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Home-based school teachers in Afghanistan: Teaching for tarbia and student well-being

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Abstract

Teachers in community-based or home-based schools in Afghanistan play a critical role in extending access to education to children who are unable to access the government schools, especially girls. These teachers—men and women—are nominated by the community to teach, without necessarily having teaching experience or even completing their own education. Whilst they may feel under-confident about their teaching skills and need ongoing professional development and support, these teachers nonetheless have a strong sense of their roles in the community, especially with respect to guiding children in their faith and promoting children's 'tarbia' (moral and ethical character) and well-being. This paper draws on qualitative data collected though the Healing Classrooms Initiative of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Using interview and questionnaire responses it presents home-based school teachers' experiences and beliefs about education and the role of the teacher, and discusses how these constitute alternative qualifications in the context of early reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Teacher identity; Teacher development; Afghanistan; Post-conflict

1. Introduction

In the context of Education for All (EFA) targets and frameworks, teachers in community-based or home-based schools in Afghanistan play a critical role in extending access to education to children who are unable to access the government schools, especially girls. Training and supporting such 'extraordinary' teachers who may not have completed their own education, have not benefited from a full program of teacher education and who are teaching in non-conventional learning spaces may be challenging yet the benefits identified—for students, for the teachers themselves and for the entire education system—provide inspiration for other country contexts in which the EFA targets cannot be met by the formal system alone, and particularly for other countries coming out of conflict and into early reconstruction. The dire education situation in Afghanistan, especially for

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girls, was the subject of media attention during and immediately after the US invasion of 2001. Since then, there have been a number of reports documenting progress made by the Afghan government and its partners, as well as the highlighting the challenges which remain (Ekanayake, 2004; Government of Afghanistan (GoA), 2004; Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC), 2004; Miwa, 2005; Oxfam, 2006). Teachers are recognized as key agents in the development of a robust, quality education system, but beyond estimates of the numbers of teachers required to ensure education for all Afghan children (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2006) there is little information available about who the existing and potential future teachers are. Various agencies and organizations supporting education produce a 'grey literature' of project reports and documentation, but there are very few in depth studies of the lived experiences of students and teachers and few insights into the complex processes of teaching and learning in Afghan classrooms.

This article draws on qualitative data collected though the Healing Classrooms Initiative (HCI) of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as part of a broad assessment of teaching and learning in IRC-supported schools in 2004. The IRC is an international humanitarian agency and a leader in the field of education and child protection in emergencies and post-conflict with programs in over 20 countries worldwide.[2] The IRC's HCI is using participatory action research to review teacher education experiences and processes from the perspective of student well-being and then to pilot and learn from new approaches. Developing new conceptual parameters related to becoming and being a teacher in emergency, chronic crisis and early reconstruction contexts is significant for the relatively new and practice-oriented field of education in emergencies. At the same time, these new concepts and ways of understanding teachers' experiences and priorities have some very concrete implications for IRC policy, programs and advocacy in each individual country, but also worldwide. The HCI has global reach but in the first pilot countries of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, in depth initial assessments were conducted and new, 'promising practices' of teacher development adopted and closely monitored. Identifying and responding to the particular needs of a diverse group of teachers are particularly important in contexts of early reconstruction such as Afghanistan where formal education is not accessible to many children, especially girls. Government efforts to meet EFA targets need to be supported and complemented by provision of community-based schooling, facilitated by teachers within the community.

Using interview and questionnaire responses from students and teachers in IRC-supported schools in Kabul Province it presents home-based school teachers' beliefs about education and the role of the teacher, and then discusses these perceptions and roles in the context of the reconstruction of the education system and social change processes in Afghanistan. Particular attention is given to the mullahs who also teach in home-based schools. We use the concept of being 'alternatively qualified' that has been developed through the HCI to highlight some of the specific and very special experiences, expertise, perceptions and priorities that the teachers bring to their classrooms. We recognize the challenges that the home-based teachers face, the limitations in terms of quality of the education they can provide, but our presentation of these alternative facets of their experience is a purposeful counter-balance to prevalent discourses about the problems of unregulated community-based schools and of untrained teachers. With multiple caveats, conditionalities and implications to address, we discuss how community teachers who have particular perspectives and commitments with regards to the well-being of children in their communities can be an important factor in an education system in reconstruction.

2. Learning about teacher identity, motivation and development in home-based schools

2.1. Teacher identity, motivation and development

There is a wealth of literature that attests to the multiple and diverse identities, biographies and experiences of teachers in North American and western contexts (see for example, Casey, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Erben, 1998; Ginsburg, 1995; Goodson, 1992, 2000; Greene, 1994, 1995; Grumet, 1988; McWilliam, 1999; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Munro, 1998; Thomas, 1995; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Such literature has greatly informed teacher education programs, especially in more progressive institutions, the importance is recognized of individual experiences, biographies and identities in teacher professional development.

[2] See http://www.theirc.org.

However, in post-conflict and fragile state contexts such as Afghanistan, there is very little attention given to the different expertise, experiences, perceptions and priorities of the teachers. Neither has there been much attention given to the broader implications for teacher support in contexts where teachers' experiences are often traumatic, when they have pressing, economic survival needs, and may have different desires and motivations to teachers in more stable situations. And yet these are highly significant issues, especially given the fact that in emergencies, 'teachers' are often identified and nominated by the community without ever having had teaching experience or even a desire to teach. The men and women (and sometimes even adolescent boys and girls) who are teaching are far from the formally trained, qualified and officially recognized teachers we might assume, and who ministries of education may aspire to have in their classrooms. In many Afghan villages, the mullah is the only educated person and so is the sole teacher candidate.

From the examination in some depth of the particular experiences, priorities and motivations of a sample group of teachers in home-based schools in Kabul Province, Afghanistan, we highlight qualities and experience of the teachers, which constitute contextually grounded 'alternative qualifications'. This concept refers to how teachers, although not necessarily formally qualified or experienced, may nevertheless have important attributes for the critical work that they do on an everyday basis with the children in their classrooms. Whilst they may feel under-confident about their teaching skills and need ongoing professional development and support, these teachers nonetheless have a strong sense of their roles in the community, especially with respect to guiding children in their faith and promoting children's 'tarbia' (moral and ethical character) and well-being. The data presented demonstrate the nature of the teachers' experiences as well as their commitment to teaching even when the circumstances are difficult. At the same time, the challenges of working with such teachers, the impacts in terms of quality of education and the serious implications for teacher education within the framework of a quality education system for Afghanistan cannot be glossed over.

3. IRC-supported home-based schools (HBS)

There is a fascinating history of community-based schools in Afghanistan, often, but not always, supported by international NGOs, such as the IRC, Save the Children, CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). Small, clandestine, multi-grade classes, taking place in the homes of volunteer women teachers with small groups of girls arriving and leaving at staggered times over the course of the day were the only educational opportunities for girls during the period of Taliban control of Afghanistan. This history is to some extent documented by Samady (2001) although the focus is on the agencies involved and on the number of students and teachers rather than any description of the experiences of either. Samady records that in 1999/2000 NGOs and agencies were supporting 1264 primary schools and basic education centers in about 20 provinces in Afghanistan, employing 1070 teachers thus providing education for 112,115 children including 21,314 girls in home-based schools for girls, which were initiated by parents and communities (p. 84). Although there is some diversity in the community-based school approach used by different agencies, common to all is that these teachers—men and women—are nominated by the community to teach, without necessarily having teaching experience or even completing their own education. In many of communities, the most likely candidate for this position is the mullah, who will have some basic education and usually be a known and respected figure in the community.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Education is making efforts to expand access to education for all children, especially girls, and there have been some dramatic improvements since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 (HRRAC, 2004). According to the Ministry, over 4.91 million children were enrolled in schools in the school year starting March 2005, with over 85% of these students at primary level. Within the primary sector, the vast majority of students are studying in Grades 1–4—that is students who joined the schools in 2002. The estimated gross enrollment rate for 2005 is 83%, but with large numbers of over-age children net enrollment rate is estimated at far lower—around 57% (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2006). This figure masks large disparities between boys and girls, urban and rural settings; nationally, girls' primary gross enrollment rate was 60% in 2005, but varying from over 80% in certain provinces to less than 20% in others (for example, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul and Khost) (MoE, 2006). Limitations to girls' schooling are a combination of demand and supply side

factors: exactly half of the schools are single-sex schools for boys, with less than a sixth of schools single-sex schools for girls. In some provinces less than 3% of schools are girls' schools.

Given the extent to which the education sector must expand to meet the EFA targets to provide access for all children, other complementary and transitional arrangements are required in order to expand the government's reach. Community-based or home-based schooling is one approach to ensuring access to education, especially for girls, in communities where there is no accessible government school (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006). The current IRC community-based education program operates in five provinces—Kabul, Paktia, Logar, Nangarhar and most recently, Herat. The home-based schools are actually single classes, either single-sex or for the lower grades especially, co-educational. Teachers teach in their homes, compounds, or in a community space such as a mosque, following Ministry of Education policies on number of school days, hours, curricula and on hours per subject.

The impact for girls of the home-based schools is particularly important; they provide quality education that is both culturally and geographical accessible. Home-based schools establish learning opportunities in the community, with a locally appointed teacher who is known and trusted by the parents to provide appropriate instruction and an acceptable environment. Women teachers are usually preferred, but local men, are also sometimes acceptable to girls' parents. Although the classrooms are not purpose-built and have few teaching and learning resources, small student–teacher ratios are a positive aspect; while varying across the provinces, average student to teacher ratios in home-based schools are always far less than in government schools (Table 1).

Table 1
Comparison of average number of students per teacher in home-based and government schools

Province	Average no. of students per teacher in HBS schools	Average no. of students per teacher in government schools
Kabul	36	68
Logar	29	51
Paktia	42	82
Nangarhar	18	80
Total average	30	72

Source: Kirk and Winthrop (2006, p. 8).

Given the low levels of formal education and limited—if any—teacher education, regular in-service training is critical for the home-based school teachers; they all receive a basic pedagogy course, providing instruction in lesson planning, classroom organization and different pedagogical strategies. Teachers also receive training in the core subjects of language and math, as well as seminars on materials development and on psychosocial awareness and attention to the needs of students. Teacher supervision and support is also important; male or female trainers visit each teacher at least once a month, providing both technical and moral support.

IRC teacher training workshops and follow up classroom visits encourage the teachers to involve the students as much as possible in different learning activities. Teachers try to use more child-centered approaches (for example having students write on the blackboard), but most instruction is still quite traditional in nature; teachers write on the blackboard or read from a textbook, whilst the students follow and respond to some questions. Teachers tend to have a relatively limited repertoire of pedagogical skills upon which to draw; we have to understand that they are constrained not only by the environments in which they work but also by the teaching and learning methods they have seen in practice and experienced themselves. This is especially the case for the mullah-teachers whose experience is generally limited to koranic schooling methods with a strong emphasis on rote learning and recitation.

4. Research methodology

The HCI assessment in Afghanistan was designed to gain rich and multi-dimensional perspectives on teaching and learning in a small sample of the home-based schools. Complementary data sets were therefore collected, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with teachers, discussion groups with students. The lead researcher (female) worked closely with an experienced national researcher (female) who assisted in the translation of teacher interviews and group discussions held with students. Classroom observations and parent interviews were conducted by locally hired research assistants who worked in their own villages. The research assistants were then able to provide important additional contextual information and to discuss initial interpretations of the data. The data collected by the research

assistants and the written questionnaires completed by the teachers in Dari were translated by a translator who was very familiar with the home-based schools. Transcripts were then firstly analyzed using holistic narrative analysis methods, coding of key themes followed by closer analysis of specific sections using Tobin's method of close reading (Tobin, 2000). Tobin's method is based on an assumption that the conflicting and contradictory views and perspectives of a society are inevitably reproduced in what individuals say and write; by focusing in on particular statements we can tease out some of the ideological messages circulating in that particular community, as well as individual instances of resistance to dominant messages and alternative positions. The numerous limitations to the research process are fully recognized; in particular, hiring and working with research assistants was challenging. Despite concerted efforts, in the selected rural communities it was impossible to find female assistants and even to find men who had real experience of conducting research and even very well-developed writing skills. This meant that access to girls' classes was restricted and student interviews, which in other countries were successfully conducted by female research assistants, became student discussion groups conducted by the lead researcher and national researcher.

The remainder of the article presents and discusses key elements from this data, organized into sections on the motivations and the challenges teachers have in becoming teachers and on the various dimensions of being 'alternatively qualified'. The article ends with conclusions and implications of the research, with particular attention how formal education might be informed by community-based education and in particular by some of the strengths of community-based teachers.

5. Becoming and being a home-based school teacher: motivations

Teachers in the IRC-supported home-based schools are all members of the local community and have either volunteered to teach, or have been requested by the Community Education Committee to establish a class. Many of them do not possess the required Grade 12 education to become teachers in the government schools, although some have at least a Grade 10 education. The teachers have diverse experiences: some teach in government schools in the mornings, some are actually still students, attending Grade 12 classes in morning and teaching in the afternoon. In some cases, the community mullah, who is sometimes the most educated person in the community, serves as the teacher. Of the 52 teachers in the IRC-supported home-based schools in Kabul Province, 9 are mullahs (16% of the total); of the 122 teachers in Logar, 17 are mullahs (14%). Some of the current teachers were teaching before the home-based school program began, with some women even running clandestine classes under the Taliban regime. Most teachers, however, had been identified by community leaders at the time that IRC was initiating the program. This entry into the teaching profession is quite different to the ways in which teachers in most western contexts come into teaching. It is also quite different to that of the government school teachers in Afghanistan, many (but not all) of whom have completed specific teacher training courses. Home-based school teachers' experience of being a teacher is also quite different to that of teachers working in a 'regular' school. There are some locations where two men are working along side each other, teaching two classes together in a mosque, but for the most part the teachers work alone. Women teachers especially have no or very limited contact with their peers.

The home-based school teachers have different demands on their time and energies beyond their teaching commitments. Some teachers teach in government schools in the mornings, others spend their non-teaching time doing household chores or working as casual laborers in the fields around the village. Of the sample group there were three teachers who are still students themselves, studying in the morning in government high schools outside their village and teaching in the afternoons. Another young teacher is a medical student at Kabul University. Three of the teachers (two men and one woman) are teaching in government schools in the morning, but they are the exception.

For the mullahs who participated in the assessment, becoming a teacher appeared to be less of a vocation than a responsibility that they feel somewhat obliged to take up, given the situation of the community and the lack of other possible and acceptable candidates in the community. Both the mullahs interviewed explained how they accepted community requests for them to establish basic education classes because they see teaching as part of their responsibility to educate the children of the community. One mullah explains that as the

Prophet Mohammed was a proud to be a teacher, so is he too. However, the mullahs have numerous other religious responsibilities, including leading the five daily prayers, and providing specific religious instruction to children and other members of the community. This, combined with their limited experience of any forms of education beyond koranic instruction, make it difficult for them to respond to the challenges of teaching home-based school classes, such as multi-age classes, limited space and resources.

Although in other circumstances they may not have considered teaching and have responded to a community request to establish a class at least in part because they recognize that there is no-one else to do so, the home-based school teachers nonetheless show considerable commitment to their communities, providing space in their homes, holding classes daily, giving up time to teach that could usefully be spent doing chores, laboring or other necessary activities. Teachers' motivations for such commitment are diverse; some of the home-based school teachers were refugees in Pakistan, and had seen the sorts of educational opportunities available for Afghan refugees. On returning to their homes they have then been moved to provide learning opportunities for the children in their village who otherwise had no education. One of the female teachers has returned to her village from Kabul with such a perspective, and another is originally from Kabul herself, but has married into the village. As such, she has also seen the opportunities available to girls elsewhere and wanted to make a difference for the girls in her adopted village who had no possibility to attend school before she started to teach. Other home-based school teachers not included in this assessment were conducting clandestine classes under the Taliban, thereby putting themselves at great risk.

One of the women teachers explains, "The villagers don't have access to education, and it is my responsibility to teach them what I know". One of the teachers is quite adamant that lack of education is the root cause of much of Afghanistan's troubles. "Because of this, and because of all the problems of lack of education, I am ready to teach, even without pay". This commitment to teaching because of the great need in the community is reflected again in the words of another teacher: "IRC came to the community and talked about setting up a school and the community elders asked me and I said I could and I would teach. They said that there was no pay, but I said that I would teach for as long as I could".

Some of the teachers may have more of a vocation for education. One of the men, who has become the principal of a nearby girls' secondary school, explains that he had always had an interest in teaching, and has been doing so now for 11 years. Another of the home-based teachers explained that although she had wanted to be a teacher ever since childhood, she got married in Grade 11, and was therefore unable to complete her schooling and continue through the formal teacher education courses. However, when her sister-in-law started to teach an IRC-supported home-based class, she started to help out. When her sister-in-law left the community, then this woman took over the class, and also went back to school in a special program to complete her Grade 12.

6. Becoming and being a home-based school teacher: challenges

In the context of peacebuilding and reconstruction in Afghanistan, the teachers' articulated the commitments to teaching articulated by the teachers are inspiring and powerful, but they have to be understood in the context of the communities in which the teachers live. Such communities have influential community elders and shuras, who have requested certain individuals to teach and it is understood that it is not easy for these men and women to decline. Another important factor, highlighted below particularly for women, is the lack of other opportunities for young people to find meaningful employment and to contribute to their communities. The specific configurations of social relations in the small communities in which the teachers live clearly offer both opportunities to create change and limitations. Young teachers are able to contribute to the community and develop the skills of a future generation, but they may not have much power in the community to make educational recommendations, to push for commitments to, for example, girls' education from other important individuals. Striking gender disadvantage persists in Afghanistan, creating particular limitations for women; isolation in home-based classes means that professional skills development is difficult, as is sustaining energy for teaching when there are so many other demands on time. Furthermore, although the women teachers are clearly role models in their communities, and may

enjoy respect from other communities, research in Afghanistan suggests that unless a woman is able to earn enough to make a significant difference to the well-being of her own family, her status in the family and her participation in important decision-making processes is limited (Wakefield, 2004a, 2004b). Women teachers may therefore remain marginalized when it comes to decision-making about their own children's education and other important family issues.

One teacher's comment that she will teach for as long as she can, is also telling, and an indication of the 'tentativeness' of being a community-based teacher (Kirk & Winthrop, forthcoming). The teachers do not receive any incentive from IRC, and only very small—if any—payments from the students or the community. Their precarious economic situation therefore means that they may not be able to sustain their teaching in the long term. Younger men explain that they are able to teach whilst they are still living with their parents and not supporting a family, but that eventually they will need to think about income-generating work. For women too, husbands and in-laws may become less and less supportive of their wives' teaching if it does not contributing to the family finances; they know that they may be forced to give up in the future to focus on either income-generating work, or to devote more time to household and family activities. One of the women teachers is quite clear about the fact that she could not continue without payment for ever: "I need financial support. My father in law is also sick. If IRC doesn't [start to] pay then I will stop teaching. My health is not good either".[3]

In communities where there are so few alternative candidates the tentativeness of the teachers' tenure has serious implications for the sustainability of access to education in the community. Advocacy and other strategies to mitigate against interruption or even discontinuity in education are discussed in Section 8.

7. Home-based teacher attributes: being 'alternatively qualified'

We use the term 'alternatively qualified' to highlight the very valuable qualities and abilities that inexperienced and unqualified teachers in crisis and post-crisis contexts do have, especially with regard to child well-being (Kirk & Winthrop, 2007). Despite the challenges the teachers face in balancing other demands on their time, and the difficulties they may have because of their limited training and teaching experience, home-based school teachers in Afghanistan have important qualities and skills which are important for the job they do. Particularly striking in Afghanistan is the extent to which the teachers articulate their responsibilities for ensuring the well-being of their students, and their moral character, or 'tarbia' a role which the parents consider as a priority for teachers. Other elements of this 'alternative qualification' include a strong commitment to the community and particularly to children; gender (and particularly being female); understanding the children and their psychosocial needs; having culturally appropriate strategies to protect and nurture children; appreciating their own opportunity to learn, develop and contribute to their communities and society. This is not to negate the importance of learning for these children, nor the role that community-based teachers play in facilitating basic literacy and numeracy. In fact HCI research highlights the importance of such learning to children, and the significance they attribute to teachers to facilitate this (Kirk and Winthrop, forthcoming). Rather, teachers who understand and try to respond to children's social and emotional needs and aspirations may be able to overcome some of their own limitations in terms of depth of subject knowledge. Whilst teacher attributes such as commitment, understanding and sensitivity to well-being are clearly not in themselves enough to ensure quality education for all children, they are nonetheless significant assets to be acknowledged by communities, education authorities and their partners supporting education in Afghanistan.

7.1. Gender

Gender is a dominant social force in Afghanistan and one that determines access to and experience of education in very significant ways. Girls are especially disadvantaged in rural areas where the nearest government schools are considered too far away for them to travel. Because of parental preferences for women teachers for their daughters, in many rural communities, a woman who is committed to teaching and who has a primary level

[3] IRC's policy is to work with communities on sustainable approaches to teacher compensation. Advocacy to governments to fulfill their responsibility to pay teacher salaries is a critical component, with community resource identification and mobilization as an interim strategy.

education herself is already significantly 'alternatively qualified'. In many communities, therefore, girls have access to education only because home-based classes take place in locations that are close to their homes, and are run by teachers who are known and trusted by the community. Girls in the three girls-only classes taught by women teachers, explain that this is an important issue for their families; if there was a male teacher then their parents would not let them attend. The girls in another class explain how they feel about their female teacher, "It is important to have a woman teacher as she is like us and we can ask her the questions in our minds, and we can be very courageous in front of her". In Afghanistan especially, gender is a highly significant dimension of being alternatively qualified, and warrants particular attention to recruitment of and support for women teachers. This being stated, it is also important to recognize that the necessity for girls to have women teachers is not equally strong in every community. In some villages, classes for girls are taught by men, and the girls and their parents appear to be comfortable with a male teacher—but a male teacher who they know and trust from the community. This is especially so for the mullah-teachers. The girls also understand that given the situation, this is acceptable; as one student says, "It would be better to have a woman teacher, but it is alright".

As acknowledged above, other discursive threads have to be interwoven with these narratives of teaching; those of the very limited possibilities for Afghan women to be employed outside of the home and to contribute to the community as well as their extremely restricted professional experience. The female home-based school teachers are isolated in their own homes with no colleagues to chat to at break time, no opportunities to be inspired by an approach or activity that another teachers is using and no-one apart from the IRC trainers with whom to share any school-related problems or concerns. This lived experience of teaching has a significant impact on quality of instruction as on the sustainability of the classes. Although the long-term strategy is for the community-based schools to serve as an interim measure until the local authorities are able to open a formal school in the area, the reality is that in many remote and rural areas of the country, this may take many years. In such a poor country where meeting basic needs is such a priority, how long each woman teacher can continue without salary is question of constant concern.

7.2. Understanding the children and their psychosocial needs

The home-based school teachers are members of the same community and have an understanding of the local children, of their aspirations and those of their parents. The data demonstrates how they are also able to transmit important cultural knowledge and to relate the textbook lessons to everyday village life. Cultural knowledge of child development and well-being related to what is called 'tarbia' in Afghanistan—is also very explicitly conveyed by the teachers; most articulate a strong sense of an expanded role of the teacher beyond that of only a deliverer of specific subject content. There are four especially important aspects of good tarbia: good and clean language, respect for elders and parents, bodily cleanliness and hospitality. Children who have tarbia are polite, obedient, respectful, sociable and peaceful. They know how to eat, sit, dress and pray properly. They do not fight unnecessarily and they do as their parents suggest. In contrast, children with bad tarbia, ('be tarbia' or without tarbia) are rude, antisocial and argumentative (Save the Children, 2003). Parents expect the teachers to model good manners and appropriate behaviors, including politeness; in fact five of the six parents interviewed indicated that it was important for children to learn good manners and politeness in school.

The teachers clearly respond to these expectations; they talk about how important tarbia is to their work with the children. Teachers describe how they regularly give advice to students about tarbia and about generally being good children. The students also describe how their teachers advise them not to fight with each other, to be polite to each other and especially to their elders. The boys should not tease the girls, for example, and all students should take good care of their school clothes and change into home clothes to keep their uniforms, or special school clothes, clean for the following day's lessons. The teachers' understandings of tarbia and of children's moral and development needs are grounded in their own experiences as members of the local community rather than necessarily in any teacher training they have received; few of the home-based teachers in the sample group have completed the IRC's psychosocial training course. Grounded in this contextual, cultural knowledge, the teachers' messages and advice for the students are therefore consistent with

those of the children's parents and relatives. The teachers know that parents expect them to contribute to their children's tarbia, and they are equally committed to it as a critical element of what it means to be a good teacher.

Although the perpetuation by teachers of the community status quo (with regards to, for example, expectations of good behavior, of gender norms) may be problematic in the long term for a country in reconstruction, in the shorter term, the coherency of messages from the different adults in their lives is particularly important for children living in unstable and uncertain environments as post-conflict Afghanistan.

7.3. Having culturally appropriate strategies to protect and nurture children

Home-based school teachers may have limitations in terms of formal teaching qualification and experience, but they articulate a desire to be close to the students, to really understand their problems, and to find ways of addressing any barriers to their learning. Such attitudes towards teaching and learning cannot be taken for granted in contexts where emerging research indicates that violence from teachers against students, because, for example, of presumed ethnic difference (Spink, 2004; cited in Spink, 2005). They may not have many different strategies or teaching methodologies at hand, but the teachers are nonetheless concerned to ensure that all the students have equal opportunities to participate and have understood the lesson. The students interviewed also indicated that they would feel very comfortable telling their teacher if they did not understand. This is not surprising as one of the teachers explains how she responds when students do not understand: "I work with them and I tell them gently and guide and encourage them, then the next day they won't repeat their mistakes".

Some of the teachers do have a stick and may use it to hit the children for things like forgetting of homework, but other teachers understand that fear is an emotion that is antithetical to learning and counter-productive to the aims of their lessons. One of the female teachers explains quite clearly the link between the teacher's manner and the children's ability to learn, "The teacher should enter class with a happy face—if a teacher goes to class with a stick then the children will be very uncomfortable and will not learn". Another woman says, "In my opinion, a teacher should be kind and should treat their students like their own children. A good teacher should have a happy face and should not be harsh—if they are harsh then the children will be scared and won't learn. If a child has forgotten something like a textbook or exercise-book then the teacher should tell them to share and coordinate—the teacher should also help".

One of the teachers is very explicit about the teacher's role as a confidante and counselor of the students. She says, "A good teacher is very kind, children can trust them with their problems and concerns (and not tell other people), a good teacher is friendly and has good manners—she should be friendly with children".

This women teacher talks at some length about the relationship she has with her female students and the fact that they will very occasionally talk to her about issues they have in the home, and even questions they have about their own bodies, menstruation, and so on. She explains that such questions are always couched very discretely and not asked directly, but with her culturally grounded, equally discrete responses she has apparently found ways to convey important health and reproductive health information to her adolescent girl students.

Although not explicitly discussed with the teachers, it may be assumed that their interest in, and commitment to building positive relationships with their students at least to a certain extent relates to the fact that they are also members of their own community, and quite likely even related to them. This creates a very different teaching and learning dynamic than in government schools where the teachers are posted and usually travel to from outside.

7.4. Appreciating their own opportunity to learn, develop and contribute

The teachers may have financial and other struggles in order to continue to be teachers, but at the same time they also express a certain degree of satisfaction gained from their work, and especially from their interaction with children. This appreciation of these opportunities then provides intrinsic motivation to the men and women to continue to teach, and to do so in ways which are in line with the community's expectations. When asked to describe what they like most about teaching one teacher writes: "When the students understand the lesson, then I am happy" and his sentiments

are echoed by another teacher, "I like teaching so that the students can understand my lesson". One woman teacher writes, "Students coming on time, their interest in the lessons and their homework". Teachers appear to be happy with the makeshift classrooms they have established, and say that yes, the students consider it as a 'real school'. One of the women says proudly that her students talk about going to school; she tells them she will be there for them until they reach Grade 6 and then she will give them papers to continue to government secondary school.

At the same time, on another level is the sense of satisfaction and appreciation of the importance of being a teacher in their community. Despite the lack of financial compensation, all but one of the teachers said that they feel they are respected in their communities for their work. They talk about being called 'ustod'—a respectful title for a teacher, and describe how some of the communities do understand that they are working for no pay and so particularly appreciate what they do. One teacher describes how the students' parents meet and greet him at the mosque and say they are praying for the teachers as they are happy their children are getting an education. Another woman describes how if there are parties and ceremonies in the village and everyone is sitting on the floor then she will be brought a mattress to sit on. Everyone—young and old—refers to her as 'ustod' too. Another woman teacher says that at a recent wedding party that she did not attend, her sister was continually asked where the teacher was and why she was not present. Another woman who has been teaching since the Taliban times describes how when she received letters threatening to burn their home when she first opened a class for girls there, but now it is quite the opposite. When she is out, for example, she will find that the parents of the students will do little things to show their appreciation, such as pay her taxi fare.

From these conversations the gender dimensions and social relations of being—and being respected for being—a teacher are also clear. The male teachers are mostly teaching in mosques, and as such have quite a different experience; they go out and about in the village, they teach in a public space, are visible, and have the opportunity for more interaction with mullahs, and other men coming to pray. Women teachers, teaching within their own family compounds have far fewer opportunities for such interaction. The male teachers hear the prayers for the teachers recited in the mosque, whereas the women do not worship publicly and are denied this external gratification first hand. Yet because of these limited opportunities for women to be active in the public realm, status and respect in a community gained as a teacher is particularly significant. In the male-dominated communities women rarely hold important positions and so it is quite unusual for a young woman to be able to confidently say, "The community is very happy that I am teaching and whenever they see me they give me respect and say how much I know". Another young woman of only 18 who is teaching a class in the afternoons in her home whilst attending secondary school in the mornings says, "I'm proud to be a teacher, for myself, and also in the village—they know I teach without pay and I get respect for it". As an outsider who married into the village, becoming a teacher has been a way of settling into the village and gaining the trust and respect of the local people.

The ways in which the teachers understand and support students' psychosocial needs have already been discussed, but the data also suggest that for the women teachers especially there is a certain amount of social and emotional benefit to be gained from enjoying a position of status, such as teacher. Women indicated that instead of being alone, surrounded by their own problems, and constantly reliving the trauma and loss of the conflict, the opportunity to teach gives them something else to think about other. One woman teacher states, for example, "School helps me forget my problems and sorrows—before I was teaching I was very sad all the time. I enjoy being with the children and it helps me forget my pain. They learn from me and I learn from them too".

One should consider the very limited opportunities for psychosocial support for Afghan women, particularly in rural areas. At the same time, women's understanding and appreciation of being able to contribute to her community, of knowing that she is doing her best, and contributing to the future should therefore be recognized as an element of being alternatively qualified to be a teacher. It may be harder for women to be active in the public realm than men, especially in rural Afghanistan, but teaching can be a culturally acceptable way to do so. In this context, community participation and contribution constitute important motivation for quality teaching and learning.

8. Some conclusions and implications

A deeper understanding of the home-based teachers' lived experiences and especially their different gendered positions and relations within communities is now informing developments within the IRC education programs in Afghanistan and beyond. Further efforts are being made to ensure that the training and supervision provided can be better oriented to the specific conditions and situations in which these men and women are teaching. Attention to teacher isolation, particularly for women, has led IRC to pilot regular teachers' meetings in communities where there is more than one home-based school. Creating opportunities for the teachers to meet and exchange experiences, strategies and challenges is especially important for the women who, with few other opportunities to leave their compound, rarely meet other teachers.

The difficulties some of the teachers face in continuing to teach and in justifying their commitment to teaching, without pay, require attention on several fronts. Strategic and sensitive community mobilization and development initiatives are required to try to raise contributions from the community to pay the teachers. Part of the community mobilization strategy has to emphasize the alternative qualifications of the home-based teachers and the critical role they play in the short and long-term development processes for their communities. Holistic and cross-sectoral approaches adopted by IRC may also help to ensure that the teachers can continue to teach, for example through vocational training and income-generating projects which prioritize teachers' families. At the same time, there is ongoing advocacy and collaboration with the Afghanistan Ministry of Education (MoE) to promote the gradual integration of home-based school teachers into the government system, and most importantly, onto the government payroll.

The new community-based education policy of the MoE is an important step in this process; it is accepted that in rural areas especially, there are very few teacher candidates meeting the required criteria, and especially so for women. Bringing in teachers from outside the community may have negative impacts in terms of access and quality and so meeting the increased demand for education requires alternative approaches. This includes officially recognizing and validating the commitment, the understandings of children's needs and the perspectives of the parents, of the unqualified teachers. The MoE is now working with community-based education partners including IRC, to develop a mechanism to enable the authorities to hire the home-based teachers as full professionals, whilst also ensuring the necessary in-service training to complement their existing skills and attitudes.

Recognizing the different ideas, expertise and qualities that untrained teachers bring to the classroom in no way negates the critical need for teacher training and professional development support. Rather it is an alternative starting point from which to build teacher support programs, which recognize teacher strengths and provide relevant, targeted support for particular weaknesses. Recent IRC HCI experience with a pilot teacher development intervention for very under-experienced and under-educated teachers in Herat province indicated that even mullah-teachers can be supported in developing new and creative teaching techniques which promote student learning and well-being (Kirk, 2006). Innovative strategies such as 'classroom-based training' were used which recognized that for teacher who have never seen or experienced alternative teaching methods to recitation and rote learning, demonstration in the classroom environment can help transfer workshop learnings into new practice.

Under the new comprehensive policy for community-based education in Afghanistan complementary approaches used by different organizations can be shared and scaled up in a harmonized way as part of an overall countrywide strategy for Education for All. This is seen as a very positive development and one through which appropriate professional development strategies for male and female community-based teachers can be developed at scale. Also important, if nonetheless challenging, is to ensure that as the community-based education programs necessarily and strategically become more aligned with the formal education system, their particular strengths with regards to children's tarbia and well-being are not lost. Given the realities of many of the formal schools in which teachers are distant figures, lecturing at the front of the class, the risks are high. Rather, education actors have to work together to ensure that these strengths are translated into policies on curricula, assessment, into teacher training courses, school monitoring and assessment procedures and thereby integrated into the formal system. In these ways *all* Afghan teachers should have opportunities to understand and use the relationships between

learning and tarbia to provide effective and positive learning experiences for children.

Appendix 1. Key open-ended questions asked of teachers and students in IRC-supported home-based schools

Questions for teachers

1. Can you tell me about how/why you first came to be a teacher?
2. Can you describe your typical working day at this school?
3. Can you tell me about one of the lessons you taught yesterday/today/early last week?
4. How do you know if your students understand the lesson?
5. If you think a student doesn't understand your lesson, what do you usually do?
6. What do you think makes a good teacher? What sort of qualities and skills should a good teacher have?
7. Apart from the IRC training and supervision, what else helps you to be a good teacher?
8. What sort of professional/moral support/help do you get from the CEC?
9. What sort of financial support do you get from the CEC?
10. What (if any) other financial support do you get as a teacher (e.g. from children, from parents?)
11. Do you feel proud of your school and the teaching you are doing?
12. Do you feel respected in your community for being a teacher?
13. Are there any barriers or limitations (either in school, at home or in the community) that stop you from being a good teacher, or which limit you in your teaching?

Questions for students

1. What do you most like about coming to school?
2. What do you like least about coming to school?
3. Do you feel proud of your school and that you are part of something special?
4. When you are in school, how does your teacher help you?
5. Are there things that the teacher does which don't help you at all and which you don't like?
6. Do you think that you are a good student? and if so, who and/or what else helps you to be a good student?
7. What happens, though, if you really find something very difficult to learn and you don't understand? What do you do? What about if you have a problem, what do you do ?
8. Do you think boys/girls have the same sort of education as you do?
9. Are there also some special students in your class—some over-age children, children without their parents, disabled children? Do you think they enjoy being in school as much as the other students?
10. What do you think you can do/what do you think your responsibilities are to make your school an even better place for teaching and learning?

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