

Fethullah Gülen and Character Education in Indonesia

by Prof. Dr. M. Amin Abdullah on 19 October 2010. Posted in Gülen Conference in Indonesia

Education stands for Character
(Pestalozzi)

“The only thing in the world not for sale is character.”
(Justice Antonin Scalia)

The Crown and glory of life is Character.
(Smiles)

Introduction

Recent news brings us a steady flow of reports on character failures of leaders and influential personalities in many areas, politics , religion, nonprofit organizations, sport, etc. All humans are flawed by varying degrees of weakness and shortcomings, and character lapse is nothing new in leaders. What is disturbing, however, is the current frequency of failures, the range and depth of their impact, and their span across virtually every type of business and occupation.

We all are character educators. Whether we are teachers, administrators, custodians, or school cleaning servers, we are helping to shape the character of the children we come in contact with. It is in the way we talk, the behaviors we model, the conduct we tolerate, the deeds we encourage, the expectations we transmit.

In fact, according to the law of education, formally the goal of education is building a character to create smart and good character students. President of republic Indonesia in his speech on the Celebration of the National Education Day on 11 May 2010 in his Palace said “character building, especially nation character building has been forgotten for long time, let us revitalize and rebuild.”

Indonesia as a Pluralistic Society.

We are experiencing greater cultural, ethnic and religious diversity today more than ever. It becomes even more imperative that citizens grow in awareness of the necessity of dialogue in living out the private and public dimensions of their lives. While we inherit our way of life, we are also responsible for creating and shaping it. The world today needs peace more than at any time in history. We are at a crossroads. Our world demands an alternative to violence in dealing with problems facing our new century.

Plurality is the very texture of Indonesia. In terms of religion in Indonesia, many researchers maintain that there is a demographic paradox: despite the huge Muslim majority population, Indonesia is constitutionally *not* an Islamic state. On the other hand, it is not a secular state either.

Constitutionally it is a unitary state which embodies and simplifies a philosophy called *Pancasila* ("Five Principles"). These principles are: (1) belief in the one Supreme God; (2) a just and civilized humanity; (3) the unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy led by the wisdom of unanimity arising from deliberations among representatives of the people; and (5) social justice for the whole people of Indonesia. Therefore, Muslims' acceptance of Pancasila is no doubt one of the most important Indonesian Islamic roots of pluralism.

Indeed, most Indonesians are Muslims, and the rest are Christian (Catholic and Protestant), Hindus, Buddhist, Confucians, and even a very small Jewish community. The reality of religious pluralism is not just a matter of the historical past, but also a reality of the living present, reflected in curiosity about other religions, studying them at various levels and reading each other's scripture. As we do so, we are often inspired by each other's insights and practices. Sometimes we find in that our various traditions share some of the same fundamental values that each of us cherish in our own religions, albeit expressed in different ways. One might say that, *to be religious today in Indonesia is to be inter-religious*. Avoiding pluralism is avoiding the reality of different point of views and beliefs in society. From the beginning, people in Indonesia grappled with what social theorists today sometimes regard as a uniquely modern problem--cultural pluralism.

Gülen and His Movement

Fethullah Gülen, is a leading Muslim thinker and global movement spiritual and educational leader. Despite severe criticism from the extremes of the religious spectrum, he is one of the most influential follower of Said Nursi, one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the 20th century.

Gülen movement emphasizes services for the common and collective good,^[1] and contrary to Huntington's thesis of clash of civilization, Gülen advocates a dialogue of civilization, which attracted academic and political interest. He has been called "one of the most persuasive and influential voices in the Muslim community" calling for dialogue.^[2] Interfaith dialogue according to Gülen is "compulsory for Muslim to support peace,"^[3] relying on the basic Islamic sources to affirm this point.^[4]

In his meeting with the pope John Paul II in Vatican on 1998, Gülen proposed for a joint school of Divinity to be established in Urfa, Turkey. While such meeting may be welcomed today, it was almost taboo during the 1990s in the political religious atmosphere in Turkey. The meeting were harshly criticized by the ultra-secularist and Islamist. His activities as a whole is especially criticized as aiming to turn Turkey into a religious state. Thus, the leftist-liberal editor journalist, Cevik responded:

All these [allegations] are absurd. Everyone knows Gülen has been preaching tolerance and goodwill. He has always encouraged dialogue not only between the believers and non-believers but

also among [member of] religions. That is why he met the Pope and sowed the seeds of inter-religious dialogue. [5]

One reason for the success of the Gülen movement in many countries is the universal nature of Gülen's vision, his nonviolence and tolerant approach during a time of fear of religious extremism. Gülen movement has entered the academic sectors.

Gülen bases his dialogue not entirely on the ground of faith, but on love. His social philosophy revolves around the idea of serving humanity, and institutes should service this purpose. Institute formed by one group will not be all embracing but those formed by a coalition of group such as interfaith group, will serve a greater population. [6] He said "the most distinctive feature of a soul overflowing with faith is to love all types of love that are expressed in deeds, and to feel enmity for all deeds in which enmity is expressed."

Gülen, pesantren and character education in Indonesia

Gülen movement combats ignorance to raise a new generation of well-educated people who respect moral values as well. There are now over 300 schools around the world, including Indonesia, inspired by the convictions of Gülen, set up, administered, and staffed by his circle of his students and associates. The school try to bring together educational objective that are too often dispersed among various school systems. They seek to give a strong scientific grounding together with character formation in non material values which includes cultural, ethical, religious and spiritual training. In fact, as Agai stated, Gülen propagates a kind of 'educational Islamism' as opposed to a 'political Islamism' (Agai, 2003 p50). Furthermore, education curricula should emphasise science and technology as much, or more than, they incorporate faith teaching. Indeed Science is a universal language for human being. *Al-kitab al-mukawwan* /to understand the cosmos (not to limit to *al-mudawwan* and *al muansan*) is the language and the door Gülen used and still uses to enter into the world. From this perspectives, he moves to *al muansan* (character building) with its climax or fruit of *hizmet*.

Encourage to dedicate their lives to the service (*hizmet*) of the people, Gülen schools seem to be absent from religious teaching establishment. No wonder there has been speculation as to "whether the movement's universalist ethos and its emphasis on 'activism through good deeds' is leading to a kind of secularism akin to that which befell those earlier Protestant missionaries that the Gülen movement can be said to resemble." (Ozdalga, 2003)

Those teaching of Gülen, the concept of *Hizmet* and *Hosguru*, for example, is also available in the teaching of pesantren, such as what it is called *Panca Jiwa Pesantren* (the Five Souls of Pesantren), i.e, sincerity, simplicity, high morality, wide knowledge and experience , and freedom.

Indeed, as institution, schools are in the "business" of three things: (1). We are in the **knowledge** business," (2). We are in the **skills building**business, and (3). We are in

the **character building** business. And as a teacher, she or he should be a full partner in student's learning journey, serve student's educational and spiritual needs, keenly aware of the importance of professional boundaries, but also very comfortable with accompanying students as a trusted friend rather than as a distant and unapproachable authority figure. She or he also has to be sure that the students are *not as consumers of knowledge but at the same time as producers of knowledge*.

Besides knowledge business, education institutions are currently under tremendous pressure to develop abilities in their students that are in some way transferable to contexts outside their academic field of study. Today's challenging economic situation means that it is no longer sufficient for a new graduate to have knowledge of an academic subject; increasingly it is necessary for students to gain those skills which will enhance their prospects of employment. Employability skills include the following abilities: the retrieval and handling of information; communication and presentation; planning and problem solving; and social development and interaction.

The school has to establish an initiative to ensure that each of its students engages with these skills and has embedded this within the academic curriculum for all disciplines. The provision of transferable skills can no longer be ignored and schools are invariably doing more to equip their students with such skills. By embedding skills into the curriculum it is possible to forge learning links and for students to develop a broad range of skills (Fieldhouse, 1998).

As we realized "*Character is a diamond that scratches every other stone,*" thus, good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. The inner landscape of a teacher's life that is three important paths: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, none of these can be ignored. These characters is embedded in Gülen's personality. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on each other for wholeness. They are interwoven in himself and in education at its best. Reduce teaching to intellect and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual and it loses its anchor to the world.

In line with his teaching, Gülen school in Indonesia should provide a pluralistic multi-faith approach that responds to the diversity of expression of religious faith and spiritual practice at the school. offers opportunities for students, teachers, staff and alumnae to deepen their understanding of interreligious dialogue and the role of spirituality in life and learning, and creates educational program that explore the moral, ethical and spiritual issues facing our community and world. In practice, however, these requirements are in need of improvement. It is also necessary for teachers to be taught and informed about Gülen's teaching on tolerance (hosgoru). In Indonesia, not all the teachers and staff understand Gülen's teaching.

The school also has to celebrate religious pluralism, the process of engaging religious diversity by nurturing and celebrating all particular religious traditions and spiritual practices represented in the school community and by actively creating spaces for interreligious encounter to build community by exploring that which binds us together in a common life.

Eventhough Gülen schools not specifically teach about religion, they combine spirituality into education, i.e., the process of integrating spiritual development and consciousness into the overall educational experience of the school so as to enrich individual learning and community life.

It should be noted, however, that ultimately this is about education, not religion. This should start with the question, “how do religion and spirituality enhance the education of our student?” and not the question, “how do we support religion or religious institution on our campuses?”

The essential teaching of Gülen on *hosgoru*, might also be interpreted as “beyond tolerance”, means that in moving beyond tolerance we seek ways in which religious diversity can be a *resource* rather than a barrier to building multi-faith community. Start with the assumption that moving from a mono-religious to a multi-religious community would require people from all traditions to build new relationships and structures of leadership. This condition will help student find meaning and purpose in their adult lives, and promote the public welfare by exercising an influence in behalf of humanity and civilization. This also means that they must be religiously literate and ethically sensitive, as well as highly skilled in critical reflection. They must be well launched on the project of coming to know themselves, as well as coming to know others through empathetic listening—being able to see the world through others ‘ eyes as well as their own. And they must be willing and able to take stands and commit their lives in the face of bigotry and destructiveness.

Looking for Humanist schools

Many Gülen schools have been built in Indonesia. They attracted critical responses from the community. As William Park mentioned in “The Fethullah Gülen Movemnet as a Transnational phenomenon,” there have been indications of Turkish chauvinism toward the Indonesian people whether intentional or not. Students in the Gülen schools are expected to sing the Turkish national anthem as well as their own , and raise the Turksih as well as their national flag (Peich, 2004). Instruction is chiefly in English, but Turkish is also extensively used in addition to Indonesian language. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the teachers and administrators in the Gülen school are Turks from Turkey rather than Indonesia (Balci, 2003b).

Park also mentioned that children of disadvantaged, even if devout is very rare to gain entry into Gülen school. The fees and the entrance requirement are high, and the good reputations the school have acquired for the quality of their technical education, their use of English as a language on instruction, and their behavior standars they set, have combined to ensure that places are a premium. Typically succesful applicant are the children of the wealthy. (Miller, 2003, Balci, 2003a, pp. 164-165).

Throughout the history of education in Indonesia, especially since the coming of European to this archipelago, the policy of implementation of education was based on a dichotomic criteria: clever/smart-fool/stupid, premium – non premium, talented-non talented. Smart, talented, and premium are well promoted, and for them best service are given, premium school, best teachers, best facilities, and “nice” services, even permissive for mistake they have done, are served. On the

contrary, for whom considered to be fool, untalented, and deprived school, non premium are poorly served. There is even no mistake is permissive, they are very close to punishment for what they have been done wrong, even have been expelled from the school. They consider those student to be "God's fail production." "Disadvantage student and disadvantage school are indications of a false system, not a false brain." (Eric Jensen).

In our educational system now, according to precentage, student with "premium" services are smaller to student with regular even poor services. Let me give an illustration. In a school with 40 students, there will be 10 student only which is categorized as "premium" selected and measured by the average cognitive capacity. That means, only 25% of the student received best services, and 75% will not. This model can be applied to a wide scale, a premium school which only for small student considered to be smart before selection or before educated (premium is prerequisite of the entrance to the school). It can be concluded that cumulatively how many premium student has been born in this world, there will be no more than 25 % student will receive a premium service. The question will be, if these 25% are succesful, can they solve the problem raised by those disadvantages 75% of the students. The answer for sure is not.! This is what happened with our nation.

Many experiences show that there is no one to be called "fool," each has his/her own and different capacity. The role of education is to help each child to find his/her own potencial capacity as ealier as possible.

Thomas Armstrong inspired by theory of *Multiple Intelligences* by Howard Gardner states that every human being is born genius. One mistake we made is that we use IQ as the only criteria for this genius character. This perspective leads to discrimination toward children. Each child has his/her diffrent role. For the genius, they have been given a High IQ, but we di not need a big number of inovator/genius, we need small, may be 2,5% of the population. We still other roles to be played in our lives

For Armstrong, genius is interpreted as a unique capacity of every body. "each has his/her capacity to help him/her to solve his/her problem, and inspires him/her every time he/she needs." For the dumb, she/he is given a special capability to feel. Etc.

Thus, our future challenge is how to build all school as premier according to their capacities and possibilities. Every school is premier, for example one is premier in academic, the others are premier in art, language, skill etc. It is important how to build non discriminative educational climate. Every child is served according to his/her capacity, each is premier in each subject. From a humanistic school will be born a humanist.

Footnote

[1] Muhammed Cetin, The Gülen Movement: Civic Service without Borders, New York: Blue Dome Press, p. 79

[2] Thomas Michel, S.J., "Two Frontrunners for Peace: John Paul II and Fethullah Gülen" (<http://en.fgulen.com/about-fethullah-gulen/commentaries/1944-two-frontrunners-for-peace-john-paul-ii-and-fethullah-gulen>) 2010, 5/oct

[3] Zeki Saritoprak, "An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish experience," *The Muslim World*, V. 95 July 2005, p. 423

[4] Ismail Albayrak, "The Juxtaposition of Islam and Violence" in Hunt and Asiandogan, p. 27; cf. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans" in Yavuz and Esposito, p. 19-47

[5] Shankland, 1999: 426, p. 27-28, quoted by Muhammed Cetin, *The Gülen Movement...* p. 79

[6] Salih Yucel, "Institutionalizing of Muslim-Christian Dialogue Nostra Aetate and Fethullah Gülen by Salih Yucel, July 15 2009, accessed oct 5, 2010

Amin Abdullah is currently serving his second term as the Rector of Sunan Kalijaga Islamic

State University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This was the first and "mother" of all the Islamic State

Universities/Institutes (UIN/IAIN/STAIN), and is now one of the leading Islamic universities in

Indonesia, with about 15,000 students.

Dr. Abdullah is well known as an Islamic philosopher who distinguishes normative Islam from

historical Islam and advocates a new path in Islamic philosophy of knowledge, one that is open

to dialogue and integration with many different sources of knowledge. Internationally recognized

for his role in promoting a modern, pluralistic and tolerant understanding of Islam, Dr. Abdullah

helped lead the world's second-largest Muslim organization, the Muhammadiyah, from 2000-

2005, when he served as Vice Chairman of its governing board.

Born in the regency of Pati, Central Java in 1953, Dr. Abdullah received his Baccalaureate

degree from Pesantren Gontor Ponorogo; his Ph.D. in Islamic Philosophy from the Middle East

Technical University in Ankara, Turkey; and has conducted post-doctoral study at McGill

University in Toronto, Canada. He is the author of numerous books, including Religious

Education in a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Era; Between al-Ghazali and Kant: Islamic

Ethical Philosophy; The Dynamism of Cultural Islam; and Islamic Studies in Higher Education.

He is also the author of dozens of articles, and frequently speaks at international seminars in

Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

According to Dr. Abdullah, Indonesia's network of State Islamic Institutes and Universities have

long been at the forefront of issues such as interfaith dialogue and improving overall relations

between Islam and the West ("We must explain to the Saudis that they misunderstand the

West"). Dr. Abdullah is currently engaged in the process of modernizing his institution's

curriculum, and expanding its relationships with other leading universities worldwide, while

maintaining its links with the past. Sunan Kalijaga University itself is named after the Muslim

saint who ensured the triumph of a mystical and tolerant Islam in 16th century Java, and thereby

helped to preserve freedom of conscience for all Javanese.