

GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA: EDUCATIONAL VISION AND FUNDING

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The establishment and foundation of Gulen-inspired schools began in Australia in 1996. By 2009, 16 Gulen-inspired schools had been established in Australia. Gulen schools have produced a high standard of education in the short period since their establishment. This paper endeavours to examine the potential reasons for opening private Turkish schools in an advanced economy such as Australia, a nation with quality education. It aims to illustrate the main purpose of Gulen's educational vision, which is the "marriage of mind and heart". Therefore, along with academic excellence in education, Gulen-inspired schools in Australia impart universal ethical values. It is expected that this vision will help establish a world of peace where "people love love and hate hatred". The Gulen-inspired schools in Australia espouse a vision of nurturing a 'Golden Generation' who will avoid a predicted 'Clash of civilizations'.

Gulen schools have been established in every continent of the world. Usually the funding system of Gulen schools is associated with suspicion and misunderstanding. However, Australia's unique private education funding system for both establishing and managing private schools has supported rapid establishment of Gulen schools between 1996 and 2008. The Howard Government encouraged non-government schooling through its funding policies between 1996 and 2007. A neo-liberal approach was used by the Howard government to promote quality, choice and equality within education. In 2008 the Rudd government continued this policy. Australia exhibits a school choice philosophy that promotes parental choice through the funding of private schools.

As well as government, other sources of finance in the Gulen-inspired schools in Australia are; donations provided by committed and generous Turkish communities in Australia; trustees, working middle class volunteers; dedicated teachers; and school fees. Each Australian state has its own education funding system and works autonomously. Consequently, the second part of this paper explores the sources of funds for Gulen-inspired schools in Australia.

TRANSCENDENT VISIONS OF GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

The rationale behind establishing the Gulen-inspired schools in Australia can be classified as high standard of education, individual character development, imparting universal ethical values and nurturing a golden generation.

In this paper Sule College in NSW will be used as case study. Sule College is non profit, independent and non denominational school which was established in 1996 and was built by the Turkish Community. The school started with only 33 students, however, today there are 3 campuses in NSW; Prestons, Auburn and Illawara. The current number of students in primary schools is 753 and 752 in secondary and caters for Kindergarten up to Year 12. There are 42 different nationalities represented within the Sule College umbrella, which is a clear representation of multicultural society of Australia.

A High Standard of Education

Gulen emphasizes on both academic and spiritual matters as a “school must be as perfect as possible” (Nelson, 2005). Hence, teachers in Gulen schools endeavour for perfection to excel in academics. Gulen-inspired schools have produced a high standard of education in the very short period of their existence offering a quality education to ethnically and religiously diverse students in Australia. In the last few years, Isik College in Victoria placed first in the state with 100% of university entries. Sule College in NSW came in the top echelons of the state with 99% of students entering university.

Two students from Sule College in 2008 were qualified for the prestigious top All Rounders list, scoring minimum 90 or higher in more than 5 out of 6 their subjects. Another student was qualified as Top Achiever in Mathematics, having garnered a ranking of eleventh out of 30175 students in the state. The student of 2008 who is from non English speaking background made in to top 0.23% highest score in Standard English in the state.

2008 astonishing Higher School Certificate (HSC) results placed Sule College in the top 8% of schools in NSW. The students of Sule College performed exceptionally well in the Mathematics course, where 50% of students gained a Band 6 (a mark of 90 and above) and the other 50% of students received a Band 5 (a mark of between 80 and 89). Another important success was achieved in Advanced English where 89% of students achieved scores in the top Band 5 and 6 regions.

Out of all examined subjects, Sule College received scores far above the average for the state. The school has left the rest of the state behind in terms of high achievement, with significantly more Band 6 scores (a mark of 90 and above) than most other schools in the state. These results are evident not only in science and mathematics yet particularly in social science subjects such as English, Economics, Community and Family Studies. Having three students with a University Admission Index of 99 and above, moreover, gaining total of 60 Band 6 scores (a mark of 90 and above), which places 32 of our 70 students in the Distinguished Achievers list have truly made Sule College stand out among other schools.

These results are obtained due to committed teachers of Gulen movement who endeavour to achieve perfection and are willing to devote time to their students after school, weekends and on holiday breaks even though this is not requested by the schools.

According to Thomas Michel (2003), Secretary for Religious Dialogue of the Society of Jesuits and ecumenical secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Gulen schools are: "to be among the most dynamic and worthwhile educational enterprises...in the world".

Student Character Development and Universal Values at Gulen-Inspired Schools

Gulen's educational vision of a high academic standard combines with moral ideals (Yildirim & Kirmizialtin, 2004). To Gulen, all aspects of youth's characters, including an understanding, tolerance and love are major concerns in nurturing future generations. Thus, to achieve "perfection in schools" having only a command of subject knowledge is insufficient. Consequently, Gulen encourages the instructors to love and care for their pupils and develop their character. Teachers must first transform their own character, to be able to transform others' character. Hence, 'being a good example' and personifying through actions is an important part of this process (Levinskaya, 2007).

The most significant purpose of education in Gulen schools is to assure that individual abilities are improved and attributes are transformed into positive behaviour (Tekelan, 2005). In this case the aim should be to develop the individual personality, a sense of responsibility, tolerance, dialogue and ethical values, which will be the core of human life. Because acquiring knowledge or science without these life principles is useless. Therefore, the perfect education is academic with character development, which will result achievement and spirituality (Williams, 2006). In Gulen lexicon 'spirituality' means ethics, tolerance, openness, acceptance of plurality, psychological health and logic (Michel, 2003). It is the character of Gulen inspired schools that the material and spiritual realms are reconciled for upbringing the ideal human character (Gulen, 2006).

The main purpose of Gulen's educational vision is the "marriage of mind and heart" (Gulen 1996a). Therefore, along with academic excellence in education Gulen-inspired schools in Australia impart universal values such as honesty, hard work, multiculturalism, tolerance, love, respect, harmony and dialogue. The promotion of multiculturalism is evident within the Sule College as it provides its services to the students representing 42 various cultural backgrounds. The senior students of these schools participate in youth encounter interfaith dialogue between Christian, Jewish and Muslim students to discuss each other's heritage, beliefs and commonalities between their religions.

Gulen schools plan to impart universal ethical values at school. It is hoped that the taste of dialogue at an early age will enable Gulen school students to understand, love, tolerate and respect beliefs and rights of others in their adult years. It is expected that vision will help establish a world of peace where "people love love and hate hatred" (Gulen, 2004).

Golden Generation

Gulen's transcendent vision of rising Golden Generation is the only reason for the foundation of hundreds of schools around the globe (Nelson, 2005). The Golden Generation is encompassed of "a generation of ideal universal individuals, individuals who love truth, who integrate spirituality and knowledge, who work to benefit society" (Gulen 1996b). Gulen describes such a person 'zul-cenaheyn', which means "one possesses two wings", and that manifests a "marriage of mind and heart" (Gulen, 1996b), merging of universal ethical values with science and knowledge (Gulen, 2004). This will nurture a "genuinely enlightened people" (Gulen, 1996a), who motivated by love, serve humanity (Yildirim & Kirmizialtin, 2004; Nelson, 2005). Gulen-inspired schools in Australia espouse a vision of nurturing a 'Golden Generation' who will avoid a predicted 'Clash of civilisations'.

FUNDING OF GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

Being aware of criticism and suspicious view of sources of funds for the educational projects, Fethullah Gulen advised to prioritize financial transparency of these schools (Ebaugh & Koc 2007). Therefore, the second part of this paper explores the sources of funds for Gulen inspired schools in Australia. It investigates and reveals greater financial transparency of Gulen-inspired schools, using Sule Colleges in New South Wales as case studies. The financial sources of Gulen-inspired schools in all countries around the globe are supported by the Turkish populace, consisting of wealthy businessmen, leaders of community, social elite groups, blue collar workers, teachers, administrators and students.

However, in a country such as Australia, the Australian government's educational funding system contributes significantly to the establishment of these schools. Australia's unique private educational funding system for both establishing and managing private schools has supported the rapid establishment of Gulen schools between 1996 and 2008.

The financial resources are necessary for the establishment of Gulen-inspired schools and the fulfilment of the educational vision of Fethullah Gulen in Australia. The major sources of funds for Gulen-inspired schools are the Australian Government's unique educational funding system and the private sector including annual pledges, fundraising, donations, school fees and others. The financial data of Sule Colleges is based on the information gathered in the interview with the Funding and Finance Director of Sule Colleges and Feza Foundation Recep Aydogan.

FUNDING SYSTEM OF NON GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

The size of the private sector in Australia is one of the largest in the OECD, which differentiates the Australian schooling system from other advanced economies. Two major

reasons for this are: the Catholic parish schools which exist independently from the government system and the proliferated growth of independent, non-systemic schools since the 1970s.

Although it is low in the international arena, Australian governments contribute a significant amount of funds on school education. In 2004-2005, the USA spent \$A518 billion for about 50 million students and the UK spent \$A83 billion to educate 10 million students. In the same period of time, the Australian government spent approximately \$A31 billion for 3.3 million students in 10,000 schools throughout the country (Dowling 2008). Australia's per student spending in primary education is slightly below the OECD average and higher than the average for secondary education.

The funding for Australian private schools derives from the Commonwealth and state governments. However, changes in the political parties in the economy have had various implications on the non-government schools funding.

The Howard Legacy in School Funding

The Howard Government encouraged non-government schooling through its funding policies between 1996 and 2007. A neo-liberal approach used by the Howard Government fostered school choice and provided incentives for increased private effort in schooling.

In 1996, the Howard Liberal – National Government (1996 – 2007) abolished the New Schools Policy and Commonwealth controls on the establishment of new non-government schools (McMorrow 2008). The deregulation of the school sector resulted in a substantial change in the number and size of non-government schools in the following years because of the funding support of the federal government.

The Howard Government realised that it could not implement the imposition of a simple market-driven solution on funding for schools, particularly in the non-government sector. Thus, it introduced 46 diverse Commonwealth funding subsidies to assist private schools. The real growth in Commonwealth funding for non-government schools has been dramatic since 1996, having approximately doubled or a much higher level compared to the government schools. The share of total Commonwealth Budget for non-government schools increased from \$1,903 billion in 1995 -1996 to approximately \$4.7 billion in 2007-2008, thus raised by 246.6% (McMorrow 2008).

The Rudd Government

The Rudd Government is maintaining the key factors of the general funding allocations it has inherited from the Howard Government. The first Rudd Budget reveals that Commonwealth funding for non-government schools is estimated to rise in the real terms and its share of allocated funding to increase respectively (McMorrow 2008). According to the 2008-09 Federal budget, the funding of private schools is approximately \$6.5 billion and public schools \$3.5 billion (Moore 2008). The main programs dominating the recent budget list make up 96 per cent of the total funding are the Education Tax Refund (\$4.4 billion over 4 years), the 'Digital education revolution' – 'computers in schools' (\$41.2 billion), Trade Training Centres in schools (\$993 million) and other funding programs (McMorrow 2008).

Both Commonwealth and State governments provide funding for non-government schools. According to the Productivity Commission (2007) data, the greater share of funding, 72.7% is provided by the Commonwealth government, while 27.3% funded by state governments (Dowling 2008, Figure 4).

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS

Commonwealth funding to public and private sector transpires through a combination of various mechanisms, recurrent grants (85.2 per cent), targeted programs (8.0 per cent), and capital programs (6.8 per cent) (Dowling 2008).

During the Howard Government non-government schooling has received both economic and political support. The Howard Government encouraged non-government schooling through its funding policies. A neo-liberal framework was used by the government to promote quality, choice and equality within education. Australia's unique private education funding system for both establishing and managing private schools has supported the quick establishment of Gulen-inspired schools between 1996 and 2008.

General Recurrent Grants

The purpose of general recurrent grants is to assist non-government schools with the recurrent costs of school education and specific projects, and is based on the Socio Economic Status (SES) of the school community. The SES index determines an estimate of parents' income based on the postcode areas in which families live (Campbell 2007). These scores are averaged and schools are ranked based on these averages for funding purposes (NSW Government 2007). The SES was introduced for non-government schools in January 2001 and implemented fully by 2004 (NSW Government 2004). The accredited schools by State

authorities are eligible to receive General Recurrent Grants, excluding pre-school students, overseas students and students on distance education. The General Recurrent Grants account for 85.2 per cent of all Commonwealth funding for schools.

In 2008 the SES of the school community or the residential addresses of students place Sule College's SES index of 96. This enables Sule College to receive \$4521 per student in primary and \$5655 per student in secondary. With 895 number of enrolled in primary and 578 enrolled in secondary the Recurrent Grants Funds became a major source of funds for the management and development of Sule Colleges. Genuine progress is achieved through SES funding approach implemented by the Commonwealth and emphasises the role of school choice in influencing the management and improvement in Sule College and its feasibility.

Targeted Program Funding

Since 2004 the Commonwealth provides five various funding programs of targeted assistance. These are Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes Program, National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Program, Special Education – Non Government Centre Support Program, Country Areas Program and ESL New Arrivals Program (NSW Government 2004). Targeted Program Funding accounts for 8.0 per cent of all Commonwealth funding for schools and the amount of funds and conditions vary for each program (Dowling 2008).

The development of Targeted Program Funding resulted in inflow of funds to Sule College as Funding for Literacy and Numeracy for approximately \$155 000 including primary and secondary schools in 2008. The funds allocated for the Literacy and Numeracy Program by the Commonwealth government fluctuate every year.

Capital Grants

Commonwealth capital grants for private schools are provided by Block Grant Authorities (BGAs). Each state has two BGAs: one administered by the Catholic Education Commission (CEC) and the other by the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) (NSW Government 2004).

The amount of funds for non-government schools are determined by the students' enrolments and need for schools and are given to the relevant BGAs. In 2004, \$31.4 million of Capital Grants were provided to non-government schools in NSW.

Funding sought for building programs for Sule College is administered by NSW BGA, which is the AIS. Through this grant the Commonwealth provides project specific allocations of 20 per cent of expenses of the project. However, obtaining this grant is very competitive as a significant number of non-government schools are applying and hence is not guaranteed.

Another major financial contribution of the Howard Government between 2001 and 2008 was the Investing in Our Schools Projects (IOSP), where eligible non-government schools were entitled to receive up to \$100,000. In 2008 \$353,400 was awarded to Sule College for both BGA and IOSP.

STATE GOVERNMENTS FUNDING

The non-government schools are also funded by all State and Territory Governments, at a lower level, and mainly linked to the annual increases in expenditure on government schools. States augmented their income level for the private school sector by more than 25 per cent in real terms between 1996 and 2006 (McMorrow 2008). States fund non-government schools through various ways and provide about \$2 billion to the private sector on an annual basis. The largest amount of income to private schools is funded by the NSW government (688 million) while the largest per capita amount is provided by the Northern Territory (\$3310 per student) (Dowling 2008, Table 2).

NSW GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS

The NSW Government funding for non-government schools occurs through two ways:

1. Per Capita Grants Scheme.

This is the largest funding contribution paid to non-government schools by the state, based on student enrolments other than overseas full fee paying students. The per capita grant is decided by using the Commonwealth's former Education Resources Index (ERI) mechanism which commenced in 1985 and has concerned extensive consultation with the private school sector. The ERI measures the funding of non-government schools according to the level of funds they receive from fees charged to parents and donations (Campbell 2007). The ERI funds schools on the basis of their relative need within a 12 category range, where category 1 is the minimum level of assistance (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1998). The non-government schools in category 1 receive the lowest assistance from the state, \$554.89 per student in primary and \$797.16 per student in secondary, while schools in the highest category 12, are given \$1454.86 in secondary.

Sule College is placed in the highest category of ERI 12; hence the state government provides \$2010 per student in primary and \$2538 per student in secondary. This funding approach adopted by the NSW government supported and improved the quality of education services and emphasised the role of parental choice in influencing the viability of Sule College.

2. Interest Subsidy Scheme

This scheme provided a generous interest subsidy to non-government schools or authority on a loan borrowed to assist in funding accepted capital works, such as building projects up to a maximum of 20 years (NSW Government 2004). Interest subsidy payments were determined by the ERI category of the school. However, this system was terminated in 2006.

The interest subsidy paid by the State Government for interest on loans for new facilities in Sule College was seen as an important source of funding. State recurrent funding based on ERI provided very generous interest subsidies up until 2006 whereby interest on loans to certain limits was subsidised up to 85%.

School Education – Specific Funding 2009

In addition to the above government funding policies, the Rudd Government's election commitments program Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding allocated \$14.7 billion to provide new facilities and refurbishments in Australian schools (The Government of Australia 2009). The BER consist of three elements:

1. Primary students for the 21st Century Primary Schools – the purpose is to build new iconic facilities such as libraries, multipurpose halls, classrooms or upgrade existing buildings. The government allocated \$12.4 billion to all primary schools across Australia (The Government of Australia 2009).

Primary Sule Colleges in Prestons, Auburn and Illawarra were granted one funding of up to \$3 million, which is mainly going to be used to upgrade classrooms, replacement of demountables, improve library services and build new hall facilities.

2. Science and Language Centres for the 21st Century Secondary Schools – \$1billion was allocated to build new science laboratories and language learning centres (The Government of Australia 2009). However, Sule College was not eligible to receive this fund as its SES was considered high for this grant.

3. National School Pride Program - \$1.288 billion is projected for funding of government and non-government schools in Australia to assist with minor capital works and maintenance projects such as renovation of buildings, construction or upgrades of fixed shade structures, sporting grounds, green upgrades and insulation (The Government of Australia 2009).

As the schools with multiple campuses are treated as a single school for the purpose of funding paid under the BER, the three campuses of Sule Colleges in NSW were given \$200,000 for the National School Pride Program to be used for school maintenance projects. The amount of this fund is determined by the BGA and is calculated based on full time enrolled students as of February 2009.

Moreover, Sule College was provided \$145, 000 for the National Secondary School Computer Funding as the Rudd Government's election promises of Digital Revolution.

The total government financial contributions, including Commonwealth and State funding to Sule College is currently around 65 per cent and 35 per cent is provided by the private funding.

THE PRIVATE FUNDING OF GULEN-INSPIRED SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

The private funding of Gulen-inspired schools in Australia consist of school fees, donations to the school building funds, and the Parents and Friends association.

Gulen-inspired schools in Australia set different fees in each state and their accounting system works independently from each other. The school finances are accountable to the Commonwealth and State authorities, as well as to the BGAs and trust's sponsors.

School Fees

As being an independent private school, Sule College in NSW is open to everyone regardless of nationality, colour, religious and cultural background, and who achieves successful results in the entrance exams and parents' ability to provide entrance, tuition and transport fees. Sule College tuition fees are various for primary, secondary and senior students. Although the fees rise as grade levels increase, overall fees are considered to be modest compared to the fees of other private schools. The school fees per capita in primary (Kindergarten -Year 6) is \$3300, junior levels (Year 7- Year 10) is \$3950 and senior (Year 11 – Year 12) per student fees are \$4400. Gulen inspired schools in Australia are unique because of their low fees, which mainly results due to the government funding system.

At the end of selection exams, Sule College offers scholarship to the students. Apart from the academic scholarships, it provides scholarship to the families with financial hardships. Also, discounts on fees are offered to siblings who attend Sule College primary and secondary.

Donations to the school building fund

The funding of the Gulen movement is associated with local suspicion and misunderstanding, thus, Fethullah Gulen indicates greater financial transparency for this altruistic service. Gulen has always emphasized and made clear that these educational institutions are a result of generous Turkish citizens and of the volunteers, such as businessmen, leaders of community, social elite groups, blue collar workers, dedicated teachers, administrators with a strong and positive vision for schools and university students (Ebaugh and Koc 2007, Peppinck 2007).

The major source of private income for capital works for Gulen-inspired schools in Australia is provided by the self-sacrifices of volunteers like in other parts of the world. Annual pledges (*himmət*) are organised in the month of Ramadan to raise funds for the philanthropic service. Funds are donated by the supporters of the Gulen movement; business people, blue collar workers, teachers, school parents, friends and other volunteers. The donations to this foundation enable the middle class to make a positive change in society, fulfil an act of piety and assist in building an active community (Clement 2007). The amount of donations varies for each individual based on his or her financial status and the amount of total annual pledges in Sule College are about \$400,000 per year.

In the interview, the young couple, who support the Gulen-inspired schools financially said:

“The Gulen movement is centred on the benefit for all humanity and is in not prejudice in its service. This movement focuses on values, ethics and morals which are very important to us. This makes the movement worth supporting and sponsoring its activities. The reason why some people contribute significant amounts is because they truly believe in its purpose. We see this as a long term beneficial investment for future generations. We believe this movement is very important because it is not focusing on issues of secluded societies, but rather multinational societies”.

The circle of people in the Gulen movement directly participate in the creation of good work activities by organising Capital Campaigns Specific Projects and other campaigns including auctions of donated valuable items. Gulen praises the extraordinary people who provide financial assistance to this altruistic service, that they see as valuable projects which will avoid a predicted ‘Clash of Civilisations’, solve the problems of the world and will lead to the better future for the country that they live in.

Parents and Friends Association

The P&F Association of Sule College frequently organises fundraising donations to support minor expenses of the school. The association raises funds through mufti days, chocolate sales, cake stalls and selling donated gifts on special occasions such as Mother’s day.

The role of the women’s organisation is also imperative in supporting Gulen inspired schools financially. Apart from their own individual monetary donations, the ladies constantly organise fairs (*kermes*) whereby they prepare and sell homemade food, sweets, sewing, handicrafts and knitting to raise funds for educational purposes. The major reasons for these women to work voluntarily in the Gulen movement are to contribute to the education of youth, to support the nurturing of the Golden Generation, seeking God’s appreciation for every action and to be rewarded in the hereafter.

CONCLUSIONS

Fethullah Gulen has successfully motivated and mobilized many young people across the globe, including Australia to establish schools and put into practice his discourse on individual character development and universal values combined with high standard of education and being aware of his ideal of nurturing a Golden Generation and achieving global harmony and peace. The Gulen-inspired schools in Australia have proved academic accomplishments and exposed their students to a taste of dialogue at an early age which hoped will enable Gulen school students to contribute significantly to the multicultural society of Australia and to the tolerance across the world.

Based on the conducted interviews the funding of Gulen-inspired in Australia has been scrutinised in this paper and revealed that Commonwealth and State governments through their various funding policies contribute profoundly to the establishment and management of these schools. Other significant amounts of funds are provided by the self sacrificed, committed Turkish volunteers who believe in realisation of the visions of Fethullah Gulen.

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