we share many similarities as teachers. And this is how I look at my patchwork quilt, its colors and patterns are unique to me, at the same time, many of the patterns may be the same as the ones in your life's quilt. Together we may learn from the designs that have emerged as a result of our experiences as teachers. I end my story in the hope that you will read and understand it with increased insight into the makings of a teacher.

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**PART II**  
**TEACHERS OF EAST AFRICA**

**CHAPTER 5**

**TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK...TACKLING TEACHING WITH TIME**

**KAUSAR KHAN**

*Tick, tock, tick, tock...*

*The clock spelt out*

*Precious lessons*

*I was to cherish in life*

*At the peak of the hour*

*I heard a chime*

*It had a clear message*

*I cleaned up my act*

*Tick, tock, tick, tock...*

*Be cautious they said*

*I put my kit together*

*And set out on a mission*

*At the peak of the hour*

*I just found a missing clue*

*Some did not see it*

*The puzzle was still unsolved*

*Tick, tock, tick, tock...*

*In the lonely room*

*A few came in*

*Phew, they heard the call*

*At the peak of the hour  
The alarm went off  
Now a loud call  
Come on, make a move*

I went to a quiet room to listen to myself, I wanted to hear my feelings talk, and I wanted my history to tell. I heard my mind open and I heard my heart sigh. And the clock spoke,

*Tick, tock, tick, tock...  
The clock spelt out  
Precious lessons  
I was to cherish in life*

Who am I? Why am I? Where am I? The pieces of a “puzzle linking knowledge, context and identity” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) were fitting in place by the minute. I started sorting the pieces, choosing those that made me the teacher I am: “Reflection and critical consideration are crucial” (Hamilton, 1998) in my venture to understand the teacher in me. As the seconds sped, the minutes churned critical incidences of my life. The cycles round the dial mark “landscapes” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) of my teaching geography. After choosing the clock as my metaphor, I realised that I was in line with Riley’s, “social clock” (as cited in Huberman 1994, p.17)

Now I wanted to understand the scope, breadth and depth of my life history because it would provide important insights into elements of personal, family and professional influences that shape a career.

### **Choice by Birth?**

I feel that my parents strongly influenced my choice of career. I am the fourth child in a family of six children. My father was a teacher in a government college and was the sole bread earner of an extended family of a widowed aunt with seven children, a

grandmother and us. To make ends meet, dad took up all sorts of odd jobs and Mum cooked food for sale. We, the children, chipped in to help where we could. Dad had a good sense of humor and always made the work seem so easy. No wonder we did most of the work without much ado.

My first teacher and idol in life was my father. In my community, dad was a highly respected man and I wanted to be like him. One of the most exciting jobs Dad took up was with the American Peace Corps (volunteer teachers from America who would serve some years of service in Kenya). Every year dad would prepare the volunteers in Kenyan ecology and culture before they went to their respective teaching posts. He did this through film shows, lectures and field trips. Dad often allowed us to join his 'students' during film shows and field trips so my first lessons in ecology and conservations began early in life. This was all so exciting and I wanted to be a teacher to live on with this kind of learning, sharing and excitement. Dad spent his spare coins on buying second hand books. We had shelves and shelves full of books and my favorite was the Readers Digest. As a rule, all of us in the family read in bed before going to sleep. This, I feel, helped me to explore worlds of wonder and especially in science. As a teacher, I have often relied on my early readings and exposure to construct my lessons in science.

I also thought mum was very clever indeed! She was not a literate person, but she always had clever traditional tricks up her sleeve. One way she saved money and conserved fuel was by making economical fuel. She taught us to mix mud, cow dung and charcoal dust to make this fuel. Much later in life, I was to learn that this is also taught as applied science. She also used ordinary cooking pans to improvise a pressure cooker and I now know the science behind that cooker. My home was my first science lab and from there I learnt to link science to real life incidences in my teaching.

My siblings and I schooled in low cost public schools where sometimes I learnt and sometimes I didn't, because public school teachers often have an apathetic attitude towards their work. There was a lot of teacher absenteeism and one particular teacher was very rude about my physical appearance. I often skipped her classes, but she never

made a follow-up on that. I only liked school when trainee teachers came for teaching practice to our school. One trainee who was teaching us biology really impressed me. She came with low cost materials, well prepared charts and she always started her lessons with a thought-provoking question. Because of her preparedness and her warmth, I was fully engaged in learning and I enjoyed her lessons. As I reflect, I can see why being thoroughly prepared for a class became so important to me in my teaching life. I also try and maintain a warm and caring relationship with my students. And these to date, have been my guiding principles.

### **On to Teacher Training**

Juggling between household chores, play and work, I managed to make it to a teacher training college for a diploma in education. And then...

*At the peak of the hour*

*I heard a chime*

*It had a clear message*

*I cleaned up my act*

I vowed to work hard and do well in academics when I joined college. This phase of my life was also the most exciting one so far. For the first time, I experienced good teaching. My tutors were good role models and I had a good rapport with them. Hence, I learnt both formally and informally the need to create a good rapport with students if one wishes them to learn efficiently. I also learnt how different students studied and how different studying styles influence learning.

Another first for me was that I indulged in sports: I swam, played hockey and was now at a hostel with no household chores. At this stage, I learnt the importance of allowing students to indulge in a broad based curriculum and I started forming my picture of the ideal teacher: One who would nurture children's physical, academic, ethical and emotional growth and helps them to become self-reliant citizens. Many times in my

practice, I have reflected on my learnings at college and I often relate my classroom experiences with these principles.

### **Induction**

On the eve of my teaching career, I felt confident I would make it in this profession since “Many judge the adequacy of their formal preparation by the extent to which it gives them technical knowledge” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p. 152). I felt that I had enough knowledge of the art of teaching. Now the seconds, the minutes and the hours hymned:

*Tick, tock, tick, tock...*

*Be cautious they said*

*I put my kit together*

*And set out on a mission*

My first job was as a Mathematics teacher at a private, high cost secondary school in Nairobi; the AKA, N (Aga Khan Academy, Nairobi). AKA, N was an entirely different set up from any school experience I previously had. The school had a lot of resources necessary for teaching and the school structure and culture was very sophisticated by my standards. At first, I was resentful about my own schooling – I wished I had been to AKA, N. But the distribution of students’ academic abilities was normal, just like in my own schooling: A few very ‘good’ students and a few very ‘weak’ students with the majority being average in academic ability. Here, I affirmed my very first important lesson in teaching. “A few bad school years due to bad teaching, high teacher absenteeism, or a mismatch with outright antagonism between teacher and child can be a factor in Underachievement Syndrome for some children” (Rimm, 1995, p.383). I felt that I had gone through bad schooling, so I often went to great lengths to help the average or the weaker learners to be able to cope with the pace of the class while at the same time keeping the bright students motivated. This called for a lot of creativity and hard work. I enjoyed this kind of work, but soon the pressure of having to complete a syllabus on time

and ‘drilling’ students to pass exams started taking precedence. The first year for me was “a time of consolidating technical expertise and a time for more intensively improving ...[my] problem solving capabilities” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p.4).

Most teachers and students at AKAN drove to school in expensive cars. Most teachers were much older than I was and most had over ten years of teaching experience. I, on the other hand was an inexperienced teacher, not so rich and I used public means to go to school. I was lonely and often felt inferior to my colleagues. But since my rapport with students was good, I managed to sail along. After some months of teaching I started getting more confident and soon I was mixing well with the teachers of the school and getting advice and help from them.

After some time, my notion of the ideal teacher was eroding and I was getting ‘acculturised’ to the beliefs, values and practices of the older staff. Emphasis in school was on content coverage and passing exams and I was more worried about pleasing parents, students and the administration. I was carried away in marketing the school as now many new high cost schools were coming up and competing with ours. I assumed the role of a *‘politician cum economist’ in an educationist’s gown*. I learnt how to balance curricular expectations, with students’ needs and the administration’s demands. Ball and Goodson (1992) explain, “The possibilities and constraints experienced in these periods seem to imprint themselves on the views and attitudes of teachers” (p.12). In my later years of teaching I banked on my professional knowledge gained during these years. I also realise now that a society’s culture strongly influences the way a teacher teaches. I taught the way the students, their parents and the society expected me to teach.

### **In a Dilemma**

During my fourth year of service at AKA, N our school was undergoing serious political problems amongst the administration. I also realised that I was grossly under paid as per the market value and rather than get hurt I left and joined an accounting firm. I also took up part-time training to become a chartered accountant. My departure from teaching taught me that a teacher needs a conducive environment to serve with dedication. An environment of financial gratification, moral support, job security and

appreciation is necessary to sustain dedication. My lack of satisfaction had led me to other fields.

### **Taking a Break**

After getting married, I stayed at home to mind my family and gave private tuitions to children in the evenings, just to keep myself in touch with books and my profession. Later, when my husband was diagnosed with a fatal disease, I urgently needed a permanent job to support my family. At this time, the Kenyan market was flooded with trained teachers and the only job I could get was teaching class one in a private primary school, called Pwani Academy.

### **Back to School**

On joining Pwani Academy, I was anxious about my ability to teach very young children but I was able to adjust by relying just on my motherhood experiences and intuition. Here I learnt the power of music and art in shaping a person's growth. Rauscher et al. in Levinowitz (1998) argue, "Findings from studies [indicate]... a causal link between music training and spatial reasoning in young children." I was overwhelmed by the joy and the vigor with which little children sang and poured out their stresses of having to follow instructions the whole day. I sang with them and felt good doing it.

In art, I saw little children express themselves differently. Their inner selves started showing. I had a little boy who would always draw fancy aircrafts and when I asked about his father, he told me that he had gone to America in an aeroplane. Later I was to understand that this boy was actually expressing his desire in his art – he wanted to be with his father. All along, I kept up with my reading. I read borrowed books and newspaper articles on education.

While I was at Pwani Academy, I also bore a son and eleven months later my husband died. I faced a lot of challenges as I worked hard to keep my job and give enough time for my very young children. After my second year at Pwani Academy, I

was promoted to become a deputy head teacher. There were many issues to be addressed if Pwani Academy was to face its competitors in the educational market. My early experiences at AKA, N were starting to appear in the way I handled matters at Pwani.

Usually teachers are perceived as learned people who are there to disseminate knowledge. This is the view most of my colleagues held, but I felt that a student's need for love, attention, belonging and recognition were not being met adequately. Furthermore, a few teachers had problems with classroom management and parents had started complaining about them. Not every one viewed the problems as I did. They felt that it was either the caliber of the students or the nature of the syllabus that were to be blamed. Most teachers did not feel responsible for the existing haphazard manner in which children's education was being handled.

*At the peak of the hour  
I just found a missing clue  
Some did not see it  
The puzzle was still unsolved*

I requested the Director to allow me to conduct a workshop that would address these issues. He gave me his consent and also allocated some resources for the workshop. I invited a counselor, a psychologist, a management expert (from a commercial college) and an experienced teacher to develop what I called an 'effective teacher' workshop. After this workshop, a group of Muslim women also invited me to prepare a two-day workshop on the importance of education in Islam. I was slowly gaining popularity in the teacher circles of Mombasa. Before I knew it, I was invited to teach Math at the AKA, M (Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa). I felt sad leaving Pwani, but the scope for professional growth was wider at AKA, M and I made the decision to move on.

### **A Dream Come True**

Through my readings and through my past experiences, I had realised the importance of continuous professional development. I was happy there because I had better resources to teach with, I was also better paid and I could get some professional development every term. Yet, a lot of teachers were still using the transmissive mode of teaching. Emphasis for them was on how to make grades and not on the holistic development of the student. Only a few teachers were keen on professional development and some did not even like to attend workshops and seminars. Each time I embarked on a new learning, I felt my practice and my outlook changed. Because of the different trainings I developed confidence in understanding the key professional issues. My notion of the ideal teacher was evolving. I feel that my role as a teacher right now I am developing because of the experience of years of teaching experience, some reading and some exposure to professional development courses.

While at AKA, M, I also took up an external degree course. For this, I worked on my projects during teaching term time and went for formal lectures to the university during the term break. On completion of this course, I applied for the Master's programme at the Aga Khan University (AKU-IED)<sup>23</sup> and by the grace of Allah I was granted a scholarship.

*At the peak of the hour*

*The alarm went off*

*Now a loud signal*

*Come on, make a move*

Since I joined AKU-IED, I feel like I am swimming in an ocean of knowledge and I relate this to the teachings of the Holy Quran:

It is He Who has made the sea subject, that ye may eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender, and that ye may extract there from ornaments to wear; and thou seest the ships therein that plough the waves, that ye may seek

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<sup>23</sup> The Aga Khan University-Institute of Educational development

(thus) of the bounty of Allah and that ye may be grateful. (Quran, 16:014)<sup>24</sup>

I feel like there is a sea of knowledge at my disposal, and I can fish what I need to keep me well nourished. My pedagogical content knowledge and personal professional knowledge has increased in leaps and bounds and within the sea there are precious pearls that keep me adorned. Every time I share learning, I acquire a pearl from the ocean of knowledge. From the Quran we also learn that it is the same sea that keeps ships afloat. If the ships were our learning institutions and we learned to navigate, we would remain afloat and move to our desired learning outcomes. As I reflect and reconceptualise the role of a teacher and of what learning is all about, I feel a sigh of relief; I am learning the true gist of teacher education...

Tick, tock, tick, tock...

As a professional development teacher in training this exercise has been useful indeed:

Reflection on practice and self study are becoming important components of the push for closer scrutiny of an individual's pedagogy in teaching about teaching, and they are linked to the ideas about the development of knowledge through better understanding of personal experience (Loughran & Northfield, 1998 p.7).

I believe that I must first understand myself before I am able to help the professional development of other teachers. I may also understand others' practice if I share my self-study with others' self-studies. Through this exercise, my teaching life is making meaning and I have become sensitive to how we are different as teachers and how we can learn from within ourselves as well as from external sources. One more area of learning for me has been the cyclic nature of learning to teach.

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<sup>24</sup> The translation of the Holy Quran by Yusuf Ali

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APPENDIX



**CHAPTER 6**

**ENDLESS SEAWARD FLOW OF MY PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY**

**ANDREW TAMAMU**

*The adult and the peer world  
That nurtured the person into which I'd unfold  
Blurred my insight into the days I was darkly gazing ahead  
As it engulfed my childhood dreams in the embrace of the darkening cloud*

*I saw the snowy mountain melt into a multiple drain  
Of turbulent tributaries, which converged and flowed down a course yet unknown  
Dragging along uncertainties that concealed the teacher beneath my ambition*

*Down the precipitous slope the merged turbulence of a mighty river  
Tumbled steeply over rocks and boulders, as the teacher that I was to be  
Rode stately on its strong, seaward flowing current  
Over the rapids and the falls and the plunge pools  
Into which I submerged and re-emerged  
To make sure the teacher in me was not drowned*

*Then the potent velocity behind the turbulent flow  
Gradually ceased to be forceful as the waters slowly turned less turbid  
And I trudged my own way wearily and unguided  
Along the winding meanders and over the settling alluvial sediment  
As I ambitiously crawled albeit with difficulty  
Towards the sea where I thought I might perhaps rest  
Hoping in vain the teacher I wanted to be would have been complete*

*But the insatiable sea is fathomless and vast  
With no sight of the envisaged destination where I had hoped to rest  
I endlessly flow through the distributaries and down into the sea  
And so the indefinite seaward flow of my journey continues as you see*

To borrow ideas from Covey (1989), understanding how and why one has been who s/he is, entails deep introspection of the self, careful analysis of lived experiences, and thoughtful interpretation and expression of the same. Taking Schubert's (1986) notion of curriculum as *currere*<sup>25</sup>, I perceive my own autobiography as a kind of 'teacher education curriculum' embedding potential biographical data "both for informing practice to improve teacher education and also for moving the [self-study] research conversation in teacher education forward." (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20)

Knowing the demands that an autobiography, as a vehicle for self-study, presents for both the consumer and the producer (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), I made a backwards and forwards interpretation of my inner personal life experiences as interwoven into the outer existential conditions prevalent in my contextual situation to accord my self-study trustworthiness and meaningfulness, consistent with Bullough and Pinnegar's suggestion. I must therefore, acknowledge having tapped generously into their guidelines to facilitate my quest for quality autobiographical self-study.

I also feel obliged to acknowledge from the outset the irresistible influence of Bashiruddin's (2002) *Seasons of my learning*, under which I wrote my autobiography. I was indeed inspired by the way the author strives to strike a well-articulated balance between the literary simplicity of her autobiographical accounts and the true events of her outer world. Similarly, I preface this account with a poem, "*Endless seaward flow of my professional journey*", which taps into both formal and free verse poetic conventions to accentuate my personal belief that a blend of both informal and formal learning constitutes the making of an ideal teacher as Nemser (1983) suggests. The stanza around

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<sup>25</sup> One of Schubert's images of curriculum that views curriculum as the running of a race that emphasizes the individual's own capacity to reconceptualise his/her biography.

which the significant episodes of a particular period of time are built highlights each phase of my professional journey.

*The adult and the peer world*

*That nurtured the person into which I'd unfold*

*Blurred my clear insight into the days I was darkly gazing ahead*

*As it engulfed my childhood dreams in the embrace of a darkening cloud*

Village life constrained my exposure to the kind of personalities that would have inspired me to follow their footsteps, save for my father who was a simple FDC<sup>26</sup> instructor. I thought of becoming a teacher like him, but throughout his career he had not had any significant achievements that would have right away inspired me to join the teaching world. Neither did he want me to be a teacher due to the low esteem the society has towards teaching. However, I was determined to study and get employed to avoid the village chores, even if it meant becoming a teacher. I hated looking after the notorious billy goats or picking coffee in the dewy morning.

The routine chores of village life came to a turning point in 1965 when I enrolled in class one in a school located in our regional town. I had rushed there to avoid my father's anger following loss of our cattle in a fire my friends and I had caused while playing. Schooling in town shone the bright rainbow colors on the path to my future:

*But when the heavy precipitation fell and cleared my vision*

*I saw the snowy mountain melt into a multiple drain*

*Of turbulent tributaries, which converged and flowed down a course yet unknown*

*Dragging along uncertainties that concealed the teacher beneath my ambition.*

Playing school with neighboring children from other schools, I gradually got more insights into teaching than I could have in the village where playing school was uncommon. Bullough (1997) argues that selves are formed in contexts, which may both

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<sup>26</sup> Folk Development College (A vocational training institution for primary school [class 7] leavers).

enable or limit self-understanding. Indeed, my self-identity as a teacher started unfolding with change in context.

I was to learn more about teaching in school. I admired my teachers for the mastery of knowledge they demonstrated, but hated some for overusing the cane. I adored my domestic science teacher who never punished us. I remember the most exciting moments during her lessons were when she used charts and pictures I had drawn for her. As she referred to them during the lesson, I imagined myself standing in front of the class, beside her, assisting her to teach. I realised I had a talent I could share with others and the desire to be a teacher grew stronger.

Social and school experiences had ‘converged’ like tributaries into a foundation upon which college training was to be based. That was 1980; a year government had envisaged its fourth 5-year plan to make the country self-sufficient in skilled human resources. This goal was far from being realised, for, like in many other civil service sectors, secondary education was facing an acute shortage of teachers, which necessitated reduction of our course from 9 months to 6 weeks. This proves how the quality of education is sometimes watered down by political decisions made by policy makers.

The informal experiences I had had about teaching were hardly discernible in the formal training and the two, like turbulent tributaries, merged into a confusion that made me wonder whether I would ever make a reality of my ambition to become a teacher. I had seen my teachers teach – actually lecture – throughout my schooling days and I kept wondering how all the ‘noise’ about curriculum development and educational philosophy and psychology and so on was related to teaching. All I wanted was to be taught ‘how to teach’, precisely, how to make good notes from textbooks and stand in front of the class and deliver the goods. I thought the tutors were wasting our time, but had to cram the stuff for my weekly tests and for the final examination towards graduation. I hated and cursed people like Pavlov and his dog, Plato, Aristotle, Bloom, and others for their abstract theories that made my life hard during the college days. Hardly did I believe that I would ever come to honor these great philosophers and educators the way I do today.

Soon after the course, I was posted to a remote secondary school, where I found myself being assigned to teach 32 periods a week. Occupied by their daily teaching routines, the senior teachers did not have time to assist me. The first teaching experiences proved to be very hard on me:

*Down the precipitous slope the merged turbulence of a mighty river  
Tumbled steeply over rocks and boulders, as the teacher that I was to be  
Rode stately on its strong, seaward flowing current  
Over the rapids and the falls and the plunge pools  
Into which I submerged and re-emerged  
To make sure the teacher in me was not drowned.*

The formal training I underwent seemed too short to have impacted the informal experiences I had had about teaching. With the poor training I had received, I felt myself like a novice swimmer who had been tossed into a swiftly moving, turbulent river to survive my own way. Each new day came along with new worries and how to *survive* the school day became a detestable obsession.

The difficult circumstances I was teaching in forced me to quickly adopt methods that would ensure my survival, for unique situations create paradigm shifts and proactivity naturally dictates that we act and not wait to be acted upon (Covey, 1989). I departed completely from the theorized ideal teacher that still lay hidden in the obscure pedagogical theories I was ‘stuffed’ with at college. I resorted to lecturing as my teachers used to do, at times ‘stuffing’ my students with the same notes I wrote while I was a student. Incidentally I was good at lecturing and this, coupled with my politeness and sense of humor, made me win the hearts of many students.

My lectures were strategic; not really aimed at making students understand, I must guiltily confess, but at making them pass examinations, which they did wonderfully. With this ‘success’, I gradually gained confidence and the ensuing feeling of satisfaction blinded me from the irreversible damage I was doing to my students.

Teaching English, I produced students with good passes, but most of them could not express themselves fluently in the language. There was an apparent mismatch

between my methods and the students' needs and expected outcomes, which I now understand was mainly bred by the mismatch between my formal teacher training and the informal exposures I had had to teaching as a student. Nemser (1983, p.153) cautions, "Unless future teachers get some cognitive control over school experiences, it may influence their teaching unconsciously and contribute to the perpetuation of conservative school practices". How our pre-service teacher education programmes can address this is a pertinent issue requiring critical considerations when such programmes are being designed.

After two years of teaching, I enrolled in a BA. (Ed) course for upgrading. The trend of training was the same – lots of theories not directly related to the practical realities I had experienced as a student and a teacher. It was apparent that the informal experiences I had been exposed to were too strong to be reconciled with formal training within the limited duration of the course and, as Nemser (1983) rightly observes, learning to teach inevitably had to continue on the job.

At this point, however, there is yet another question arising: To what extent does the school culture provide ideal conditions for collaborative mutual support to nurture the novice teacher's potential for professional growth? It is an inescapable fact that the school setting in many contexts is far from being supportive to on-going professional learning of the teacher. Collaboration, which is a key factor for staff development, is inevitably being constrained by linear administrative structures and compartmentalised, egg-crate modes of operation (Hargreaves, 1995). That is why as a beginning teacher I had to learn how to survive on my own, at times submerging into the plunge pools of professional jealousy that was gradually looming over my growing reputation, but I re-emerged to ensure my ambition to become an exemplary teacher was not drowned. So, if teacher educators and administrators were to ensure learning to teach on the job aligned with formal teacher education as Nemser (1983) suggests, then we need to attend to the nature of the school setting, which inhibits mutual staff collaboration.

After graduating, I was transferred to a high school to teach English, language and Literature. Capitalising on the teaching experience I had before joining the university, I did not face much trouble to re-enter the teaching field. Within a short time, I stabilised

my basic teaching style (lecturing) and set into workable routines that made me feel secure, confident and a master of my own ways towards the cherished goal:

*Then the potent velocity behind the turbulent flow  
Gradually ceased to be forceful as the waters slowly turned less turbid  
And I trudged my own way wearily and unguided  
Along the winding meanders and over the settling alluvial sediment  
As I ambitiously crawled albeit with difficulty  
Towards the sea where I thought I might perhaps rest  
Hoping in vain the teacher I wanted to be would have been complete.*

I had gone through the turbulent phase of my career and was feeling more and more professionally ‘competent.’ However, my routinised practices were becoming monotonous, boring, and devoid of challenge and intellectual stimulation. My social life, on the other hand, was becoming harder as my family was still expanding.

Contriving to survive on a small income, I realised that my career struggle was steadily shifting from survival in the profession to coping with the harsh socio-economic realities. I was forced to take up part-time classes in three different institutions in addition to my regular teaching duties to supplement my income. Time to concentrate on teaching was literally not there, and I would receive with skepticism any suggestions to use my time after classes to meet and discuss with others matters pertaining to improving teaching. I would sometimes do so not much out of a felt need, but out of compulsion for duty and would partially or never implement whatever resolutions were made.

Teaching in four different institutions was very tiring, but economically rewarding. Moreover, despite my lecturing methods, my students’ academic performance was setting unprecedented records, the most remarkable being in 1990 when my school ranked first in English in the ACSEE<sup>27</sup> examination nationally. This earned me a reputation that led to an appointment in the school inspectorate in 1991. I did my training in Edinburgh (UK) and soon after the course I was appointed Zonal Coordinator of the

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<sup>27</sup> Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (Class 14 national examination).

English Language Teaching Support Project<sup>28</sup>. Three years later I was appointed national chairperson for the English language national examinations marking panel.

The professional ‘current’ was gradually becoming less and less turbulent; as I had attained a position where I could determine my own way of doing things, like a river finding its own way as it meanders towards the sea. The achievements I attained within a short period of time made me feel that my destination – an exemplary teacher, was within reach. However, I came to realise that this dream was still far from being a reality when in 1994 I was offered a short ELT refresher course for school inspectors at the University of Leeds (UK).

I still remember how ‘Working with teachers’, which was one of the modules we covered during the course, greatly enlightened me on how to handle teachers towards initiating changes for better classroom practice. Consistent with Hargeaves’ (1994) assertion, I learnt that teachers are social beings with their own philosophies, beliefs, and desires for change and that they should be made to appreciate the *need* for change rather than *prescribing* changes to them the way I used to do. I learnt to differentiate my roles as a supervisor, an inspector, and a mentor; as well as the situations calling for each.

I must confess that before I attended the course in Leeds my inspectoral duties did not go beyond the supervisory role. School supervision was relatively easy. It entailed routine inspections and at times ‘disciplining’ teachers to make sure they operated as per the code of professional conduct. This is why inspectors are generally not very much welcomed in schools. It was, and still is common for teachers to put up a contrived performance when inspectors are around and soon revert to their traditional practices once the inspectors are gone. The course helped me to scrutinise my own inspectoral practices. Before it I tended to believe that the teachers were just being stubborn but I realised that our watchdog approach partly contributed to their reactionary nature. For the first time I saw the inescapable need to reconceptualise the role of school inspectors as agents of change and dissemination of good practice, instead of the routinised ‘tyranny.’

A reconceptualised role of school inspection is, however, easier said than done for I always found mentoring teachers more professionally demanding than the routine

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<sup>28</sup> A British Council funded project introduced in Tanzanian secondary schools in 1986 to support teachers of English to teach the language – especially reading comprehension skills better.

inspections. It inevitably entails diagnosing teachers' professional needs and providing appropriate support by being exemplary and by organising remedial workshops/seminars, as appropriate.

After the course, I always tried to use school inspection as an opportunity to identify teachers' professional needs and address them accordingly, more than as a fault-finding exercise. However, despite my efforts, teachers tended to revert to traditional classroom practice and took a defensive stance for their failure to live up to the expected changes, by giving lots of excuses including lack of time, resources, and unsupportive school culture, to mention a few.

Most teachers, however, appreciated the usefulness of the new methods suggested, but I came to realise that the conditions in which they operate constrain their capacity for change in several ways, the most obvious but commonly ignored by policy makers being the deplorably low economic status of the teaching profession and the poor working conditions. It is unfortunate that we have tended to ignore the fact that teachers are not just technical learners, but social learners as well and that we ought to address ourselves to both their capacity and desire for change, as suggested by Hargreaves (1994). In Tanzania, for instance, it has reached a point where teachers see no point in developing themselves professionally and have instead opted out of teaching, especially graduates, as they do not see how developing themselves professionally in the teaching field can help them get out of their miserable life. The assumption that professional satisfaction is the sole impetus behind teachers' desire for change is contrived and misleading. It is time now that research should be done on this area as well.

As I have pointed out, my career success had reached a point where I was feeling satisfied with who I was as a teacher and when I was nominated by my employer to take up the offer to study at the AKU-IED<sup>29</sup>, it took me some time to decide whether I should accept it. Eventually I realised that learning has no end and I resolved to accept the opportunity, hoping that the course would not only develop me professionally, but also open up better opportunities for future self-advancement, despite the financial gains I would lose during the two years of study.

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<sup>29</sup> Aga Khan university -Institute for Educational Development

So, here I am, at the AKU-IED, on an endless journey in search for more knowledge, like the mighty river flowing endlessly into the sea. Though the course focuses mainly on things I have actually experienced during my years of service, I must admit that it has provided fathomless and vast opportunities for me to recycle the old experience in new and varied dimensions, as the quest for more knowledge is naturally insatiable:

*The insatiable sea is fathomless and vast,  
With no sight of the envisaged destination where I had hoped to rest;  
I endlessly flow through the distributaries and down into the sea,  
And so the indefinite seaward flow of my journey continues as you see.*

Looking back at my *curre* I am inclined to believe that I have been a victim of my own biography, for before enrolling on this MEd programme I seemed satisfied with doing things the way I was used to, despite being aware of the need and possibility for change. I perceived change with skepticism and at times I questioned its feasibility. This opportunity to recount my professional journey under the lens of AKU-IED's reflective practice philosophy has made me realise that through reconceptualisation, change is always possible and that background experience is a treasure that can be processed into more and more refined experiences, to make one perceive phenomena in a new and refreshed paradigm. I can now see my ambition to be an exemplary teacher rejuvenating like a young river starting its endless journey towards the vast sea of professional knowledge.

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## CHAPTER 7

### MY TEACHING PROFESSION, THE FLAME OF MY LIFE

MARY ANYANGO OLUGA

#### MY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

I was born of a mother who was a nurse and a father who was a court clerk; the fifth born in a family of ten children. Ours was ranked among the well to do families, because both my parents were in well paid professions compared to the majority of families who earned their living through subsistence farming. Becoming a teacher was not part of my life dreams since my parents despised the primary school women teachers very much, especially for the way they so generously used the cane on other people's children. My mother also gave negative comments about their grooming, with particular hatred for the way they "walked around with their petticoats hanging below their skirts". If anything, my dream was to become a nurse like my mother so that I could also wear that white, starched uniform and cap. Quoting my mother's negative comments about female teachers is not aimed at scandalising the teaching profession, but, to point out that her attitude helped me later as a teacher to observe good grooming and it also maximized my perception about the importance and significance of a teacher as a role model in society.

Nevertheless, my admiration for my childhood teachers still stand strong today especially the way they freely mingled with us, jumped, sung and danced with pupils as if they were of the same age. They were very special. Even when they caned us for mistakes that we made, the regulation was that we must say "Thank you sir/madam". I hated the idea of thanking my teachers for thrashing me, but now when I look back I realise that the aim of the appreciation was for the corrective intention of the punishment rather than the hurt it caused.

I met the teachers of my dreams when I joined a boarding girls' high school in 1977. The teachers were always smartly dressed and they moved around with an air of self-importance. My class teacher was quite exceptional. She was so beautiful and caring. I would say everything about her had a subtlety and quiet elegance to it. The way she sat on top of our desks as she checked and marked our exercise books, not to mention her sweet perfume. She was unique and when I look back at what made her unique, I think it is possibly because of the way "she managed to develop a personal relationship with her students and staff this made me to see her as a person rather than a teacher" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995 p. 84). Of particular note is when my father suddenly went blind due to the glaucoma disease. I was so traumatised; I thought that would be the end of my life too. My teacher was so caring and worried about how I was going to manage my studies. She virtually walked every step of the trauma with me, counseled me and made sure that I could cope with the situation. I was able to recover faster than my siblings who were in schools where they could not get equally good teachers. I developed the notion that to be a good teacher, one needs a supernatural calling. I felt that voice in me urging me to take up teaching so that I could give something extra to my pupils, the way my class teacher had done for me. On completion of my high school advanced level, I joined the university and there was no doubt about what my profession of the heart was; I had to pursue a bachelor of Education Degree.

### **The Teacher, a Flame about to be Extinguished**

In this part of my story, I wish to identify with Benita Dalton's sense of self as a good teacher and her challenges in the professional landscapes. Like her, in 1987, I graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree. This to me was a 'rite of passage' into teaching and proof of my mastery of the accepted body of knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995 p.8). Little did I realise that my university had not prepared me for the informal processes of teaching that I was bound to encounter in my practice. On graduation I was posted to one of the largest schools in the country, situated in the city of Nairobi. It had a student population of 1,100 and 74 teachers. I swung into the teaching profession with a lot of vigor, confidence and apprehension to perform to my very best.

Little was I prepared for the shock that awaited me. Beginning teachers have to translate understanding of curriculum, children, learning and pedagogy into practical classroom activities. They have to stand on their own feet, unlike their time in teacher education when they were supervised by experienced teachers (Craig 1995, b; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

The culture of balkanization was rife in the school and it took me time to decide where to belong, since I hated affiliations and this cost me dear time because I did not receive the older colleagues support for some time. Cases of indiscipline were rampant but this did not bother the old teachers at all since most of them had already established personal links with the students. Every time I consulted my head of department, she always reminded me that I was a new broom therefore, I must sweep cleaner. Lack of collaboration made my life difficult and destroyed my will to perform well. I wish every practicing teacher could take note of the fact that:

Beginning teachers are important to the teaching profession. They represent the renewal of the profession and thus, it should be in the interest of the profession as a whole to make their entry as painless and smooth as possible. They need initial assistance, advice and information as much as ongoing support during the entire induction period of three to five years. (Fortland, 2004).

The other issue is that I faced a lot of discipline problems from the students. At one time, a student unzipped my dress as I went round the class checking their books. On several occasions I attempted to give remedial classes to the weak students separately, but every time I would sit aside in a separate room with them, other students would come peeping through the windows whistling or making the thumbs up sign. I really developed great fear for the boys, I could not feel free with them the way my mentor teachers had felt free with me when I was a student.

The last stroke that broke my dignity happened when one day, I ordered a boy out of my class for not doing his homework. At first he refused to go out but when I insisted that he must, he moved to the front of the class, stood high above me and shouted

the most obscene insult at me and stormed out of the class. Some students giggled, others gasped in shock and I remained so confused that I just staggered out of the class, to go and make sense of this incident. My pride suffered a blow, I felt like a crushed rose flower. However, this incident marked a major turning point in my teaching career. It is the incident that saw me develop from the 'reality shock' of the career entry phase to the phase of stabilisation (Huberman et al, 1993 p. 5). When I look back at the issues of discipline in that school, I wish to concur with Benita (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995 p.82) that, discipline is a collaborative effort. Discipline comes from understanding the child. The best way to understand what is going on is to talk with the child. Have a dialogue and communicate with the child. To blatantly discipline a child would be wrong. When children are treated the way I did they are bound to retaliate and the results can be as bad as it happened to me. It is also important to enter into dialogue because it makes the teacher understand the underlying problems of the child. In this case when I reconciled with this student, he actually confessed that he could not do his homework, most of the time, because at home they never had any kerosene in their tin lamp. I regretted that he was a victim of my nagging whenever he failed to complete his assignments. I therefore made arrangements for him to complete his homework in school before leaving for home.

I find it difficult to describe the kind of uncertainty that marked the first three years of my teaching. I agree with Huberman's words, that my first years of teaching were marked by a discrepancy between educational ideals, classroom life, the fragmentation of the work, the difficulty of combining instruction and classroom management, reconciliation between intimacy and hostility towards one's pupils, unruly or intimidating students, preoccupation with self, trial and error, etc. (Huberman, 1993, p.5).

### **The Flame of the Transformed Teacher is Rekindled**

True, if you need to enjoy the sweet fragrance of the rose flower, then you must crush it. I valued my job very much therefore, after that terrible incident, I could not resign but I had the option of seeking a transfer. I went to the Teachers' Service

Commission and narrated my ordeal in detail, seeking sympathy so that I could be transferred to a small girls' school away from the city. But, instead, the tough looking officer said to me, "Mwalimu, we do not transfer problems from one school to another. Go back to your school and cultivate your character as a teacher or resign". This humiliated me so much and as I walked back to that school I kept on wondering whether I was a garden full of weeds that needed to be cultivated. If so what were the weeds in my life and where were they so that I could uproot them?

Since I had to survive, I gained courage and talked to one of the old staff members who seemed to enjoy a great deal of popularity with the students. She taught me the importance of collaboration, being caring and human to children and inquiry into learning. Like Benita, I developed into a reflective practitioner. I started to question daily happenings in my classrooms and what is going on with my students, how am I making sense of being a teacher and how am I figuring out the curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p.82).

I opened my eyes to the diverse human needs of my students; the drug addicts, the rich who had everything except parental love, and the poor who could not afford a meal in a day, and they accepted me as a person. I made up my mind I was going to be a good teacher. I would regard each student as an individual having dignity and worth. I would create a class atmosphere that was friendly and encouraging in which a person could make a mistake without being made to feel he was an idiot. I would communicate enthusiasm for my subjects (Shulman, 1983, p.158).

Performance in my subjects greatly improved. In 1995, after serving in that school for seven years, I went for a course in Guidance and Counseling and the Ministry of Education recognised me and appointed me Head of the Guidance and Counseling Department in the school. This was a fulfillment of my life dream. Now I had the mantle that made me close to my students. Now, I was not just another teacher, I was able to walk with my students along the path of life's challenges, share their joys and pains in life. Indeed, and this I know, I made a lot of difference in many students lives. I remained in that school for 11 years and the Ministry of Education rewarded my efforts and

appointed me to the inspectorate as an Inspector of Schools in 1998. I felt honored by this appointment but I took it up reluctantly because I had just reached my serenity phase (Shulman, 1983, p.158) and I was actually living my dream of being the caring teacher that I now was.

Now that I am part of the policy making team in the country, I really lay emphasis on the importance of induction and support of beginning teachers into the school routines. I also strongly advocate for guidance and counseling programmes in schools as well as collaborative efforts in solving discipline problems. I talk to teachers quite a lot, because I realise that like me, most of them need to uproot the ‘weeds’ in their character and manner of teaching and sometimes, like me, they need to be prompted to re-evaluate their practices as teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

I highly appreciate my current job as an Inspector of Schools; on the other hand I feel de-linked from the very source of my inspiration, and that is the child. My current dream is to go back to a learning institution as a pedagogical leader where I can have a direct influence in shaping the young children’s lives. In my autobiography, I wish to dedicate my poem (in appendix 1) to the youths. As parents we attach a lot of value to getting children but we fail to recognise the responsibilities that accompany parenthood. A child is born with many talents and grows up with a lot of expectations, which I describe as burning coals. From these coals it is up to the parents and teachers to add fuel and build a fire out of them. Hence, the metaphor of ‘the flame’ in describing my life (see appendix 2). Personally I almost put out the fires of the many young lives that I handled when I was a novice teacher. On the other hand I owe my life to my parents, my teachers, and other people in my life who rekindled my life into the kind of flame I am today. My government’s initiative in sending me to IED for further studies is a boost to my professional practice, since I am now getting equipped with knowledge on the current trends in education.

Like Helg Fortland (2004), I can now proudly look back and shout 'I once was a fledging teacher. Long time ago, I was a fledging teacher'. But, the struggle continues.

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## CHAPTER 8

### A DREAM COME TRUE

ESTHER NDIRANGU

The question, “who am I?” was always in my mind during childhood. Writing my autobiography has taken me to the same question; who am I and who am I in the lives of my students? As Clandinin & Connelly (2000), cited in Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) argue,

“Experience is what we study and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (p.14). My narrative is based on the metaphor, ‘A Dream Come True’. The dream started in my childhood in Kenya. I would visualise myself standing in front of the class, teaching. Nothing distracted me from this dream despite the many challenges that I faced.

#### **Childhood: A Dream to Become a Teacher**

I grew up in a family of eleven. Being the seventh born, I had older brothers and sisters to look upon. My parents gave me all the support that I needed in school. My father always reminded me that the sky is the limit. Teachers were accorded great respect in my society. This really inspired me towards my dream of becoming a teacher. During free time with my siblings, I would always want to be the teacher when playing school. I did this with delight and I especially enjoyed punishing my siblings by beating them with a stick if they made mistakes. Feiman-Nemser (1983) supports this by saying that children also learn to be teachers besides whatever they are taught by their parents and their teachers. I would look for things to teach my siblings by imitating my teachers.

Learning in the primary school was mainly through rote memorisation. The teacher was seen solely as the provider of knowledge and the students were passive recipients. Carter and Doyle (1996) cited in Bashiruddin (2002) talk about the teacher being an expert, self-made and that everything depends on the teacher. We were drilled

thoroughly, and as a result of the drilling, I passed very well and I was admitted to the most prestigious girls' secondary school in the country. I was extremely happy, as this was one of the ways of making my dream come true.

### **Secondary School: More Inspiration towards My Dream**

At this level, I was really inspired by the Math teacher. He was always prepared for the lesson and he would use teaching aids, which made the subject more real than abstract. We worked in groups and each group was given problems to solve and explain to the class later. Students from the other groups kept on coming to me for help. They said that I was very patient and I explained even better than the teacher. This inspired me a lot as I could see that I was leaving a mark on the students. I enjoyed Math, and it ended up being my best subject.

In high school, my dream to become a teacher continued, this time with a better understanding of what teaching meant. I was doing Math, Chemistry and Biology. The teachers engaged us actively in the teaching and learning process. We were taken out for field trips, after which we would write reports. I could see the sense of learning, as I was able to relate what I was doing in class with real life. I have realised that it is very important to engage learners actively in the teaching and learning process. They are left with a lived experience, which helps them make sense of the world out there. This made me love teaching and as Beattie (1995) points out, “nothing captured my imagination in the way teaching did” (p.3). My dream continued as I chose teaching as my first choice despite a lot of resistance from my brothers and sisters.

### **Selection for BED: Beginning to Realise My Dream**

When the “A” level results were released, I had performed extremely well. I was admitted for a Bachelor of Education (Mathematics) at the University. It was a joyous moment for my family, as I was the first member to make it to the university. I was very excited, as this was one of the ways towards realising my dream. I attended lectures in

Math and in education courses. The lecturers used lecture method all through. No wonder they are called lecturers! We were stuffed with many theories, and I wondered if they were going to be applicable in teaching. We had micro-teaching, where we would prepare lessons and teach the other students. This happened every fortnight. At this level, the statistics lecturer, who had good mastery of the subject, inspired me. For the period he taught us, he never carried notes to class. His examples were well thought through and I followed them very well.

After the first year at the University, I went for teaching practice. This is where I needed to tactfully put theory into practice and I spent sleepless nights preparing lesson plans and teaching aids. The school assigned me a mentor to ensure that I was following the syllabus. The lecturers came for supervision once a week. It was quite challenging but I managed to go through it successfully. I was teaching 12 lessons a week, and this gave me ample time for preparation. The principal was quite impressed by my work, and she requested the Teachers' Service Commission to post me in the school as soon as we completed the course.

### **Beginning to Teach: A Dream Come True**

I completed my BEd degree successfully. I was posted to teach in the school where I did my teaching practice. My dream finally came true! This was a great honor for me, as I was not only a teacher, but also one of the highly educated teachers as most of the teachers in my village were certificate holders. Word spread like fire in the village after receiving the news that I had been posted to teach in one of the most prestigious schools in the country.

As a tradition of the school, I was to meet the principal and her deputy every day at lunchtime for a week. In the meetings, I was given the historical background of the school. Being a girls' school, I was expected to be an example to the students in all that I did. I was told that the school has a good tradition of performing well and it is the duty of every teacher to ensure that the tradition is maintained. What surprised me most was the fact that there was nothing mentioned to me about the teaching methods. I wondered how

I was going to ensure that the tradition was maintained. I was too scared to ask in case the principal got a bad impression about me. I decided to find out what other teachers were doing and I was struck by the notes used by most teachers. The supposedly white paper had turned brown as a result of continued use for many years. I wondered if the teachers ever reflected on their teaching, if they were using such outdated notes. Teachers really need to critically reflect on their practice and evaluate their teaching if meaningful learning is to take place.

I was overwhelmed by the responsibilities given to me. I was a class teacher, a hockey patron, and a member of the timetable committee. As a hockey patron, I had to accompany the students for various tournaments over the weekend. Besides this, all Math teachers had to teach remedial classes everyday after school. There were 40 students in each class and this was another nightmare. My teaching load was 26 lessons a week. I really wondered how I was going to cope with all these responsibilities, bearing in mind that it had already been made clear to me that the results were very important. I had good content knowledge, but the problem was how to deliver it. I spent a lot of time at night preparing and I would make sure that I solved all the problems that I was to give in the class. Hamilton & Pinnegar (2000) cited in Feldman (2003) argues that a student must trust that what the teacher is teaching is true, accurate, adequate, and worthwhile. I was determined to ensure that the students had confidence and trust in me as I was the only female Math teacher.

Through hard work and determination, I managed to capture the students' confidence and trust in me. Covering the syllabus was the main thing. I managed to drill the students and my classes were always the best in the main exam. The other teachers did not attribute the exemplary performance to my hard work. Instead, they said it was because I was a woman and the girls were not scared of me. This had very little effect on my morale, as I derived a lot of pleasure from teaching effectively. I continued working hard and all my energy was directed to teaching as I was not yet married. The good results gave me confidence in teaching, and I entered into what Huberman (1993) calls the experimentation and diversification stage. I was able to raise critical issues regarding teaching methods during the faculty meetings. I could try out different ways of teaching

and even invite teachers to my classes. I was interested in professional development courses whereas the faculty head was not and this gave me a chance to attend most of the workshops on his behalf. I attended a Science and Math School Improvement Project, organised by Aga Khan Education Service (AKES), Kenya. This was a very helpful workshop, mainly on learner-centered methods. After the two week workshop, I felt like a newborn baby. I reflected on my teaching methods and I felt that I had been very unfair to the students. I learnt the importance of the constructivist theory in teaching and I realised that I never gave my students a chance to explore. Like most of the teachers in the school, I was more interested in the results. I realised that despite the good results, meaningful learning was very essential.

I changed my teaching style, and my lessons became learner-centered. The students enjoyed my teaching and other classes started complaining that their teachers should teach like me. The headmistress called me to ask about my new style of teaching. I explained everything to her and she talked about it in a staff meeting. The change was to be implemented, though the teachers saw me as an enemy. I facilitated a workshop and all seemed to be clear. The teachers agreed to start using group work, though they went back to their traditional methods after some time. They gave the usual reasons of syllabus coverage, heavy workload, and many responsibilities. I realised how hard it is to convince experienced teachers to change their methods. The teachers were only interested in the methods that would yield the best results. I felt frustrated to work with such a team, as my dream was not just to be a teacher, but to be an effective teacher. My intellectual stimulation was growing, but there were no structures to support professional growth. I felt I needed a change of environment and especially to move to an institution that supported professional development. I applied for a teaching post in the private schools that were keen on professional development.

### **Working with AKES, Kenya: An Era of Tremendous Professional Development**

As a result of my hard work, commitment, determination and interest in professional development, I was offered a job to teach at the Aga Khan Academy, Nairobi. This opened new doors towards professional development as the institution is well known for its commitment to the teaching and learning process. My first experience

in this school was horrible. I was terrified by the barbaric behavior of the students. They had no respect for teachers and this demoralised me. I thought of going back to my former school, but after deep thought, I felt that I should not accept defeat. I remembered the saying that where there is will there is way, and I had to find a way of surviving. Classroom control was my biggest problem and I was like a new teacher in the profession despite having taught for seven years. I gave the students ground rules and my expectations. For some time, I decided to turn to the lecture method so that I could control them. I would go to class, write the exercise and the questions on the board without explanation. Later, I managed to control the class and I started using the learner-centered methods. I would use group work quite often, and I was happy to see the great change in the attitude and behavior of the students.

I had shown keen interest in both personal and professional development. Feiman-Nemser (1983) supports this by saying that teachers not only want to change to be effective with students, but also to have some challenge and intellectual stimulation in their work. I was sponsored to a workshop on the marking of “O” and “A” level examinations. This workshop made me realise that learning is a life-long process. I thought I had reached the peak, but the learning that took place amazed me. By going through the marking process, I realised the need to ensure that students understand what they are doing without necessarily memorising it. Sometimes I gave Mathematical formulae without the students understanding how they came about. After the workshop, I made a point of deriving formulae with my students and their understanding improved. This was evident in the work they produced for their projects and portfolios.

I was selected to attend a workshop on teaching Math, which was organised by the International Academic Partnership (I.A.P.). This workshop enabled me to be a better teacher in terms of the teaching and learning activities. I learnt the need of Math games to make the subject more interesting and I also took an online course regarding teaching approaches and setting of tests and exams. I realised the need for a test to cover all the levels of learning; knowledge, comprehension, analysis and application. I also realised the need for a test to cover all the areas in the curriculum. I used to set my tests and exams in such a hurry that I never thought about these levels of learning or the validity of

the test. I also learnt of the need to do an item analysis after every test. This is to enable a teacher to get meaningful feedback from the test and then check on the practice. From that time, I started setting comprehensive tests and exams, and I also tried to do item analysis, though it was not easy due to pressure of time.

Later the school introduced International Baccalaureate (IB) to replace “A” level. I was taken for training on how to mark the internal assessment. I learnt how to assign and assess students’ project work. I was very confident in my teaching and I was able to guide the students in their course work. It came as a surprise to everyone in the school when the IB internal assessment results came out and I was declared the best assessor in the school. I was involved in remedial teaching and this made me close to the students. The school sponsored me for a guidance and counseling course after noticing the students had confidence and trust in me. The course made me understand my students even better, and I was able to improve my practice.

### **MEd at AKU-IED: Learning is Really a Life-Long Process**

As a result of my hard work, and good rapport with the students and teachers, I was selected for the MEd programme at AKU-IED. This was a hard decision for me to make as it involved being away from my family for two years. My husband and my parents were very supportive and encouraging. My quest for more knowledge in order to sustain my dream made me opt to leave my family, though it was not an easy decision. The experience I have gained so far is fabulous. I feel that I have grown and will continue to grow both personally and professionally; learning is really a life-long process. My dream of being a teacher was fulfilled and my next priority is to sustain my dream by being a life-long learner. In writing this autobiography, I agree with Feiman-Nemser (1983), who says, “learning involves changing not only what we do, but also how we think about learning to teach throughout a teacher’s career” (p. 150). The author further suggests that there is a need to help future teachers critically examine their past to see how it shapes their beliefs about the ways schools ought to be. I hope to use the knowledge and skills I have gained from AKU-IED to do that in my context.

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**PART III**  
**TEACHERS OF CENTRAL ASIA**

## CHAPTER 9

### AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE

DAVLATNAZAR KHUDONAZ

*“No one is diminished by the truth, rather does the truth ennoble all”*

*Al-Kindi*

#### INTRODUCTION

My biography is presented in the form of a letter to my son as an inspiration and encouragement to him, also to seek knowledge that goes beyond what I count as my achievements. My story, therefore, is an answer to four questions: presumably from my son, on where I came from, what I wanted to be, who am I and where am I going. This includes my childhood inspiration to be the kind of teacher I am, and the challenges I faced in my growing as a teacher. My letters are being delivered to my son through the pigeon, a special bird that was used in my context, to deliver important messages.

#### LETTER 1

##### **My answer to the Question: “Who or What in Your Childhood Inspired You to Become a Teacher?”**

My dear son,

Well, I am very happy that you like our conversation about my memories. You said if I do not have time, we could stop our conversation. No, it is very important because it’s “the interaction of biography and history” that makes us who we are. Through this discussion I will try to explain, where I came from, what I wanted to be, who am I and where I want to go.

You asked me why I chose the teaching profession. Possibly, there are many reasons here, as Tusin (1999) mentioned, “those who select teaching are frequently influenced in their career choice by family members and by significant teachers in their own schooling” (p.12)

When I was in grade seven one of my friends came to me and asked for my bicycle to play with, he promised to reveal a significant secret to me. I agreed on condition that he would tell me his secret. When we went to his home, he showed me a board where there was written sentences in Persian-Arabian script. My friend read it for me, because I could not read the Arabic script:

*“Bismillahi Rahmanir Rahim”*

*Holy Prophet (salallah alihe wa sallam) mentioned:*

*“I am being sent as a teacher”*

I was shocked because of two reasons; first, during the former Soviet Union period any dissemination of religion was prohibited. Moreover, the government waged anti-religious propaganda. It is clear that every attempt to teach religion at that time was considered a violation of law and would bring bad consequences. The second reason was the magic beauty of handwriting of Persian-Arabian words, because people very rarely used those scripts and it was accepted as holy writing. I became interested to learn more about religion and I started to attend informal classes. I learned about the philosophy and history of religion. It was independent learning like in the Plato Academy in ancient Greece; without classes or bells, a well-managed time for learning and seeking knowledge, and a generation of good conversation and good friendship. It was my teacher’s thought that “education is not the filling of a pail but lighting a fire”. I think these classes also had some influences (such as discussion, learning by sharing, and encouragement that we got from our teacher) for becoming a teacher, which I did not realise at that time. Unfortunately our ‘classes’ were closed.

I used to share what I had learnt from those classes with my friends. Unexpectedly, they listened to me attentively and I felt very proud of that. Here, I would

like to emphasise that learning from my teacher and sharing it with others (my friends), were initial steps towards my teaching profession. Probably my teacher lit that fire in my heart and I started my journey as a teacher. Then there was a long time of learning, 25 years in school, and still I feel that I am learner and I need “to learn, learn, and learn”.

After successfully completing secondary school, I found it difficult to decide which profession to choose. My uncle who was my custodian (I grew up as an orphan) encouraged me only by saying it is your choice. I felt bored. Fortunately, once during our convocation the Principal of our school came to us and asked about our future planning. He said: “all the professions are important but without teachers there would be no engineers, no scientists, and no letter carriers. I want to suggest you to choose the pedagogical profession”. I think this suggestion not only influenced me but all of my five classmates as well. We then joined the Dushanbe Pedagogical University (DPU).

## **LETTER 2**

### **My Answer to the Question: *What is the Meaning of “My Student’s Life Golden Years?”***

Studying at the University was really a golden time. It was independent learning, enquiry, personal freedom, and friendship. Learning was not only in the classroom. At that time I came close to my profession through passive and active practice in the field. In the passive practice during two weeks, I observed classes and different activities. Participation in classes gave me an opportunity to ‘smell the powder’ of the teaching profession and reflect on it. Active pedagogical practice continued for a month and I still remember my first lesson. Well prepared, I went to teach my first lesson just as Bashiruddin (2002) described, “I taught as I had been taught, by the traditional, up-front, lecturing method”. The class was very noisy and I could not control the students. Moreover, I was angry with two boys who disturbed my lesson but I tried to calm myself by asking: Why did it happen? How can I make the next lesson better? I am a teacher and it is my responsibility to make my lessons better.

Fortunately, relevant feedback from my supervisor helped me to understand some of the sensitive aspects of psychology and methodology of teaching. I met with many teachers with strong teaching identities, beliefs, values and personal histories. I realised that professional ethics is a most important issue in the teaching profession and I thought about this statement: “the most significant problem of teaching is discipline, keeping children busy and doing things that would ensure that children moved through the lesson on time and in an orderly fashion become ends in themselves rather than means toward some specified educational purpose” (Nemser, 1983, p.156).

### **LETTER 3**

#### **My Answer to Your Question: “*How was Your First Experience of Teaching?*”**

You also asked me how our family arrived in another state, which you remembered and where you were born. Well, I graduated from DPU in 1980 and by order of the Ministry of Education I started working in the Professional Vocational School (PVS) in your remembered town. I consider I was lucky because “each educational institution was a mini enterprise, educational staff had security of tenure, state salary and indirect rewards such as access to health services, pre-schools, schools re-training and sanitarium” (Howse, 2001). I was involved very actively in teaching processes through different workshops, seminars and in particular my mentor’s guidance. My mentor was an energetic old woman with a wealth of experience. For almost a year she encouraged me to learn how to teach.

Today, after several disconnections I received your letter. Your next question is: “How did you become a leader?”

**LETTER 4**

**My Answer to Your Question: “How did You Become a Leader?”**

You have probably heard the phrase “repetition is the mother of learning”. It has become clear to me that life gives the test over and over again until we demonstrate that we have learned the lesson by passing the test.

You see, I have had an opportunity to learn how people have influenced my purpose beginning from my school years. If, chronologically, I describe my experience as a leader it looks like the following: In school I was the member of Students’ Council, in DPU I was Head of the Trade Union and commander of SCG<sup>30</sup>, I was the Head of Summer Student Camp, I was an inspector and Director<sup>31</sup> of Government Schools and then Director of Aga Khan Lycee<sup>32</sup>. Thus, my leadership evolved and its dynamic power was learning and reflecting.

You asked me how I became director of the suburb school. Oh, it’s a long story, in short, I was Inspector of the Provincial Education Office. I don’t know why I became inconvenient for the office chief but it was when Gorbachyev<sup>33</sup> became leader of the country and everything changed. In schools, the position of Director became elective and suddenly the head of the office proposed me to participate in the election. It was not a complete secondary school because it lacked resources, had old buildings and non-believing teachers. Fortunately, we built a strong team of stakeholders and in a short time we constructed a new building, purchased resources and, most importantly, formed a good teaching team. I learned a lot of new information about the school, community, decision making and how to encourage teachers. My success as a principal led me to think that I knew who I was and where I was going, but I didn’t know a lot of the particulars. I didn’t really have a clue about what changes were going to be essential to improve my leadership.

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<sup>30</sup> Students Constrictor Group

<sup>31</sup> Principal

<sup>32</sup> Type of school

<sup>33</sup> The former President of former Soviet Union

In 1993, I changed my workplace. I had been offered a job in a big school, where you were a student. It was one of the most famous schools in the country. However, the transition from the Soviet time involved a civil war, which destroyed the education system. Social, cultural, and educational changes were brought about by these events.

The overwhelming reality was a reduction of financial resources. In that reality, we had only one salvation – transition from a government system to a private school (AKES)<sup>34</sup>. It was the first experience in our province and there were many barriers and challenges.

In September 1998, in inaugurating the Aga Khan Lycee (AKL), His Highness, the Aga Khan IV<sup>35</sup> addressed the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and teachers. He maintained that:

I would like perhaps this afternoon to pay compliments to men and women who were in this school in the most difficult circumstances that human professionals could function in. And all through these terrible times of poverty, professional men and women did everything they could to sustain the education system of Badachshan. I think therefore, it is appropriate that at beginning of this speech I should pay my compliments, my respect, my gratitude to the teachers who have kept education alive in Badachshan.

Fortunately, in a short time the Aga Khan Lycee became the most excellent education centre in the province.

### **What is the Secret of My Success?**

I believe that success of a nation, a company, or an education institution lies in group dynamics and teamwork through which miracles can occur. To attain this goal I do

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<sup>34</sup> Aga Khan Education Service

<sup>35</sup> Aga Khan IV, a spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili Community

my utmost to inculcate and encourage a team spirit with all stakeholders in making changes.

However, as long as I remember, my fantasies and fascination were with teaching. I always preferred the title “muallim”. It conveys what is most important for me in my work and my life.

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## CHAPTER 10

### HOW DID I BECOME A TEACHER?

FARRUKHSO FRAIDOV

Rumi<sup>36</sup> considers teaching the mother of other profession and accordingly says:

*Hej kas az peshi khud cheze nashud,*

*Hej ohan khanjari teze nashud.*

*Hej Mavlono nashud mulloe Rum,*

*To muridi Shamsi Tabrezi nashud*

*No one has become someone just by himself,*

*No iron has become a sharp sword by itself.*

*No Mawlana<sup>37</sup> has become the Mullah<sup>38</sup> of Rum<sup>39</sup>*

*Unless he has not become a student of Shams of  
Tabriz<sup>40</sup>.*

This poem is the thesis of my autobiography; it is the tool of my inspiration and it reflects the ways of my learning to teach. Looking back at my early childhood, the poem, which was famous among the people in my context, inspired me and guided me towards positive attitudes and beliefs about teaching during all my life.

“Before teachers start their formal pedagogical work, they have already considerable informal preparation for teaching. From infancy onward, they have been taught many things by other people, most prominently their parents and teachers” (Nemser, 1983). Similarly, before joining teaching, I had no formal training course in pedagogy. My basic understanding of pedagogy was gained from informal learning like

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<sup>36</sup> The famous mystic Jalal-ud-din Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>37</sup> Mavlono (from Arabic Mawlana) is a title in the religious hierarchy. In this case, it refers to Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the most influential Sufi of Islam in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>38</sup> Mullah is a knowledgeable person in Islam. The mullahs served as sources of reference in the world and religious matters.

<sup>39</sup> Rum refers to the Byzantine Empire; i.e. the eastern part of the Roman Empire, later occupied by the Seljuk Turks.

<sup>40</sup> Shams of Tabriz, a mythical personality, is said to have been the teacher of the famous Jalal-ud-din Rumi and to have had a reformatory impact upon him.

imitating my teacher during childhood plays, parental support and encouragement, helping my classmates and my younger brother and sister and informal teaching at the university. After graduating from the university I started to work formally as a teacher and I learnt pedagogy by doing. After joining school as a teacher, I got an opportunity to improve my pedagogy through practicing, consulting my critical friends and attending different workshops and training courses.

I don't remember exactly when, but the first time I heard the poem of Rumi mentioned above was from my parents. Though neither of them was a teacher, they were both literate and they knew the value of teaching very well. Maybe because of our parents' awareness my eldest brother and sister became teachers. I started to understand the value of teaching from that time through my parent's inspiration. I remember one day, when my eldest brother came from school, my mother greeted him and said that he did well at school and as a result he became a teacher. Then she turned to me and said that now all people respect him, and if I also do well in my studies, I could also become a teacher like my brother. It was the first time I heard the word "muallim"<sup>41</sup> and it gave me ideas about a teacher as a respectful person. This incident had a great influence on my beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and from that time to be a teacher became my dream.

These beliefs and attitudes towards teaching became more obvious when I joined school. In school I realised that my mother was absolutely right, because I saw a lot of teachers that were respected like my eldest brother. At that time the Soviet government gave a lot of importance to education and teachers were not only well supported materially but morally as well.

Every day after classes we used to play the game named "muallimbozi"<sup>42</sup>. I liked teaching very much in this game and I always acted as a teacher and imitated my teachers. This action along with my positive belief and attitudes towards teaching improved my teaching skills. Similarly, research says that in the process of classroom interaction, teachers end up imitating internalised models of past practice, e.g. doing what

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<sup>41</sup> Muallim is a Persian word that means teacher.

<sup>42</sup> Muallimbozi is a game where one acted as a teacher and others as pupils.

their second grade teacher did when the children got restless. This was my first step towards professional growth in teaching at the primary level and it supported me later in my job. This action made me more proactive and consequently I used to explain the homework to my classmates, which significantly affected my professional life. Regarding this the following incident is always in my mind.

It happened when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. One morning when I came to school my classmates were waiting for me because the previous day my brother, our math teacher, gave us a difficult problem to solve for homework (I always consulted him at home and hence my understanding in math was good). When I entered the classroom all of them ran towards me and asked me to show them my math homework. As I had already done it at home I gave them my exercise book and the students started to copy. I felt happy, because my mother always said that if I help others, God would bless me. Unfortunately, at that time my brother entered the room and asked why all the students had gathered around my table. I said that they did not understand the task and I was explaining it to them. Then he asked one of the students who copied from me to explain the problem but that student could not do so. My brother turned towards me and said “good explanation, isn’t it?” And he further mentioned that if I wanted to help them, I should not allow them to copy but learn by solving the problem. At that time I felt very embarrassed amongst my classmates and I became upset.

However, the incident was a turning point in my learning to teach. Since that day, whenever the students had difficulties my brother encouraged me to help them. At home he would explain to me how to help my classmates. Therefore, I made all effort to prepare my homework not only for the teacher, but for helping my classmates as well. When my brother told my mother about this, she appreciated it. It also increased my interest towards the subject and motivated me to work harder.

Consequently, when my younger brother and sister joined school my childhood ‘muallimbozi’ turned from play to reality. I always helped them to do their homework and I would give them problems and ask them to solve the problems. Almost always my sister did better and I asked her to help my youngest brother. I learned this strategy from

my brother and it gave me some ideas about how to teach more effectively. As my professional growth related to teaching improved, my love also increased towards teaching. It is from that time, when my self-esteem grew to a higher level and whenever I explained something to anyone, I felt happy. All these experiences made me realise that I have some qualities of a teacher.

However, my positive attitudes and beliefs about teaching did not continue for a long time. In 1991, the USSR collapsed and it badly affected the economic, social and political life of the country. The system of education was the first to be affected. The budget was not enough to provide even a minimal salary for the teachers. Most experienced teachers left their jobs and went abroad or started their own business. Teaching became a very low paying job and the number of untrained teachers increased in schools. People who failed to enter any high school as a student appeared in the school as a teacher. It badly influenced the quality of teaching. The idea that a teacher is a respectful person declined in the public view and Rumi's poem was not popular anymore. I felt very bad about it and I lost my desire to be a teacher. Sometimes I remembered the boring classes with inexperienced teachers who were the object of fun for students and I started hating teaching. I did not enjoy teaching anymore.

After graduating from school I entered university in the economics faculty, where we had not even a single lesson about pedagogy. Moreover, like the school classes most of the classes at the university were very boring and traditional. The teacher read the written lecture and we would write; our learning was based on rote memorisation. It was our daily routine. But the Dean of our faculty was a very good teacher and he sometimes encouraged us to discuss topics in the class. I liked his classes and would try my best to prepare myself for the discussion. My participation was at a good level and I was always active in presentations.

Considering my participation, in my fifth year, one day the Dean called me to his residence and asked me to teach economics for one month to an English group in year 3. It frustrated me a lot, because by then I had developed negative attitude towards teaching but rejecting the Dean's request was not easy for me. I was in a dilemma. I had to make a

choice whether to choose the profession that I did not like or reject the Dean's request. Keeping in mind the consequences of the state examination, I decided to accept the Dean's proposal because I thought that teaching economics might help me to prepare myself for examinations. But my concern was how I could teach the students of year 3 without having any pedagogical knowledge. Now I realised that on one hand the teacher was right because, as the teacher gains experience s/he adjusts his/her methods of teaching.

During my first lesson it was very difficult for me to face about 60 students. By recalling my past experiences and feelings about my teacher at that time, I thought that the students might think about me in the same way and I felt insecure. Later on I realised that these students were different from my classmates at that time. They were older and they understood my concern as a young teacher. They did not judge my mistakes as I tried to make my class more interesting and I learnt a lot from them. As a result, it boosted my self-esteem and from there I started to enjoy teaching even though I still used to imitate my teachers in the traditional way of teaching.

When I graduated from the university the Dean offered me a job as a teacher in the economics faculty. Again I felt very confused; I really did not know what to do. This time it was a critical moment in my life and I had to make a proper decision. The decision was between choosing teaching as career or finding some other job as an economist. Finally, I agreed to work in the economics department as an assistant.

During my teaching practice I faced many challenges. In the first three months I never had any experienced teacher to observe my lessons or give any suggestions. I did not know how I was teaching. I had the routines that I learned from my teachers and previous experiences of my fifth year. I dictated lectures to the students. It seemed to me that for three months did not have any change in my pedagogical practice. Hence, I felt that it was very boring for the students and some times I got so frustrated that I wanted to leave the university.

Fortunately, one day, one of my teachers who worked for the AKL<sup>43</sup> and who had already done her Visiting Teachers (VT) course from AKU-IED, gave me an application for a job as a teacher of economics for grade 11. The school was supported by AKES<sup>44</sup> and professional training courses were in progress. Keeping in mind improving my pedagogy, I applied without any hesitation and passed the interview. From that time I started a new experience working in two places, at the university in the afternoons and school in the mornings. I worked under a mentor's facilitation. She was cooperative attended each of my classes and gave me constructive feedback. I really liked the way she encouraged me to teach in a better way. She encouraged me to write daily reflections. It was the first time in my life that I felt I was working very effectively. I started to learn to be a teacher with my mentor's support. I learnt a lot from her and today I can say that good learners will be able to live and work productively alongside, as well as learn from and with, people whose ways of thinking, being and learning are different from their own ([Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001, p. 88](#)).

The training courses continuously supported my learning as a teacher. One of the training courses was especially arranged for economics teachers and this significantly improved my pedagogical content knowledge. Our trainer was from the University of Toronto, Canada, and the way he taught us was very motivating. During this training we were encouraged to develop lesson plans and apply them in real classrooms. After implementing the lesson, our trainer would give us feedback and based on our challenges he would share effective strategies of teaching. This cycle of preparing lesson plans, implementing them, getting feedback and building on our past experiences, promoted my understanding about teaching to a great extent. This process helped me to "see" the relevance of formal coursework to classroom problems and made connections I might not otherwise have made (Nemser, 1983).

It was during that time that I started to understand the child-centered approach. I learnt new strategies of teaching, like group work, and while implementing them I saw my classes were more interesting and successful. Once in a general meeting the Principal

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<sup>43</sup> AKL (Aga Khan Lycee) in this case refers to biggest school in Khorog, Tajikistan

<sup>44</sup> AKES (Aga Khan Educational Services) one of the biggest branches of Aga Khan Network that started to operate in Tajikistan from 1991.

mentioned my name as an example of a successful young teacher. At that time I felt very proud of and it energised me towards self-improvement as a teacher. I started to use new strategies of teaching at the university; I felt even there my lessons became more interesting. Now by teaching in two different institutions – university and school, I learnt more about teaching. Reflecting on that I realised that learning in context also establishes conditions conducive to continual development, including opportunities to learn from others on the job, the daily fostering of current and future leaders, the selective retention of good ideas and best practices and the explicit monitoring of performance (Fullan, 2002, pp. 19-20).

During my one year experience at school as an economics teacher, I learned a lot and it was the most influential phase of my teaching career. As a result, in second year I was promoted and I worked as head of the economics department. To continue my professional development I taught the economics group. As a mentor I started to observe the lessons of my two colleagues and I gave them feedback. I worked on planning lessons and conducting workshops that helped me to get more insight into how teachers learn. Now thinking about it I do agree with Alvarado (1988) who says:

It's a big mistake to think that teaching is what we do every day and professional development is an occasional seminar or workshop or institute. No! The job is professional development, and professional development is the job. When we learn that - really learn it - we'll be on our way (p.23).

But even at that time I was not sure about teaching and I wanted to learn more about pedagogy. Therefore, I applied for the MEd programme at AKU-IED. I still remember the happiest day of my life when I was informed about my selection for the programme.

When I came to IED, beside the cultural shock in the new context I received a shock in my professional life too. The learning environment that I experienced at IED was very different from the one I experienced in my own context. I was amazed by the friendly relationship between the faculty and Course Participants (CPs). I learned that the

students are the constructors of their own knowledge and the teacher is their facilitator. I realised that children come to school with prior knowledge and the teacher should not ignore it but appropriately build on it. I realised that it is unhelpful to speak of “bad” or “good” students, all are equal and all have potential to learn. Also I realised that collaborative learning enables teachers to draw on their previous experiences by tapping their reservoir of accumulated wisdom and knowledge, and that makes a great contribution towards teacher learning. All these new ideas that were different in my context created conflict in my mind.

Before, I had entirely different ideas towards these new theories and I was reluctant to accept them, but afterwards through the constructivist approach to learning and after practically experiencing the new approach I started to change my previous belief. It made me aware of my own characteristics as an adult who liked self-direction. I learnt through discussion and problem solving with an awareness of my needs relevant to real life, which was encouraged at AKU-IED. Adults tend to want to learn knowledge, skills, and methods that will increase their competence in regard to their immediate circumstances. Regarding this, it seemed to me that there was a battle between my inner world and the new situation around me. Maybe because of having limited experience in this new situation I easily accepted the new theory of teaching. Today, I realise that it is the kind of course that one can feel a sense of continuity, progression and consistency.

I believe that IED will give me enough power to fill my future journey with success. I will implement the ideas in my own context for improvement of the education system through a variety of types of courses for teacher professional development. But neither training alone nor training followed by implementation is a sufficient condition for change. Beliefs and attitudes change only when training and implementation are combined with evidence of improved teacher learning (Guskey, 1995 in Butler, 2001). So, looking back for evidence of my improved leaning and improved learning of my students gives me a kind of moral support for self-improvement. This is all about where the importance of autobiography for teacher learning lies.

My journey with a focus on teacher learning started from my childhood and brings me up to date. During this period there were a lot of incidents that emotionally and professionally affected my teaching career. It was like a cyclical movement but the tendency was directed towards my professional improvement. Successes followed by challenges and challenges followed by successes filled the gaps between the cycles that in general provided me opportunities for my professional growth. But still my long running journey is not completed and I have to work a lot in order to move towards its completion.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to say that I became a teacher not by myself but by the people around me in my context. I had formal and informal teachers who inspired me, guided me and taught me during my life journey up to date. At the end I would like to mention again Rumi's poem that serves me as a light in my teaching journey:

*Hej kas az peshi khud cheze nashud,  
Hej ohan khanjari teze nashud;  
Hej Mavlono nashud mulloe Rum,  
To muridi Shamsi Tabrezi nashud.*

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## CHAPTER 11

### FOLLOWING MY PARENTS' FOOTSTEPS

JAMAL PAPIEVA

Autobiographical work with stories is based on the same set of assumptions as reflective practice i.e. that the teacher needs to know herself well, and that an important component of self-knowledge involves investigation of one's personal history (Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1999, p.79).

Self-knowledge and self-imagination are important, not only in terms of vision for the future, but they also guide one's experience of the present. As Beattie (1995) says:

The process that began with the storying of ... own narrative is one within which past experiences are brought forward to deal with the present, reconstruct in the light of the new context, and focus on the future, to which they bring new meanings and significance. (p.10)

As I visualise my life's journey my previous understandings of past experiences are reconstructed and changed. To better understand the process of becoming a teacher, I need to be cognizant of all of the participants in the process, and to understand more about what each brings to these encounters. Acknowledging my gratitude to those who helped me to learn and to determine my professional career, I will try to depict my life story of becoming a teacher. Bullough and Pinnegar's (2001) *Guidelines for Self-study Research* and Bashiruddin's (2002) *Seasons of my Learning* have shaped the way I understand my experiences and have influenced me in writing my autobiography.

The words 'school, books and teaching' were not new to me because these words are very common in the home where I was born. This is because the profession of teaching has been an inheritance in my family and the whole life of my family is connected with this noble profession. For example, my father is a science teacher at one

of the universities and my mother has been a primary school teacher. She is my first teacher also, she is the person who led me into the world of education and taught me how to hold a pen and how to put the letters together and make sense from them. My mother is the very person who inspired me to become a teacher; who I imitated and who I wanted to resemble. She gave all her heart and soul with love and tenderness to us, her children, to become human beings with a right mind to find our place in life. I am the second person in the family who followed my parents' footsteps; my elder sister is also a teacher. Thus, I became a teacher to maintain the status quo.

It is quite common in the human race that professions have been followed in the next generation. It is evident from the old civilisations of humanity, that there has been an inherited system of professions, for example, a particular family would be engaged with a specific profession, and this system goes on. One of the main reasons for this transmission or adopting the same profession is imitation. Likewise, being a member of the family I was attracted to the teaching profession through different ways. For example, when I recall my early childhood I can see that I imitated my family generally, and particularly my mother. In this process I was not the only imitator and follower, there was also my sister. Thus, I can say that the main factor and starting point of this great journey was my family, particularly my parents who played a vital role in drawing my attention to teaching facilitated me informally to be a teacher.

Though I started going to school with my mother, I was formally admitted in school when I was six years old in the town of Osh. The school system of teaching was completely dominated by traditional teaching methods, where the students were considered to be *empty vessels*. In other words teaching was very classroom-based and lecture-based. Teachers and textbooks were considered the only sources of knowledge and teachers were “the sage on the stage”.

Choosing a teaching career was quite straightforward for me; I had wanted to be a teacher for as long as I could remember. I still remember childhood games where I played the role of the teacher with great delight. My zeal of becoming a teacher and interest of playing school was shared with my elder sister. I grew up and studied in the city with my

parents while my sister studied in the village school and lived with our grandparents. Every weekend when we visited them we would share our practices and play together. Our classes were empty so we used to write the names of our classmates on pieces of paper and put them on the floor. We imagined that they were our students. We used to teach in two different rooms; I taught language lessons and she taught mathematics. We would teach in our own classes then change our classes, I taught language lessons in her class and she is in my class with mathematics. Surprisingly, after several years I have become a language teacher and she is now a math teacher. One weekend when I visited the village I saw my sister had a blackboard. Grandfather noticed her playing school and made a blackboard for her. That time I envied her that I did not have that facility for teaching. After that, the doors of the rooms turned out to be a blackboard for me. My parents did not even suspect that I was playing school as I used to play when I was alone at home. When I played I loved to dress in my mother's clothes, even her high heeled shoes. At that time they did not even realise that I was in their footsteps. I would talk to the parents of my students and scold them for their misbehavior in my imaginary teaching world. When I reflect, I understand that I was only imitating my teachers and parents. Nevertheless, these experiences formed the beginning of learning to be teacher. With the passage of time I began to stop living in an imaginary teaching world.

When I reached class 9, only two years were being left before I was to finish school. My parents began to worry about my future profession, what I would be and where I would study, because I did not share with them my interest and passion of becoming a teacher. What my father suggested was that he would help me to enter the university where he had been working, particularly the same faculty, physics-mathematical faculty, where he was deputy dean. My mother agreed but suggested another option was to send me to my uncle, who lived in the capital of our country and he would definitely help me with my further education as he was holding a high post in the government. After thorough discussion they gave preference to the initial option. They were taking the decision as if I was a child who just reached school age and as parents were choosing which school to take the child to. But now I reflect on that incident and wonder why they did not involve me in the decision-making process. Before writing this autobiography I had never thought about this event as significant. It was still two years

before I was to finish school, so my father started to prepare me to enter his faculty. Every night he would teach me physics for one hour. My elder sister loved science so she accompanied me and at that time the daughter of one of our relatives from a remote place, also a student of physics, was living in our home. She also joined our *formal* lesson, it was really formal, as the time was fixed and one particular room was allocated for that purpose. All necessary handouts and stationary were prepared, there were home tasks and presentations as well. I hated that one hour, it was terrible for me to sit and bear that lesson. I was bad at science at school from the very beginning and I could not understand what my father was teaching and explaining. Whenever he asked me a question I would just sit and stare at him with blank eyes. When he was not looking at me I felt sleepy, it was boring for me. He used to give us tasks, which we were supposed to do for the next lesson and since I could not do them by myself I cribbed from my *class fellows* without showing to them, then I would be ready to show. That experience seemed to be nightmare for me and for the first time I felt hatred towards the profession of teaching as I imagined myself teaching physics to children without understanding and disliking the subject myself.

My mother shared this incident with one of her colleagues who was my English language teacher. That teacher told my mother that I was very good at English and that I was language smart. She suggested to my mother that I should be an English teacher. That suggestion was a turning point in my life, I am grateful to my English teacher for helping me to find my own place in life. My father was feeling that I was not doing well in physics and he was at his wits end as to what to do further when my mother told him about my teacher's suggestion. He became happy that maybe it was the right direction for me. Then he took me to one of his colleagues, who worked in the Foreign Language Department of his university, to check my knowledge of English and help me to improve my English. That teacher interviewed me in English and gave me some tasks to accomplish. As a result she said that she would teach me and prepare me for an examination to enter the university. She is the person who directed me, she is the person who inspired me to love English. Then again I started to feel a strong desire of becoming a teacher.

As a result of my tutor's hard work, I entered the university gaining high scores and consequently I became a diligent student displaying the fruits of her work. From the first year I became more interested in learning English and again started to feel a love for the profession of teaching. It was due to my first teacher at university, who inspired me so much. She continued to build the basis which was established by my tutor. But in the second year of studying a boom of doubt appeared again as our teacher was changed and another teacher who was old started to teach us. He was a follower of the traditional approach to teaching and blew out my desire of becoming a teacher. I started to study just for the purpose of learning English.

When I was in my third year my father established a private school, which was the first private school in our area. That school became second home for us and members of the school became our family members. I intervened and got involved in every deed of the school helping my father. Out of study time I was in the school and at evenings all the members of our family gathered together to reflect on events in the school and to discuss issues related to the school. From those informal meetings and involvement in school life I gained insight into teaching and the work of a school. I realised how challenging the job of teaching is but at the same time it is interesting and full of joy. According to the policy of our educational system, in the fourth and fifth year of study at the university the students have to practice teaching in the field for one or two months. Our group consisted of twelve people and we were sent to our private school for practice. Our focus was not only on teaching but we were supposed to conduct extra-curricular activities as well, to each of us one class was allocated and we spent all the time with those children. It was such a nice experience for me; I enjoyed teaching children and just being with them.

After graduation from the university I joined my father's private school and I became involved in the school life as a teacher. I did not face any serious problems from the beginning; it was easy for me to enter into the stream of teaching as I had a very clear vision of what it would be like. As principal of the school, my father used to conduct workshops for the teachers. He supported and encouraged teachers all the time, he observed our lessons and gave feedback which helped to improve our teaching. If any lesson failed he would say we should treat failures as opportunities to invent new lessons.

He also challenged us to observe each other's lessons as he was of the view that through observation the teachers learn more. Now when I reflect on it I think that good learners will be able to live and work productively alongside, as well as learn from and with, people whose ways of thinking, being and learning are different from their own (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001, p 88). Working at that school, I learnt a lot concerning teaching and learning. Reflecting on that particular time I would say that a good teacher should journey back to the time when s/he was at school, think about teachers s/he had and should tailor themselves according to the students' needs.

Unfortunately, after a year of working in our private school it was closed. Then I was offered a job at the same university from where I graduated. I joined the university with my luggage of knowledge about teaching and I did not face any serious problems in my work. I found working with university students much easier than school children. It may be because they were nearly of my age and our views of the world and interests were the same. I was not only teaching them but I was learning with them. I realised that "a classroom is not a place to teach children, but a place to learn more about teaching and learning... learning is a part of the job of teaching" (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p. 150). Gradually, I became accustomed to my new situation, to the rhythms and cycles of university routine and a new curriculum.

Whenever I had any difficulty or issue related my work I used to discuss it with my father as he is also a university lecturer. I had a chance to participate in a teacher training course on the critical thinking project, which gave me the opportunity to get acquainted with new unconventional ways and methods of teaching. The greatest advantage was that I could immediately implement the various teaching strategies learnt and see whether they were inspiring or not. I was supported by my chairman for participating in that course and after finishing it he provided me conditions to work with other teachers and share my learning with them. I learnt a lot while conducting workshops with them and sharing our ideas with each other.

Later, there was an announcement for the Master of Education programme at The Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) and seven

people applied for one place. Fortunately, I was selected to represent my country and my university. Studying here I have developed not only professionally but also personally and I feel as if my professional career has just started. Now I think about the experience of studying at IED and about the meaning I have been gaining from it. I understand how it is affecting my understandings and has changed the way I understand teaching. It has also changed the way I think about teaching and learning, as well as the role of a teacher in the classroom. From the very beginning I felt as if I am entering a new world, which opened up better opportunities for future self-advancement. The courses are focused on the school, teaching at school, improving the school (I mean not university) and this gave me an opportunity to think about reorganising that private school of my father to which he gave too much effort and soul. I could continue my father's work in future. I have shared this intention of mine with my father and he was very happy and supported my idea. I discuss all the principles, methods and techniques of teaching along with articles and practices in the field with my parents via e-mail. They give me feedback, which helps me greatly. Though they are hundreds of miles away from me I feel their support and help as if they are next to me guiding me towards the right direction.

Being far from my family I have faced real life problems and realised the challenges of living away from home. I have learnt to communicate with people, learnt how to deal with any issue, begun to appreciate the Motherland and understand the value of parents, siblings, relatives and friends. I have understood the feeling of 'missing'. I have met nice friends, who have been supporting and inspiring me. AKU-IED gave me a chance to realise all those things; I would call them my life lessons alongside my professional growth.

Following my parents' footsteps further, my target now is to live up to their expectations.

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## CHAPTER 12

### BECOMING A TEACHER AND A TEACHER EDUCATOR

MAISARA BALKHOVA

It was spring. The sun was shining and smiling because a new baby was born in the Balkhov family in the village of Porshnev, Tajikistan. The name Gulbakhar was given to her by her wise grandmother who was pious a woman. She used to sing songs and tell stories and taught her the difference between right and wrong. By Allah's blessings and with her educated family's help and support, Maisara grew up and eventually became a teacher and then a teacher educator.

Becoming a teacher and teacher educator was not easy for me. My days were sometimes stormy when I had to struggle with challenges, and sometimes sunny when I had success in my learning and teaching. In any case, all this lead me to grow. His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan<sup>45</sup> gave advice that students should "be as eager to study as the armies of Prophet...It will assist you in serving your country" (p.32- 33). This message to search for knowledge became a guideline for me.

I am using 'captain' as a metaphor to describe my teaching. I was a captain in the classroom and always ready to help students to construct their knowledge and support teachers in the vast ocean of education.

#### **The Captain's Childhood Memory**

My childhood days passed very happily when I was in the kindergarten and my sisters and brother were at school. I looked at them and I dreamed about school. It was not clear for me what they did at school though it seemed that the school was a very

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<sup>45</sup> A spiritual leader of Ismaili Community  
The speech of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan (1967) in Bombay.

interesting place where children gather together and learn. Therefore, I was very keen to go and I would get a bag with papers and pretend that I was in school busy with my reading and writing.

Fortunately, there came a time for me to go to school. It was a most exciting time for me and I went with flowers, new clothes and a bag containing notebooks, pen etc. My *first teacher* welcomed all the students. She was very beautiful, calm and kind. We had a good relationship with her. I was free to ask her to help me when I made mistakes. For me she was like the fairy from a fairytale who helped me and made me enjoy my work in school.

However, the language of instruction was difficult for me to understand. In fact, I learnt it through interaction with my friends and guide in the kindergarten, and from my family members. Later, I did not have any problems in speaking or understanding.

I was good in language and literature. I remember all of us sang songs in primary school when we had celebrated “*Idi Alifbo*”<sup>46</sup>. It is our school tradition that at the end of the alphabet students say *thank you alphabet*. We were engaged in various a co-curricular activities by our teacher. I liked to recite poems in Tajik and Russian. My writing and reading became fluent and when I entered secondary class I was able to write essays on my own.

I liked my literature teacher’s way of teaching because she did not emphasise rote memorisation. Instead she encouraged us to read the poems and to make sense of them. The impact of my teacher’s support was a great improvement in my essay writing and my essays were always exhibited in school and other conferences. Reflecting on this, I realise that this was a significant time in my learning where I had a lot of success.

During learning in school, from primary up to the secondary level, I learnt a lot of new concepts in different subjects; some in depth and some superficially.

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<sup>46</sup> Celebration of mastering the letters of alphabet. This celebration was widely practiced in Soviet era.

In secondary school, I learnt that only teachers always have the right answers. There were teachers who would ask questions and mostly answer themselves without letting the students answer. For example, in math and science I learnt many rules and formulas which now I think did not teach me to reason. This was instrumental understanding but not relational understanding, which corresponds to intellectual learning

I also came to realise that teachers were all different in terms of teaching, knowledge and attitudes towards students. Some of them were calm, kind and friendly, while others were rude and strict. Observing my mother and other teachers enabled me to distinguish between teachers and to act as needed; that is to behave or act according to their habits and rules. I listened to only those teachers whom I felt were competent and I did not listen to those whom I felt were incompetent.

I think that when I became able to distinguish between those who could teach or not I realised that teaching is not easy work because you need to be very knowledgeable and to be helpful to your students. Thinking about it now, I feel that somehow this assumption stopped me from choosing teaching as career because I felt that I was not ready and not strong enough to cope with students. I also did not want to be strict and unfriendly with my students. Nevertheless, I think my positive learning experiences in school were the factors that ultimately encouraged me to become a teacher.

It was not in my mind to teach though I appreciated my mother and father because they were teachers. I wanted to become a lawyer or pilot – a captain. I wanted to see the entire world. But later on I changed my decision.

Perhaps I saw how students respected my mother in the school. The most important day in my context is Teachers' Day. On that day everybody comes to congratulate my mother. Even though she has retired, people still come to congratulate her. This opened my eyes about teachers and about how they are respected in society; not only by students but parents and government. I think this was one factor, which made me interested in being a teacher. I understood also that teachers' work required tolerance and patience as I saw in my mother's work. I never heard my mother complain about her work, instead I saw at that time how creatively she prepared the teaching aids for her

students. I started to become interested in the processes of making teaching aids such as puppets, pictures of birds, animals, flowers etc. Now I realise how significant that was for me in those days because all this helped me to develop my creativity and my aesthetic sense. Generally, all these experiences made me love and respect teachers and their work.

### **My First Independent Journey to the *Pedagogical University***

There is a saying of people in my country that “one can learn more from a journey because he or she has to interact with different people and gets different ideas. In this way those ideas influence one’s thinking about the world.”

I chose teaching because of my parents’, and also my brother and sisters’, suggestions. I also chose to go to the Pedagogical University as all of them graduated from there. My mother suggested to me that being a primary teacher is good. She said: “You will enjoy working with children”. My father said “I started my career from teaching. It helps you in your further professional growth”. I had the following conversation with my uncle who was a famous philosopher:

Uncle: My daughter, what did you decide to be?

Me: I will be a lawyer.

Uncle: It is also good but life is like a spiral not straight. It has ups and downs. So, in order to be strong in your faith and knowledge teaching is more vital. Going over the challenges in your life helps you to gain knowledge and wisdom.

All the night I was thinking and finally I decided to be a teacher. My university days were full of joy and also tears. The journey was risky due to the civil war (1992-1994), which affected my learning in many ways. Despite all the political, social and economic difficulties, I did not stop believing that ‘tomorrow I will need the education’.

At the University I was impressed by the teachers of language and literature subjects. I enjoyed learning the Russian language as the teacher used various resources. She involved all the students in discussions and writing assignments. The way she explained the content was clear and I never needed to open any books after her explanation. I always came to the lesson prepared. I was the *right hand of my* tutor. I was impressed that she gave the students the choice to sit the exam or negotiate the grade. Compared to other tutors she was more flexible, open-minded and she was a good decision maker. I realised that I should also be more flexible with my students so I imitated some of her actions and characteristics.

A one week trip to Russia (Saint-Peterburg and Moscow) that was initiated by the University for improving speaking and writing abilities was very vital because it helped me in writing my essay about the people's life and the historical places of the country, such as well known museums e.g. Ermitazh. Thinking on this now I realised that connection in learning is important.

In literature all students were assigned Russian literature as reading and our exposure to foreign literature was very limited. I enjoyed reading the poems of famous Russian poets like Pushkin and Lermontov. The readings were for independent learning but they were also exam based. It was difficult in a limited time for students to read twenty five thick books.

In year four of my course I had a one week teaching practicum. As Feiman-Nemser (1983) states, "student teaching is generally viewed as a necessary and useful part of teacher preparation. Teachers typically regard it as the most valuable part of their preservice work" (p.155). I agree with this because it is a student's first trial of leading a class in a real classroom. It helps student in a limited time to become familiar with the real work of teachers and as well to learn about themselves as a teacher. As I was in a teacher's role for the first time I felt it was vital for me to take advantage and learn from it.

In teaching practicum I taught in class 5. I was observed by our tutor and the class teacher. I became nervous when my tutor observed me because she was very formal. Her

feedback was negative and it discouraged me. When the class teacher observed me she was very supportive. She was impressed by the resources that I used in my lesson. This empowered me and I felt confident. She also suggested that I should try to make all students participate.

Even though the teaching practicum was short it was not as successful as I expected. I tried to continue my journey to become a good teacher because I believed that I could teach. I believed in the view of Rudaki (15<sup>th</sup> century) who said:

*Har ki n-omukht az guzashti ruzgor  
Hej n-omuzad zi hej omuzgor.*

*Who did not learnt from his/her experiences  
He/she never learns from any teacher.*

I agree because my further journey that follows was mostly based on “experiential or craft knowledge...knowledge drawn from practical experience” (Retallick & Mithani, 2003, 4).

### **My Further Journey of Becoming a ‘Captain’ Teacher**

Feiman-Nemser (1983) quoted Herbert Kohl (1976) who said, ‘the essentials of learning to teach begins when one has the responsibility for a class or group of young people’ (p.11).

I agree with the above point and when I recall now my first teaching days I realise that really it was my learning. I was responsible to teach the classes 5A, B and C. I became a captain in my ship (metaphor used for classroom) where I was responsible to get my ‘passengers’ (metaphor used for students) safely to their destinations. Whether I could do this became a big question for me.

I was welcomed by the principal and teachers of the school. As I was a new teacher according to the school policy I had to observe them teach. I did not refuse but I

felt that the school administration perceived me as an inexperienced teacher and I felt as I was an empty vessel for them.

The lesson that I observed was teacher-centered and it was not new since I “have been exposed to patterns and ideas of teaching and schooling that pervade the culture” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p.152). I came to the school with a mission on my mind to control the students as I had been taught when I was a student. I tried to be a good teacher, to do everything on time and to cover the syllabus. However, I did not know how it would happen in the real situation. This was a dark cloud for me where tears and uncertainty overcame me. I was looking for the sun to make it sunny. I even did not think about it as I assumed that I had gained enough knowledge and skills at the university. I also thought that writing lesson plans and using the textbook were the main tasks. It was like a habit for me.

Nevertheless, when I start to teach sometimes I found myself in a dark forest. My teaching did not satisfy me and I showed my anger when the students did not listen or did not give the right answers. In many situations I did not know how to act; I was near to leaving my job. But my faith and my interaction with my mother and other colleagues helped me to overcome these tears and uncertainties. My mother advised me, “Try to understand students. Listen to them and explain them”. Using that advice really worked for me. For example, in class 5B I had some students who misbehaved and disturbed others. I involved them during the discussion and I gave them responsibility for being leaders in the class. I felt it was a good way because they felt responsibility for the given task.

This was a “period of trials and errors” (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p.159). It was also a period of inquiry because when a new issue or question arose I started to find the solution from other teachers.

My way of my teaching was different as I asked students to do tasks using various resources such as cards, pictures etc. I tried to imitate my university tutor to take my students on an excursion to write an essay. All these trials helped to make the lesson interesting. As Feiman-Nemser (1983) said, “beginners work things out on their own”

(p.159). I agree with this because I also tried things on my own. I tried to work out the problems and I saw improvement.

I was not criticised by the deputy or principal when they checked my lessons. As nobody gave me any comment for improvement I thought myself that it was good planning. I was successful; I had covered the syllabus and my teaching was correct. So, I became confident and I continued to plan and teach in the same way.

Later I was given a primary class. I liked working with the children and I had to teach them different subjects like Math, Nature Study, etc. To teach them I had to re-learn some concepts. I found some work at school unfamiliar and it seemed to be bureaucratic. A lot of administrative work was given to the teachers. The one that I struggled with was filling the registration book of students' daily performance. It was a rule class teachers marked six students every 2 days. As I marked, in one day, ten students I got a comment that "this is not the right way". For me it was not fair towards those students who contributed in the class. It was an issue as it affected my students' learning because the students knew that teacher would not ask them in two days so they did not prepare their lessons. This we called *learning for marking*. Reflecting on it now I realised that such assessment was not for improving students' learning. Similarly, I found that there was no linkage between what I was taught at the university and the school practices. The school had different expectations and it was difficult for me to adjust to them.

Despite this, I think I tried my best to teach students well and to build a good relationship with them. I realised that rote learning does not lead students to reasoning. I think now that more active learning leads students to reason. I also think that the learning should relate to the students' real life because it motivates them "to learn, builds self-esteem...and importantly, maximises the effectiveness of the learning taking place" (Dalton and Watson, 1997)<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup>Retrieved June, 4, 2003, from <http://www.Plotpd.com/pedagogy> in action.

### **The Light that Guided Me in My Professional Journey**

*Donish andar dil choraghi ravshan ast*

*V-az hama bad bar tani tu javshan ast.*

*Knowledge is the light to make the heart light*

*And the worse is that if it has dressed in 'javshan'<sup>3</sup>*

My interpretation of these lines of the great Persian philosopher Nosiri Khusraw is that knowledge is a “light” that guides people in the dark. I continued searching for the light to guide me on my pathway. I had a lot of successes in this pathway and as well as many challenges. At the start it was learning by doing; that is I learnt when I started to relate theories with practice.

I had a 3 year gap in teaching as I worked at the University in my area. I gained skills and knowledge in management and I improved my English and computer skills. In my spare time I borrowed English books, newspaper, journals etc. from the library. In fact it was a base for me to get an opportunity to be an employee of the Aga-Khan Education Programme in the primary component. My job description included the following:

- To translate for the consultant in the workshop and to translate the document from English into Tajik.
- To assist the consultant in the field for one or two months duration.
- To develop teaching resources, to plan and demonstrate the lessons and to facilitate teachers during the workshop in their learning.

This period during 1998 was very significant for me because of working out new methods of teaching, such as group work. I think it was a transitional period for my

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<sup>3</sup> In 17-18 century the soldiers had armour

beliefs about education. The limited knowledge about new child-centered methods that I got from books was expanded and this helped me to use and understand it in depth. I found my new job very interesting and interactive. My consultant and my colleagues were supportive of my personal and professional development. They were happy and challenging days. It was a new experience for me to translate for the consultant from abroad in the workshop. It was not easy to pass the information so that teachers would not get confused. I had to be a good listener and translator.

In my first demonstration lesson I was worried because teachers were more experienced. I thought that the teachers would not accept me so I felt frustrated. After some practice and with my consultant's and colleague's feedback I became more confident. All this helped me to become better in designing and applying the lessons for teachers. Soon I was recommended to attend the VT Programme at AKU-IED, Karachi.

I progressed in my professional growth because in this programme I got a deeper understanding of group work. I learnt to write reflections about my learning and analysis of the curriculum etc. Also the micro-teaching helped me to implement those theories that I learnt in the class. Daily reflections helped me to think clearly and to be conscious of my actions. I felt empowered because I was given a chance to conduct a workshop for teachers on such topics as curriculum, assessment and reflection. In the workshop I realise now that while facilitating teachers in analysing curriculum I was also a learner. The outcome of this work is a guide for teaching language that was written by our facilitator with teachers' advice. It helped to built trust between both sides. My role now was to facilitate teachers in implementing the new methods in their field. I was selected for the curriculum committee and for publishing dual language books for children.

After working for two years I felt that I needed to improve some area of my teaching and learning. Fortunately, in 2002 I was selected for the Master of Education programme at the same private international institute for teachers' development as I attended in 2002. I tried to take benefit from this programme and therefore, the advice of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan "not to leave... a page unturned" became daily

practice. In this programme I learnt a lot of theories and I also got an opportunity to see the theories in existing practices.

I think the programme helped me through “repetitive experiences... make sense of the situation of uncertainty...” (Schon, 1983, p. 52). The exposure to different cultures and contexts helped me to become aware of different ways of learning and teaching. I learnt that good teachers will always consider the prior knowledge of students in order to help them to construct new knowledge.

Though I worked with teachers, coming here I felt that I did not have theoretical knowledge in this area. The Teacher Learning module helped me to fill the gaps. Initially, I did not accept writing an autobiography but when I reflected and read articles I realised that it is one way of self-learning or knowing. When I worked on PLOT<sup>4</sup> I found myself in a *wonderful place*. I was impressed by interacting with different topics such as Pedagogy in action, Adult collaboration etc. I realised that my new learning helped me “to navigate the change and diversity ... collaborate, and be flexible and creative” (ACDE, 2001).

I believe the *Light* or the *Lamp* that I found at IED will guide me in further planning and implementation in my context for self-development and for teacher professional development. Teaching is a life-learning process. My journey has confirmed my uncle’s comment that knowledge and learning lead people towards wisdom and light.

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<sup>4</sup> Professional Learning Online Tool [www.plot.com](http://www.plot.com)

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**PART IV**  
**TEACHER OF BANGLADESH**

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **MY JOURNEY OF BECOMING A TEACHER**

**TASLEEMA BEGUM**

The process of becoming a teacher for me has been an upward move through irregular and interrupted critical incidents. In moments of reflection I ask myself what were my reasons for becoming a teacher and those reflections take me backwards and forwards in my life journey. It seems like an album where all the significant events of becoming a teacher are pasted like colorful pictures. I have been turning the pages and visualising the moments; happy memories as well as sad incidents and facts. Narrating one's autobiography related to professional life is acquiring meaning from past experiences. Angelides and Ainscow (2000) are right in saying that, these were “highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development”. My journey of becoming a teacher begins with my own narrative and in my story past experiences are brought forward to deal with the present, reconstructed in the light of the new context, and focused on the future, to which they bring new meaning and significance (Beattie, 1995, p. 10).

#### **Background to Becoming a Teacher**

Teaching is my present professional identity in Bangladesh. At this moment when I reflect and ask myself what I wanted to be in life, I found my destination was something different than becoming a teacher. How I involved myself in this journey of becoming a teacher, I could not realise before writing my autobiography. When I thought about the past I was surprised to discover a long list of significant events and memories, which influenced me to become a teacher. Now I am feeling proud of myself that I have overcome many challenges to attain my goal and vision of becoming teacher educator.

I belong to a literate family and my mother was a teacher. From my childhood I was impressed to see the way people respected and gave honor to my mother

for being a teacher. My mother was a soft-spoken lady with dignity. I was always inspired by her personality. While she taught the students at home I also used to study with them and sometimes used to help the students to accomplish their tasks. When I was studying in grade nine my mother always wanted me to write the marks and comments on the report cards because my handwriting was fine. This experience gave me a satisfactory feeling of acting like a teacher. It can be counted as my informal learning towards becoming a teacher.

In the journey of my life I have come to realise that all teachers are different in terms of teaching, knowledge and attitudes towards students; some are calm, kind and friendly, while others are rude and strict. At primary level I was inspired by my grade V class teacher. I studied in a convent school and most of the teachers were well behaved and always taught us about morality. My academic performance was always above average. Being a good student and monitor of my class, at times I used to behave roughly with my class fellows because I was proud of my performance. My class teacher noticed this and one day she counseled me. I cannot explain exactly how she made me understand the negative effect of being proud but I tried to change myself. I started to behave nicely with everyone and students also noticed and appreciated my motivation. After coming a long way in life I still remember her as one of my favorite teachers. I learnt that a teacher should guide the students to develop their morality because teaching is moral act dealing with human lives (Sikandar, 2003). On the opposite side of the coin I still hate one of my English teachers of my junior level. She took our English class in grade 6-8 and I had bitter experiences of her way of teaching. I was so fed up with her actions that I used to pray for her death. Her attitude discouraged me from becoming a teacher. I learnt from these experiences that a teacher needs to consider each child as an individual and should be very careful while dealing with them, because teachers can make or break students' dreams while teaching them.

I always respected the principal of my school because of her personality. She had good teaching skills, especially recognising students' weak and strong side and teaching accordingly. All the students in my class loved to attend her English grammar class. She had her own style that never made us feel bored. In my journey of becoming a

teacher I follow her as a role model. I learnt that a teacher should pay equal attention to all students and provide everyone with learning opportunities.

Throughout my school and college life I experienced exam-oriented learning based on rote memorisation. Teachers used to deliver their knowledge in the transmission way where I acted like a passive learner. I never got any opportunity to learn by doing, even in the science subjects. In science classes like physics, chemistry and biology, teachers demonstrated the experiments and I used to observe them and then copy the diagram and explanation from the textbooks. As a result I could not develop my constructive skills. I had no desire to become a teacher because at that stage none of the teachers inspired me in that direction.

In my childhood the only dream I had was to become a doctor and people in my family used to call me ‘doctor’. To become a doctor I had to gain the highest score and get admission in the MBBS course. I achieved excellent results both in my SSC<sup>48</sup> and HSC<sup>49</sup> level. I got first division and was selected for the MBBS<sup>50</sup> admission test. But unfortunately my dream could not come true because I failed in the MBBS test. That was the most frustrating period of my life and I thought I would never be able to overcome that condition. But God helped me in overcoming this shock and had a better plan for me.

#### The Truth of a Failure

Failure doesn't mean you've wasted your life,

It does mean you've a reason to start afresh.

Failure doesn't mean you should give up,

It does mean you should try harder.

Failure doesn't mean you'll never make it,

It does mean it will take a little longer.

Failure doesn't mean God has abandoned you,

It does mean God has a better idea!

(Schuller, 2004)

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<sup>48</sup> Secondary School Certificate

<sup>49</sup> Higher Secondary School Certificate

<sup>50</sup> Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery

The theme of this poem inspired me to become what I am today. My journey towards becoming a teacher fulfilled all my desires and discouraged me to act like a failure. I started to get back my confidence and I explored myself to learn more to reach the destination of becoming a teacher educator.

### **Looking Forward to a New Destination and Vision**

During the three month vacation after the HSC examination I taught the neighbors' children as private tuition. I used to teach them the way I was taught by my good teachers. For example I encouraged my students to rote memorise and gave them lot of drilling exercises. The strategy I used was to enable my students to get good marks at school examinations. It showed my positive teaching qualities. The money I earned through private tuition encouraged me to continue my work.

At this stage I started my journey as a teacher and a student at the same time. In the morning shift I worked at kindergarten school and in the evening I studied for graduation in Science. I taught English in grade 1 to 5. My teaching strategy was transmission and textbook oriented. At the beginning stage I never tried to improve students' creative thinking skills or apply different teaching strategies. I was unaware of the modern techniques of teaching and the school authority accepted my teaching style. Sometimes I was depressed when I compared my low salary with the workload and people around me teased me about why I was spending too much time and energy on it. But I kept in mind my mother's advice that I should not count money but should count experiences. This will help me to build up my future career. Her advice became true and I am grateful to my mother who was always there to support and push me towards my teaching career.

### **Journey had a Halt and Restarted with a Speed**

My journey stopped for a while when I got married. After getting married I was exposed to a totally different culture in which 'going out' was out of the question. It was

almost hopeless that I would ever be able to continue my job. I accepted the reality and involved myself in housework as a wife. Time passed by and I lost one year from my life as neither a teacher nor a student. My academic background and my strong desire to build a professional career influenced my husband to allow me to continue my study and teaching as a profession. My journey got speed with the strong support and inspiration of my husband. Throughout my journey he walked with me, felt proud with my success and encouraged me when I faced challenges. I stepped into an English medium high school as an English teacher and at the same time I got admission in an MSc course, which had a great influence in my professional life.

The experiences that I went through teaching in this new school had a great influence on me in becoming a teacher and growing up professionally. I learnt so many new things regarding teaching such as how to design lesson plans, year plans and schemes of work. The school authority appreciated my sincerity and hard work and this sped up my growth as a teacher. I worked there for three years and developed myself as a teacher; I learnt to manage classes, negotiate with parents and become a responsible teacher.

### **Significant Turning Point of My Journey**

While struggling and crawling in my professional life I received an advertisement from AKES-B<sup>51</sup> from my brother-in-law. He encouraged me to apply and after going through all critical testing steps I got the chance to become a teacher of that reputed school, which was my dream. At the same time I passed the MSc<sup>52</sup> examination with first class. Both of these successes gave me a new start on my journey.

AKES-B<sup>53</sup> proved to be a milestone in my career as a teacher. It introduced me to different terms and teaching strategies. It developed a lot of confidence in me to tackle different situations in class. I became aware for the first time about

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<sup>51</sup> Aga Khan Educational Service, Bangladesh.

<sup>52</sup> Master's degree in Science

<sup>53</sup> Aga Khan School, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

teaching pedagogy when I attended a VT<sup>54</sup> programme. This programme facilitated my journey towards professional development as a teacher. During this program I worked under a mentor's facilitation and I was impressed by her personality as well as her teaching style. She was cooperative and always gave me constructive feedback. She encouraged me to write reflections that helped me to improve my teaching. She influenced me to implement a different teaching style to increase students' interest in learning. For the first time in my life I started to feel that I was working effectively. Her positive guidance amplified my confidence as a teacher. I learned a lot from her and today I can say that good learners will be able to live and work productively alongside, as well as learn from and with, people whose ways of thinking, being and learning are different from their own (Mohammad (2003) quotes Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001, p.88).

Through the teachers' training course I learnt to develop lessons plans, low cost or no cost materials and I applied them in the real classroom. After implementing lesson plans I reflected and identified the challenges and I tried to use more effective strategies of teaching. I realised that reflective practice could help me a lot to improve my teaching. I learnt that a teacher could learn better from his/her own practices if s/he reflects on them regularly (Hole & McIntyre, 1999, cited in Hadi, 2003). I was very enthusiastic to improve the quality of my teaching in order to improve the students' learning. I used to sit late in the night to prepare my lessons and resources and I went to classes with a clear understanding of what I intended to teach. Besides that I learnt how to assess the students in different way. I tried to relate the content knowledge with real life experiences, which encouraged my students to learn by doing. I also introduced inquiry-based learning in my geography classes that enhanced students' reasoning skills. I had a lot of success in this pathway as well as some challenges.

I faced challenges when I first implemented group work and pair-share work in the class. In one class I applied group a work strategy, which was observed by one of the PDT's<sup>55</sup>. At the end of the class I was full of tears to see the performance of

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<sup>54</sup> Visiting Teacher's Training Programme

<sup>55</sup> Professional Development Teacher

the students. They made too much noise, spoke with loud voices and complained about each other. As a result I could not complete my lesson. Later I got back my confidence through the positive feedback of my observer. Her continuous support and facilitation helped me to establish social skills in the classroom and continued practice with the strategy brought me success. I realised as Feiman-Nemser (1983) states, “A major part of learning to teach occurs on the job, in the first five to seven years” (p.163). I think it was due to my interest and love of teaching that each experience gave me a new insight into teaching. I learnt through experience that a teacher should be hard working and dedicated to his/her profession.

I tried to apply all those new strategies that I was exposed during the training programme rather than traditional method. It was actually a shift in my professional thinking approach as a teacher. Fortunately I was always encouraged and supported by the school principal, vice principal, coordinator and colleagues. My senior teachers always provided their supportive hands whenever I faced challenges and asked for their help. The entire staff of the school was supportive and encouraging to bring innovations in my teaching and learning process. I also developed a close friendly relationship with my students, which influenced them to become more open with me and they never hesitated to inform me about their problems. I tried to establish a learning environment that was free from fear because students are eager to learn in this type of environment.

Because of my hard work and dedication I was sent to the senior section of the same school on students’ demand and I started to teach grade 7 and 8. It was a turning point in my journey of becoming a professional teacher.

Working as a supporting facilitator in the CEM<sup>56</sup> course and with a Canadian teacher for six months enhanced my learning about teaching and my journey moved a step forward for my professional growth. With the passage of time I am now confident enough to deal with all classroom challenges and I share my views concerning better students’ learning outcomes with the novice teachers of my school.

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<sup>56</sup> Certificate in Educational Management Programme

### **Great Achievement in Life as a Teacher Educator**

At this stage of my journey I became enthusiastic to learn more about pedagogy so I devoted myself to the teaching profession. I applied for the MEd programme at AKU-IED<sup>57</sup> and I still remember the happiest day of my life when I was informed about my selection.

I am glad to be here. This programme has opened new doors of learning for me. On the first day of the programme I realised I have learnt a few things during my journey of becoming a teacher but I still have a lot to learn. I have been exposed to various theories of teaching and how to integrate the theories with real life. I have learnt the effective role of educational research to develop my own context of teaching. School visits and reflective writing have given me insight and understanding of teaching in practice to improve students' learning.

When I compare my last nine years of experience with this six months learning in the MEd programme, I feel I have a long way to go to develop myself professionally. The challenges I have faced here are the ones I never faced in my previous life because there was a battle between my inner world and the outer world. Maybe because of the limited experience of teaching this new situation defeated me and I easily accepted the new theory of teaching. Today, I realise that it is the kind of course that one can feel oneself making connections, making progress and achieving stability as a teacher.

My journey of becoming a teacher has been a zigzag motion. Though I have come a long way as a teacher, my destination is to become a teacher educator and a life-long learner. Each day I am learning new things, which will show me the right direction to reach my destination. During my journey I have realised that professional training is important for a teacher's pedagogical development. Training can guide, motivate and expose a teacher to innovation. It can also enhance self-esteem to learn and accept new things needed to bring change in one's self. I have devoted myself to the

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<sup>57</sup> Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development

teaching profession and I will continue my journey to become a teacher educator with knowledge to improve the standard of teaching and learning for my teachers and students. My journey will continue.

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**PART V**  
**TEACHER OF SYRIA**

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **THE PATH... TOWARDS... THE BIRTH**

**TEHAMA ALMASSARANI**

I was five years old when I took that walk along a road. Suddenly I found myself in an unfamiliar place. When I looked around, I saw very tall trees and nearby there was a big building. I stopped and looked at the trees from bottom to top, and then I looked along the street and asked myself, how long do I have to walk to reach that house? At that moment a neighbor saw me and realised that I was alone so he picked me up and took me to my family's home. My mother asked me where I was going. I said I just wanted to visit my grandmother! Actually, I was going to walk three kilometers to reach my grandmother's house. That was the first risk I took in my life towards discovery.

I liked my grandmother very much. She was very honest and kind and she knew what to say, how to say and when to say. I consider her to be a great teacher, because she devoted her last eleven years to take care of my cousin who was born with Down Syndrome. She was the first teacher in my life.

In 1976, with a new dress and a new bag, I formally began a long journey in my learning life. During my school years I developed good attitudes towards my teachers. In the primary school my teachers were like a mother, they encouraged me to participate in the classroom activities. Because I was very shy they rewarded me and rarely do I remember being punished.

When I moved to another school I was almost thirteen and I had successfully finished my primary schooling. The secondary stage was difficult at the beginning because there was a different teacher for every subject; this meant that the students were unable to build strong relationships with their teachers. In this school I admired three of my teachers due to their creative teaching, the effective way they used the blackboard and their attitudes towards the students. They empowered me to continue my study and to extend my knowledge.

My dream was to study at a university in Damascus, particularly at the College of Education. I was very happy when the faculty of the College admitted me, but my happiness disappeared when I started attending my classes. First it was difficult for me to adjust to the new environment in Damascus and, second, I did not like the curriculum, the traditional way of teaching or having to memorise the old information from our books (Bashiruddin, 2002, p.106). The first and second years were more difficult because we studied subjects, which covered two areas, psychology and education, but the two last years were much more interesting because I specialised in psychology, which is the area that I like very much. I liked the faculty who taught me during this period.

One year after my graduation in 1996 I decided to go back to the capital city to complete my study and achieve the Diploma in Education. I thought that I needed practical training in teaching as the study at the university did not provide me this kind of training. I agree with Feiman-Nemser (1983) who says, “There is a general impression that teachers think their education courses are too theoretical and not sufficiently practical” (p.155). In the Diploma course I learned how to teach, how to make lesson plans and how to prepare resources for the lessons. As a part of my study I went to many schools to teach twenty five lessons in grade four, after many days of observation.

I still remember the first class I taught; it was an Arabic language lesson and the topic was about a trip to Almaeet Sea (Almaeet means the Dead Sea). I prepared a lesson plan, many resources such as map to show the location of the Dead Sea and many big pictures related to the topic. My tutor and my colleagues in my group came and observed me teaching; I felt deep fear and a big responsibility because it was the first such experience in my life. I started the lesson by asking questions to find out if the students had been on any trips to the sea, then I explained the information which was written in the text book and while I was speaking one child asked me “why is this sea called Almaeet Sea?” I answered “I will tell you at the end of the lesson”. I said that because according to my lesson plan I have to tell this truth at the end of my lesson, I didn't realise in that moment that I could modify my lesson plan to make him and the whole class think about the answer. When I finished my class I found that I forgot to use the pictures that I prepared. I used only the map. When my tutor and my colleagues gave me

feedback I was able to identify my strengths and my weaknesses, they told me that the teacher has to take spontaneous decisions and be more flexible. After that lesson I was very conscious of how to use my resources effectively in the classroom and how to respond immediately to the students' questions.

Teaching in many schools in Damascus gave me confidence and good experience of how to control the classroom and how to communicate with the students according to their age. In 1997, I graduated from my Diploma and I went back to my town. I tried to find a job but it was not easy to find it because in my town there was large number of people who were looking for jobs.

At that time, by chance I met a woman who was working in a society which takes care of children with disabilities. She asked me if I would like to go and to teach those children. I welcomed the idea and I started to go to the society. Many of my relatives asked me "why do you waste your time in teaching those children, you can't change them or their behavior". I always answered them "we can help them to learn but maybe they need more time to improve. If I don't teach them and others don't, who will help them to learn?"

In the beginning I taught them in the traditional way by repeating information many times but I noticed that not all the children learn in this way. I had to find another method of teaching so I thought that I could help them to learn through play. I designed many activities and through them the children were able to learn and to enjoy it but sometimes I found it difficult to control the classroom. Many of the children improved emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically, though not entirely, due to my teaching. It was because we (my colleagues and I) worked together as a team. This experience was very helpful for me to reconceptualise my vision about teaching. I discovered that to teach is not just to transmit some information to the students and then check if they are able to memorise it, rather it is to foster important values within them and to help them to grow up in many aspects. When I reflected critically on this experience I found that we can't force any child to learn through our methods even

though we consider them to be good methods. The opposite is right; we have to modify our methods and our activities according to the children's needs and interests.

In 1999, I worked for almost seven months in a pre-primary private school. During this time I noticed that there are a lot of differences among the children. Some of them are fast at understanding and others need more time and more explanations. Therefore, I tried to use concrete materials to clarify abstract concepts, such as numbers and other concepts in mathematics. In this school I faced difficulty managing my time, every activity required more time than I had planned. When I tried to find out the reason I remembered that from the first day in this school I gave freedom to the children to move around inside the classroom (as my doctor at the university said "you do not have to force the children to sit on their seats all the class period"). One of the children in my class was very active, he couldn't sit for more than five minutes at his desk and everyone in the classroom complained about his behavior because he took his fellow's stationary without any permission. This child was an obstacle to complete my lesson in the limited time and I was searching for a new strategy to deal with this child. I decided to help him to change his behavior by praising him when he behaved well in social manners and ignoring unacceptable behavior. As Rao and Reddy (1992) say: "Behavior is maintained or changed by its consequences (the events that follow it). Teaching is the art of changing the behavior of students" (p.156).

In 2000, I got a job as a counselor in a secondary school. It was a great pleasure for me to work at the same school which I had spent six years as a student. Many of my teachers were still teaching at that school. At the beginning I was worried because I had to introduce myself in the new job, since none of the students knew any thing about it (it was the first time the Ministry of Education had appointed counselors in the schools).

I went to the classrooms and explained to the students the nature of my job. I told them that I would listen to them if they had any problems, which affected their personal life or academic achievement. The students (all of them were girls) trusted me and started to come to my room to tell me about their complaints and problems. Some of them related to their family situation and others to their study habits and relationships with

teachers. Working as a counselor helped me to know about the students' needs both inside and outside the classroom. I noticed that if a student had any problem, especially if s/he had a negative attitude towards a teacher, s/he would not be able to concentrate on the lesson (the students of age 13-18 are very sensitive and they don't like any kind of criticism especially in front of all the class). Also if they had any arguments with their family or friends it would have a negative effect on their performance. This experience made me aware of many dimensions of the teachers' responsibilities and now I know that teachers have to encourage all students and avoid discrimination. They have to concentrate on the students' strengths and give all of them the opportunity to express their ideas equally. They have to realise that students are different in their abilities and tendencies and in consequence teachers sometimes need to modify their plans or strategies if they notice that the students, or some of them, are unable to understand the lesson.

Four years of counseling and the daily routine of my school gave me a strong feeling that I needed to develop myself and my knowledge. I started to think that traveling outside my country might help me to get outside the shell I found myself in. I felt, as a veteran teacher said, and Feiman-Nemser (1983) maintained, "that there was still so much to be learned" (p.150). I joined many courses in English language, which later enabled me to do my Master of Education at AKU-IED<sup>58</sup> in Karachi. This important moment in my life put me in the centre of educational issues, since before coming to IED I was not aware about methods of teaching such as collaborative learning, group work and formative assessment. Many of my tutors at the College had mentioned that brainstorming is a good way to begin your lessons but they didn't implement this tool in the classroom during their teaching. At IED I have learned through jig-saw reading and group discussion and I want to learn more to be able to implement these strategies and methods in my context. I hope I will be able to help the teachers in my context to develop their performance and their knowledge by sharing ideas and experiences and providing feedback to each other. The IED stage is like a new birth for me as it has opened up a new world of learning and teaching.

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**PART VI**  
**TEACHER OF AFGHANISTAN**

## CHAPTER 15

### MY SIGNIFICANT STEPS OF LIFE

**ABDUL WAHID ZIRAK**

By going to the past and coming to the present I recalled some significant scenes and feelings about learning to teach and teaching to learn through the discipline of my own history. In fact I found these feelings integrated with elements such as isolation, collaboration, fear and courage in relation to my life personally outside and professionally inside of the classrooms. The scenes are significant for me because each one of them played various roles to make me a teacher and bounded me with the process of education.

It was May 7, 1975 that I opened my eyes in a family settled in Kabul. This was to be the place where my father took me to school when I was 7 years old. It was a time to know what a school looked like, and what its function was. When I entered school for the first day I saw teachers with some pieces of wood in their hands managing the students. The teacher's behavior has a very important role in introducing the children to a new environment and setting (Fabian, 2002). I was thinking that school is the place where students are punished to learn. I used to memorise the contents of the book, but I did not know what was written there, because I was under pressure of my teacher. My teacher did not support me, but punished me a lot. I was not ready to go to school, because I felt alone. Dreikurs & Soltz (1964) state "Since the child is a social being his strongest motivation is the desire to belong" (p. 14) but I was ignored and isolated there.

#### **Old Feeling and New Action**

I was in grade 10 of high school and interacting with a new environment. It was a completely different place for me. Here we had teachers who were kind and friendly towards students, but I still had feelings of not belonging and isolation; that was based on

my previous experience from primary and secondary schooling. The learning was the same as the past based on memorisation and rote learning. Here I was confused about the concept of being a teacher, because here the teachers did not have wood in their hands and punishment was not there, so I was thinking that maybe it relates to level of students; like during childhood they would be punished and when they are older they would not be. I still remember when I was in grade 12 realising that being a teacher does not mean a person to punish students.

### **Days to Decide**

It was the winter of 1991 and the weather was getting colder and colder. I had just finished high school and I was waiting to enter for the final examination. I never thought of becoming a teacher. After I got the results I wanted to select the Islamic law studies department. I came to my friend who was close to me to inform him of my selection. He asked me why I did not inform him before selecting this department. I asked him why he wanted to know. He answered me with a very simple but strong statement. He said: “First if you wanted to remove your sense of isolation you should go for social science, because here you would be able to know how to socialise yourself by learning theory and interaction with people and society. Secondly, you could make the building of collectivism more stable in our society by teaching to the next generation”.

I realised that he might be right because he was one of my closest and wisest friends and a good and knowledgeable person. Then I went home to think; I thought a lot and shared with my father. He encouraged me as well, so after much thinking based on my childhood memories of strict teachers who made me to be isolated I decided to be a very friendly and democratic teacher. I started walking through the mountains of learning about teaching to eventually reach the stage of collaboration and cooperation, far away from isolation.

### **Following My Ideals**

I was at university. It was a place where I saw different tutors with different styles and teaching strategies; we had nine subjects in each semester. We were taught through dictating from the handbook that was prepared by the faculty except for one subject that was taught in a completely different manner. That subject was based on lectures delivered by an excellent tutor who did his PhD from America. Students and faculty mostly wanted him as their tutor as his style, his attitude, his behavior and his vast knowledge and command of the subject was ideal. He taught us psychology. He was the one who removed my sense of isolation by teaching psychology and this increased my interest in learning for teaching. I was inspired by his teaching style and I made a decision to be a teacher like him. This was the actual point in my life where I began to understand the responsibility and the role and concept of being a real teacher in a classroom and in an academic environment.

### **The New Gate for Practice**

It was 1996, I started my academic development by becoming an assistant professor of history at the Bamyan University. That place was like a gate to enter into the new world of teaching professionally and I used to go with the professor to the classroom. I became aware that, as Clandinin and Connelly (1995) say, “Classrooms are a special place within the professional knowledge landscape” (p.12). Here I would observe how the professor interacted with students, received questions and answered them. He used to deliver lectures to students. After six months at the university I was allowed to teach independently. I tried to use the same procedure as my university tutor, but I was not succeeding in the same way. I began to look for opportunities to enhance my pedagogical skills and knowledge.

### **Realisation**

In December 1998, due to political problems in Afghanistan, I immigrated to Pakistan and settled in Karachi. It was time for me to join the Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan (AKES, P) programme for Afghan children. Here was the place for teaching primary level and I remembered my own background of learning at the primary school. Keeping those experiences in my mind I was behaving in a very friendly way with all students and they liked me a lot. Although I had limited information about child psychology, I used to encourage them a lot to develop their capacities by themselves. I realised that teaching small children is not so easy as compared to adolescents. I did not really know how to support them. I heard that there is a lot of information on the internet about pedagogical knowledge and skills of teaching for primary classes, but I did not know English so I decided to learn English to access that network. I joined one of the institutes of English and computers in Karachi and it was another experience that I added to my life as a teacher.

### **Team Work**

In 2003, I joined AKF, Afghanistan as a regional education officer for Bamyan Province. Here was a different educational role for me to play, I used to manage and lead a team of master trainers who were more experienced. We would launch short in-service courses to support government schools on methodological aspects. Here I mostly learnt from my colleagues; as Connelly and Clandinin (1995) say:

As you travel to new places, you will learn much from those who have walked these trails before you. They will provide you with direction, yet they will respect your journey and let you find your own way. They are travellers of days gone by and they wisdom to share with you. Listen to their voices and learn alongside them. (p. 23)

My colleagues gave me courage to walk with them as a team. They were under my supervision, but I never told them what to do; instead of that I used to ask them how to do. Although I was not aware of the theory of participatory leadership and management, I used to share with them so I understood the practical value of a team working towards educational development.

### **The Modern World**

In July 2004, I entered IED. Here I felt myself to be a real traditional educator. I was completely affected by IED's culture, environment, classroom decoration and wise facilitators. By taking several courses during two semesters I found out the educational problems and issues of my own context, which lacks many things, such as educational enquiry, formative assessment, cooperative learning, democratic educational leadership and management, enquiry based teaching and so on. I realised that schoolteachers besides teaching could be researchers as well. IED taught me that good educators are those who teach on the basis of reflection. Here I felt myself entering to the modern world of learning for teaching.

Finally, I realised that learning is a process, which can be picked up from the environment and social interaction including face to face classroom sessions. As far as teaching is concerned, having new theory and its implementation is important for raising the quality of education. Therefore, learning is one of the integral parts of the educator's professional life that is never ending.

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## **CONCLUSION**

### **THE MEANING OF BECOMING AND BEING A TEACHER**

**JOHN RETALLICK**

Having read the autobiographical stories of teachers from various countries in this volume, it is appropriate now to pose some questions that might enable us to make more sense out of our reading. The main question I have in mind is: What do the stories tell us about the meaning of becoming and being a teacher? Other questions that might illuminate that one could be: What is common and what is different about the life stories? What can we learn about the process of teacher development from the stories? How do teacher education and teacher development intersect in the lives of teachers? No doubt there are many other pertinent questions as well but these will provide a useful starting point for some analysis of the stories.

First let us consider the nature of the main question and we will return to it at the end of the chapter. To ask “what is the meaning” of something is to enquire into the essence of that phenomenon. It is to seek to uncover its constituent elements or what it is made of. But meaning is more than constituent elements, which might be no more than a list of items on a page. The idea of ‘meaning’ implores us to make connections or to see that thing in relation to other things, to make interpretations or to see that there are multiple ways of seeing that thing and to make judgments about the quality or the goodness of that thing. It also takes us beyond a taken-for-granted view towards a realisation that becoming a teacher is not just an individual process but it is also a social process. As such teachers are both individually and socially constructed or, to put it another way, teachers are formed through both agency and structure. This sociological perspective positions teachers as individuals with a degree of agency but located within a complex structural, social, cultural, gendered and physical context (Day, et al., 2006). That is to say, becoming a teacher is a process that is formed and shaped in part by their own personal biographies, decisions and responses though perhaps, in larger part, by the context of their life and work in schools. Interestingly, the nature and context of life and

work in schools varies from one country to another though there are similarities across countries. These are some of the issues that are highlighted when one enquires into the meaning of a becoming and being a teacher, which is described in fifteen different ways in the stories in this book.

### **What was Common and What was Different about the Stories?**

At first glance what was common was that they are all stories of young people who grew up and became teachers but what was different was that the stories were located in many different countries and cultural contexts. This interplay of commonality and difference made the stories engaging to read and it also enables us to draw out some general observations about what it means to become a teacher in a cross-cultural sense, at least in the developing world.

Most of the stories use metaphors and/or poems to creatively express the journey of becoming a teacher. Metaphors such as ‘a lost sailor’, ‘learning circle’, ‘clock’, ‘captain’, ‘journey towards the horizon’, ‘patchwork quilt’, ‘endless seaward flow’, ‘a flame’ and ‘a dream’ are to be found in the stories. For many of the authors the advantage of using a metaphor seemed to be that it gave the story a sense of cohesion and connectedness that otherwise might be difficult to capture. Use of a poem achieves a similar outcome and often both a metaphor and a poem were combined for added impact.

One of the most common themes in the stories was the young child who wanted (or did not want) to be a teacher. Usually the family had a lot to do with influencing the young person one way or the other and it was often against becoming a teacher as can be seen in these excerpts from the stories: “My parents wanted me to be a doctor; I did not know what I wanted to be and fate made me a teacher. I never wished or aspired to be a teacher” (Gulab); “I made up my mind that after class eight, I would study science and go for medicine” (Shahida); “when I reflect and ask myself what I wanted to be in life, I found my destination was something different than becoming a teacher” (Tasleema). On the other hand, sometimes the young person genuinely wanted to be a teacher against the

wishes of the family, “My dream continued as I chose teaching as my first choice despite a lot of resistance from my brothers and sisters” (Esther).

The influence of parents can be very strong on a child deciding to become a teacher. As one of our authors pointed out, “... the profession of teaching has been an inheritance in my family and the whole life of my family is connected with this noble profession ... My mother is the very person who inspired me to become a teacher; who I imitated and who I wanted to resemble” (Jamal). Another said, “I feel that my parents strongly influenced my choice of career ... My father was a teacher in a government college and was the sole bread earner of an extended family ... My first teacher and idol in life was my father. In my community, Dad was a highly respected man and I wanted to be like him” (Kausar).

A different but quite common reason for choosing or not choosing teaching as a career is the esteem or value accorded to the profession in various countries. There were differences here in that some societies placed a high value on teaching whereas others did not. “Teachers were accorded great respect in my society. This really inspired me towards my dream of becoming a teacher” (Esther) or “The most important day in my context is Teachers’ Day. On that day everybody comes to congratulate my mother. Even though she has retired, people still come to congratulate her. This opened my eyes about teachers and about how they are respected in society; not only by students but parents and government” (Maisara). Here we can see how the social circumstances in different countries shape perceptions about teachers and teaching and this is a very important factor in determining the status of teachers (Vazir & Retallick, 2007).

In one country the situation changed quite radically: “At that time the Soviet government gave a lot of importance to education and teachers were not only well supported materially but morally as well”. However, “In 1991 the USSR collapsed and it badly affected the economic, social and political life of the country. The system of education was the first to be affected. The budget was not enough to provide even a minimal salary for the teachers ... Teaching became a very low paying job and the

number of untrained teachers increased in schools ... The idea that a teacher is a respectful person declined in the public view and was not popular anymore (Farrukhsho).

Perhaps the most common theme of all in the stories was the experience of rote learning when the authors were themselves school students: “Learning in the primary school was mainly through rote memorisation. The teacher was seen solely as the giver of knowledge and the students were passive recipients” (Esther); “Most of the teachers and students were relying on rote learning. I still remember my science teacher who did not make science concepts clear to us. In each thirty minute period, she would read from the textbook for twenty minutes and the remaining ten minutes were for us to memorise the lesson. From this experience I did not get a good impression of teachers” (Humaira); “Throughout my school and college life I experienced exam-oriented learning based on rote memorisation. Teachers used to deliver their knowledge in the transmission way where I acted like a passive learner. I never got any opportunity to learn by doing, even in the science subjects” (Tasleema).

In addition to that, many of the authors made a connection between rote learning and punishment, “I was thinking that school is the place where students are punished to learn. I used to memorise the contents of the book, but I did not know what was written there, because I was under pressure of my teacher” (Abdul); “Our teacher would give us a lot of text to memorise, which I couldn’t do well. To escape from punishment we would often cheat our teacher by standing next to her chair and while she was following each line in the book we would sneak a look at the book” (Shahida).

Other instances of severe corporal punishment were often cited: “I admired my teachers for the mastery of knowledge they demonstrated, but hated some for overusing the cane” (Andrew) or “Becoming a teacher was not part of my life dreams since my parents despised the primary school women teachers very much, especially for the way they so generously used the cane on other people’s children” (Mary) and “I had never aspired to be a teacher. Harsh treatment by my early childhood teachers had developed a certain kind of abhorrence in me towards teaching and teachers” (Gulab).

However, this was not always the case. A point of difference in the stories is that not all teachers used harsh punishment and those teachers were well liked by their students, “I adored my domestic science teacher who never punished us” (Andrew) and “In the primary school my teachers were like a mother, they encouraged me to participate in the classroom activities. Because I was very shy they rewarded me and rarely do I remember being punished” (Tehama). Showing how pervasive punishment can be was this interesting comment, “I still remember when I was in grade 12 realising that being a teacher does not mean a person to punish students” (Abdul). What these experiences of rote learning and corporal punishment mean is that childhood experiences have a powerful affect on shaping future decisions about who will and will not become a teacher and, indeed, the type of teacher that will eventuate.

### **What Can We Learn about the Process of Teacher Development from the Stories?**

One thing we can learn from the stories is that the process of teacher development often starts in early childhood with ‘playing school’, “During free time with my siblings, I would always want to be the teacher when playing school” (Esther); “My basic understanding of pedagogy was gained from informal learning like imitating my teacher during childhood plays” (Farrukhsho) and “I still remember childhood games where I played the role of the teacher with great delight” (Jamal).

It is indisputable that students attending school over a number of years experience the ways and means of many teachers and they learn a good deal about what it means to be a teacher through that first-hand experience. Probably no other occupation is as familiar to the growing child as that of a teacher so it is not unreasonable to assume that the process of teacher development starts in early childhood and continues throughout the period of schooling. One of the most powerful ways that students learn about teaching is by being inspired by good teachers, as shown in these instances:

“My class teacher was quite exceptional. She was so beautiful and caring. I would say everything about her had a subtlety and quiet elegance to it ... I felt that voice

in me urging me to take up teaching so that I could give something extra to my pupils, the way my class teacher had done for me” (Mary).

“I was really inspired by the Math teacher. He was always prepared for the lesson and he would use teaching aids, which made the subject more real than abstract” (Esther).

“In the journey of my life I have come to realise that all teachers are different in terms of teaching, knowledge and attitudes towards students; some are calm, kind and friendly, while others are rude and strict. At primary level I was inspired by my grade V class teacher” (Tasleema).

“In this school I admired three of my teachers due to their creative teaching, the effective way they used the blackboard and their attitudes towards the students. They empowered me to continue my study and to extend my knowledge” (Tehama).

The power of this perspective helps to explain why teachers often teach ‘the way they were taught’ and why formal teacher training is sometimes quite ineffective in overturning what the trainee already ‘knows’ about teaching. As one author pointed out, “The first teaching experiences proved to be very hard on me ... The formal training I underwent seemed too short to have impacted the informal experiences I had had about teaching. With the poor training I had received, I felt myself like a novice swimmer who had been tossed into a swiftly moving, turbulent river to survive my own way. Each new day came along with new worries and how to *survive* the school day became a detestable obsession” (Andrew).

Teacher development occurs through informal, incidental learning and may be seen as a lifelong process (as distinct from teacher education, which is concerned with attending formal courses). Having begun in the person’s own school days it continues in the workplace of the teacher i.e. the school, and at this point it may be called workplace learning (see Retallick, 1999). We know from extensive research findings over many years that shared and collaborative work cultures foster and enhance teacher workplace

learning, and hence teacher development, whilst individualistic and isolationist cultures hinder it. However, on this point a problem is revealed in our stories and that is a disjunction between what we know is good for teacher development and the reality that exists in many schools. A number of authors referred to this disjunction, “It is an inescapable fact that the school setting in many contexts is far from being supportive to on-going professional learning of the teacher” (Andrew); “Lack of collaboration made my life difficult and destroyed my will to perform well” (Mary) and “in our school teachers would not discuss any issues regarding teaching and learning” (Shahida). What this means is that schools are not always places that encourage teachers to become good at what they do. In reality, they often hinder the development of good teachers.

An important theme in teacher development is that of change; clearly, development implies change and vice versa. Also implicated is learning, since that is at the heart of teacher development and change. However, there is a difficulty here in that many teachers, particularly experienced teachers, do not want to change and are not interested in learning new methods of teaching; hence their development becomes stunted. One author reported, “I realised how hard it is to convince experienced teachers to change their methods” (Esther). Another author who was open to change said this: “In the beginning I taught them in the traditional way by repeating information many times but I noticed that not all the children learn in this way. I had to find another method of teaching so I thought that I could help them to learn through play” (Tehama).

Here we get a glimpse of why it is that schools often do not encourage the development of good teachers – after a while many teachers become resistant to change. Beginning teachers are usually full of enthusiasm and new ideas but they soon become disillusioned by the circumstances and conditions of their work; teacher agency is suffocated by the structure.

A ‘new method’ that was often cited in the stories is group work and this is a good example of how teachers can change the way they teach in the interests of their students, “I would use group work quite often, and I was happy to see the great change in the attitude and behavior of the students” (Esther) and “It was during that time that I

started to understand the child-centered approach. I learnt new strategies of teaching, like group work, and while implementing them I saw my classes were more interesting and successful” (Farrukhsho). Fortunately, as we see here, not all teachers have their individual creativity and agency squeezed out of them. Not all teachers become resistant to change. Indeed, it is a hallmark of a good teacher that he or she is prepared to be innovative in the interests of fostering and improving student learning.

### **How do Teacher Development and Teacher Education Intersect in the Lives of Teachers?**

If teacher development is an informal, lifelong process and teacher education is more formal and based on learning through pre-service and in-service courses, then it is obvious that teachers are involved with both (though it is relevant to point out that the quality of teacher education courses in many developing countries is not high). What is interesting about this from the stories are the many and varied ways that the two processes intersect in the lives of teachers. Questions like these come to mind: To what extent can teacher education courses actually interrupt the ongoing process of teacher development? Putting it another way: Can teacher education courses change the way that teachers work or will they always teach the way they were taught?

Different responses to these questions came to light in the stories. One says, “It was apparent that the informal experiences I had been exposed to were too strong to be reconciled with formal training within the limited duration of the course ... All I wanted (from the teacher education course) was to be taught ‘how to teach’, precisely, how to make good notes from textbooks and stand in front of the class and deliver the goods” (Andrew). Another says, “My class teaching was very traditional and conventional. I taught the way I had been taught and hardly ever thought of my students as individuals who deserved to be treated differently” (Zillahuma) and, “I was assigned to teach science and Urdu. In the beginning I forced the children to memorise the text. Perhaps that was my early influence; I taught the way I had been taught in my primary classes” (Shahida).

There was also evidence that teacher education courses do not help a great deal in the real world of teaching, “In 1992 I did my BEd from the College of Education, Karachi (and) in 1993 I joined primary teaching back in my school but I realised that what I had learnt was the lecture method which would not match with my primary classroom teaching ... a mismatch between formal teacher education and real classroom teaching” (Shahida).

On the other hand there were more positive views coming forth from some of the stories. There are ways in which teacher education courses can be effective in changing perceptions and practice in classrooms and one of those relates to what happens back in the school to follow up on the course that a teacher has attended. Positive outcomes can result through mentoring and role modeling as in these instances: “I was inspired by his teaching style and I made a decision to be a teacher like him. This was the actual point in my life where I began to understand the responsibility and the role and concept of being a real teacher in a classroom and in an academic environment” (Abdul) and “Experienced teachers can support novices and provide them with learning opportunities by sharing experiences and helping them learn in the process. This is my perception of teacher educators; they must provide the foundations on which new teachers will build up their knowledge” (Zillahuma).

Other ways to promote positive outcomes from teacher education are through reflective practice (Retallick, 2004) and building learning communities (Retallick & Farah, 2005). There were many examples in the stories of teachers becoming reflective, usually but not always through the influence of a colleague or mentor.

“I developed into a reflective practitioner. I started to question daily happenings in my classrooms and what is going on with my students, how am I making sense of being a teacher and how am I figuring out the curriculum” (Mary).

“I worked under a mentor’s facilitation. She was cooperative attended each of my classes and gave me constructive feedback. I really liked the way she encouraged

me to teach in a better way. She encouraged me to write daily reflections. It was the first time in my life that I felt I was working very effectively” (Farrukhsho).

“During this programme I worked under a mentor’s facilitation and I was impressed by her personality as well as her teaching style. She was cooperative and always gave me constructive feedback. She encouraged me to write reflections that helped me to improve my teaching. She influenced me to implement a different teaching style to increase students’ interest in learning. For the first time in my life I started to feel that I was working effectively” (Tasleema).

“Upon reflection, I realise that my teaching practices did not address their needs. I taught with zeal but my intentions were at variance with what my students required” (Zillahuma).

These are good examples of the power of reflection to give teachers insights into their work and their dealings with children. Reflection can also help teachers to change their perspective on teaching and become more learner-centered as can be seen in this excerpt: “I discovered that to teach is not just to transmit some information to the students and then check if they are able to memorise it, rather it is to foster important values within them and to help them to grow up in many aspects. When I reflected critically on this experience I found that we can’t force any child to learn through our methods even though we consider them to be good methods. The opposite is right; we have to modify our methods and our activities according to the children’s needs and interests” (Tehama).

Whilst the stories did not explicitly raise the concept of learning communities, a careful reading shows that it is implicit in many of them. The authors seemed to have an intuitive understanding of the importance of teachers learning from their colleagues and having a moral commitment to the learning of their students, two of the hallmarks of a learning community:

“I was very frustrated and quite often I thought of quitting the job and going back home. But I could not do so as I had developed a moral relationship with these

teenagers and loved teaching them. I wanted to help them achieve their dreams. However, from the bureaucratic school culture I learnt an important lesson; trust and collaboration are vital for the professional growth of teachers and effective teaching and learning” (Shahida).

“With help from this colleague, I developed confidence and started to recognise my students as individuals, when previously I had categorised them broadly as bright, average and dull. This paradigm shift didn’t happen suddenly; it took time but taught me a lot of lessons about life and teaching. I started to look at my students as individuals like me who had their own needs and learning styles. These realisations made me accept the fact that I was responsible for my students’ learning and I couldn’t just shrug them off if they did not do well” (Zillahuma).

Above all else teacher development and teacher education are both learning processes; one informal and the other more formal. The essence of the school as a learning community is that all participants are learners; not just students as in traditional conceptions of the school, but teachers and administrators as well (Retallick, Cocklin & Coombe, 1999; Retallick & Farah, 2005). A learning community releases the agency of teachers and provides a structure to facilitate and support their continued professional and personal learning. It is argued therefore, that the school as a learning community represents an ideal structure to foster teacher development and teacher education.

### **What Does it Mean to Become and Be a Teacher?**

In conclusion, I would like to return to the main question I posed at the beginning of the chapter: What do the stories tell us about the meaning of becoming and being a teacher? Of course the stories tell us that becoming a teacher means turning up for lessons to teach math and science and Urdu and English and so on but they also reveal a more profound meaning. My reading of the stories told me that being a teacher in a deeper sense means shaping the lives of children to help them realise their dreams. It is about helping children to learn, not just about teaching subjects. It is about wondering

what the future holds for the children in your care and giving them a sense of hope that they do have a future and that they can realise their dreams. One of the authors puts this well when she says: “I learnt from these experiences that a teacher needs to consider each child as an individual and should be very careful while dealing with them, because teachers can make or break students’ dreams while teaching them” (Tasleema). If we think of the meaning of teaching in this way we are encouraged to see our everyday work as making a difference in the lives of our students. After teaching for some time it is good if we can say: “I made a lot of difference in many students’ lives” (Mary).

A clear focus on student learning is important but it is not the only meaning of becoming and being a teacher. What is also important is that becoming a teacher means being a continuous, lifelong learner. Teaching and learning go hand in hand, not only for the students but also for the teachers themselves. Being a teacher is actually a continuous process of becoming – becoming a good teacher, becoming a continuous learner, becoming a mentor to help other teachers and so on. It is always a journey, never a destination. When teachers see themselves as learners, they have a different perspective on their work as was pointed out: “Initially, teaching was no more than an activity that had been taken up with boredom but now it had become meaningful and helped enhance my understanding of my own capabilities and interests in life” (Zillahuma).

If that is what it means to be a teacher then how can writing autobiographical stories assist in developing that meaning? There is a clear connection; writing an autobiography is a way of understanding one’s life journey and “I believe that I must first understand myself before I am able to help the professional development of other teachers” (Kausar). Helping the development of other teachers is an act of educational leadership and if done in an appropriate way it can help improve schools and make them more successful. This idea was nicely captured in these words: “I strongly feel that schools which render assistance and support to their teachers and provide well-structured, need based in-service training programmes lay the scaffolding for future professional development” (Zillahuma). I would add to that, such schools help children to realise their dreams.

Finally, what are the implications of this analysis for the institutions of teacher education and schools, particularly in developing countries? There are many though here I will point out just two and leave the reader to consider others. In terms of teacher agency, both pre-service and in-service courses need to do a great deal more to foster the creativity, spontaneity and intellectual development of individual teachers. Teachers must have knowledge and skills, particularly about learning, and not just what students need to learn i.e. the curriculum but also how students learn. They must be and feel empowered to make decisions about their students that will be in the best interests of their learning. To achieve this, teachers need much higher quality of pre-service and in-service courses, which implies a major upgrading of teacher education institutions to university level where such does not already exist. This is a challenge for most developing countries where teacher education is under-funded and languishes in very low status and under-resourced colleges.

The second implication is in relation to the context or structure of teachers' work, which plays such an important role in shaping the identity of teachers. The working conditions of the majority of teachers such as the physical condition of schools, salary, systems of support and policies on issues such as promotion, leave much to be desired. An out-dated bureaucratic structure that provides little encouragement to teachers and even less support to overcome their difficulties seems to be a common feature in developing countries. For example, in the government sector in Pakistan there are supposed to be 'field supervisors' who visit schools on a regular basis to provide support and resolve problems of teachers. In many schools this does not happen; there are too few supervisors, some do not have transport to go to schools, many do not have the capability to do the work and some even lack interest in the job and concern for teachers. In such circumstances it is little wonder that many teachers are demoralised and consequently they do not perform their work to a sufficiently high standard. This is not to blame the teachers but to see the structures of teachers' work as inhibiting their performance. A major consequence of this situation is that young people attending school quickly become aware of the plight of teachers and if they have any other choice, they do not want to become teachers themselves.

Unfortunately, becoming a teacher is not an attractive option for the best and brightest young people in Pakistan.

Much needs to be done to improve teaching and learning in developing countries. A contribution to this is a better understanding of how and why young people become teachers. This book sheds some light on those important questions.

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Appendix A

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| Teacher Learning 2005 |
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*Class of 2006*

*Theme 1: Teachers' Lives*

Lesson Plan (Semester System)

**Week Two**

Tuesday 15 March 2005

Session 1

9:00 – 10:30

Introduction of the Product and the Process (HO1)

Product

Becoming a teacher is a journey with significant learning experiences. Write an autobiography in which you capture the richness of your experiences and beliefs as a teacher. Identify important people or critical incidents that have significantly influenced your understanding of professional development as a teacher. Then, critically analyse those experiences and beliefs in terms of how they have shaped you as a teacher that you have become and a learner of teaching. While constructing an autobiography keep in mind the guidelines identified by Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar in the article “Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research”.

Process

- Make groups and pairs for collaborative writing
- Brainstorming and beginning writing
  - Self-Study by developing Annals and Chronicles (HO2)
  - Developing Annals (some examples)

Session 2: 11:00 – 12:30

Displaying and sharing of Annals.

Introduction to chronicles (share some examples from your own writing)

Write stories based on the critical incidents mentioned in the annals

Writing chronicles, volunteer to share.

Session 3: 3:00 – 4:00

Tasks for the week

Personal writing

Reading 1

- Read Bullough, Jr. R.V., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 13-21 and identify the 9 guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study.
- Ask to read the following two autobiographies to inspire their own writing and structuring representation of their own autobiography.

Reading 2

Bashiruddin, A. (2002). Seasons of my learning. In J. Edge (Ed.) *Continuing professional development. Some of our perspectives* (pp.104-114). Kent: IATEFL Publications, and look at the various stages of her professional development. Also see how she has represented these stages.

Reading 3

John, E. (2004). Endless seaward flow of my professional journey. In Bashiruddin, A. (Ed.) *My story, my Identity. MEd Course Participants' narratives of becoming teachers*. E-Book, and reflect on your professional development by using questions given at the end of the reading.

Reflection-on-writing (Task 1)

(HO3)

How did your memory help you in writing major incidents of becoming a teacher that you discovered from constructing an annal? How has it informed you about your professional development?

**Week Three**

Tuesday, March 22, 2005

Session 1

9:00 – 10:30

- Discuss the 9 guidelines of quality stated in reading 1. Let each group present each quality. Sum up by using the OHT.
  
- Analyse reading 2 both for its content and organisation.

Session 2

11:00 – 12:30

- Discuss reading 3 by using the reflective questions at the end of the article.
- Introduce E-Book and encourage CPs to read as many stories as they can and also look at the reflective questions.
- Encourage looking at some of the supplementary readings. The books are on reserve in the library for CPs use.
- Introduce ways of organising their writings (HO4).
- Developing a structure for the autobiography. Use creative ideas, e.g. Use of metaphors, stories, poems, dialogues, paintings, sketches. (share some more ideas of arts-based representation, not mandatory to use).

Session 3

3:00 – 4:00

Collaborative Writing

- Writing and sharing parts of chronicles with each other for feedback (oral and written) for clarification and for further development of the stories of learning to teach. (Pairs make their own timelines for writing and feedback)
- Prepare presentations.

Tasks for the Week

Reading 4

Read Feldman, A. Validity and Quality in Self-Study. *Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 26-28, and reflect on the issue of validity and quality in self-study research.

- Read E-Book: My Story
- Thinking about ways of organising their writings and preparing for the presentations

Skim or/and read supplementary readings

Supplementary Readings

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F.M., (1995). *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Clandinin, D. J., Davies, A., Hogan, P. & Kinnard, B. (Eds.). (1993). *Learning to teach, teaching to learn : Stories of collaboration in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. London, On.: Althouse Press.

**Week Four**

Tuesday, March 29, 2004

Session 1

9:00 – 10:30

- CPs discuss the outlines/ideas of their autobiographies.

Session 2

11:00 – 12:30

- CPs discuss the outlines/ideas of their autobiographies.

Session 3

3:00 – 4:00

Developing the stories of learning to teach further by incorporating ideas from the sample readings and feedback from the peers.

Tasks for the Week

Reading 5

Read Feiman-Nemser, S., (1983). Learning to teach. In L. Shulman & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Handbook of teaching and policy* (pp.150-170). New York: Longman answer the following question:

What are the stages in learning to teach suggested by Feiman-Nemser?

*Reflections-on-writing (Task 2)*

How did reading stories and collaborative writing help you in developing your own learning?

How did reading articles help you in your professional development and in understanding your processes of becoming a teacher?

Reflections-on-writing (Task 3).

What were your learning experiences in writing about your journey of becoming a teacher and learning to teach? How would you use this strategy of teacher learning with teachers in your context? How do you think self-study research can have effect on the policy in teacher development?

**Week Five**

Tuesday, April 05, 2005

Session 1

9:00 – 10:30

- Discuss the stages in learning to teach
- Give jigsaw reading task (Reading 7)  
What are the life cycles in teachers professional lives identified by Huberman?
- Discuss the life cycles identified by Huberman.

Reading 7

Huberman, M.(1993). Introduction. In *The lives of teachers*. NewYork: Teachers College Press.

Session 2

11:00 – 12:30

Discuss Reading (Feldman)

Writing process and issues

Session 3

3:00 – 4:00

Personal writing

Collaborative writing

Tasks for the Week

Personal Writing

- Read your stories to see if these stages or life cycles are apparent in your own stories of becoming teachers?
- Continue writing autobiography. Respond to your own writing. Consider the questions raised by Beattie in Writing a narrative, “Responding to your own writing”, p.162.

Collaborative Writing

Exchange writing with peers and get a response. Consider the questions raised by Beattie in Writing a narrative, “Getting a response from reader”, (coherence of the account) p.163.

*Reflections-on-writing (Task 4)*

How did it help you to understand your teaching journey as a teacher by

- (a) reading and responding to your own writing;
- (b) reading and responding to the stories of your peer and
- (c) getting feedback from your peer.

Personal Writing

Revise and rewrite, check details, make it as coherent as possible.

Collaborative Writing

Exchange writing with peers and get a response. Consider the questions raised by Beattie in Writing a narrative, “Getting a response from reader”, (Evidence of reflection and inquiry) p.164.

Personal Writing

Continue refining your writing

Collaborative Writing

Exchange to give each other feedback

Personal Writing

Developing the final draft

Collaborative Writing

Feedback from peers

Personal Writing

Prepare the final draft. Use the guidelines as a checklist identified by Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar in the article “Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research” before submitting the final copy.

Tuesday April 19, 2005

Submit Autobiography by 8:30 a.m.

Appendix B

**The Aga Khan University  
Institute for Educational Development**

**MEd Class of 2005**

Teacher Learning

**Ethical Consent for Self-Study Research**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand and agree that all the material produced in the self-study research in form of autobiography during the course may be used for research purposes. However, all the materials will be considered confidential at all times. My real name, business address and other information that may personally identify me will not be used in scholarly writing (e.g. a conference presentation, a journal article, a book). Pseudonyms will be used to keep the anonymity.

Signature of the CP: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your co-operation

Dr Ayesha Bashiruddin

Appendix C

The Aga Khan University  
Institute for Educational Development

**Book Proposal: Becoming a teacher in the developing world**

Dear CP

You would be glad to know that we are proposing a book: *Becoming a teacher in the developing world*. This book would be based on the self-study research that CPs did in Teacher Learning Course. (MEd classes of 2004, 2005 and 2006). We intent to select 16 autobiographies (4 each from Pakistan, East Africa, Central Asia and 1 each from Syria, Afghanistan and Bangladesh). The Selection of the autobiographies will be based on the representation of each region and on the quality of writing.

**Congratulations, your autobiography has been selected for our proposed book.** We would like to take permission from you so that we can publish your autobiography with your name. However it would be edited so that it is around 2000 words and is written in standard English. If you agree to the proposal please sign the Ethical Consent form given below. If you are responding through e-mail just write a response to our email saying that you agree with all the Ethical considerations. You do not need to send a signed consent form. In case you do not agree please do say so in your e-mail and not sign the consent form.

Ethical Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand and agree that all the material produced in the self-study research in form of autobiography during the course may be used for the proposed book: **Becoming a teacher in the developing world.**

However, all the materials will be considered confidential at all times. My real name will be used as the author of my autobiography. I give permission to the editors to edit my autobiography.

Name:

Signature of the CP:

Thank you for your co-operation

**Editors: Dr Ayesha Bashiruddin and Dr John Retallick May 16, 2005**