

Sughra Choudry Khan

A Lowly Creature, or a Somebody? The Uncertainty of the Teacher Self

*'We were having assembly... one of our students was called Shabbir Khan.....and the other Feroz Khan. One day Feroz Khan was absent. When he came the next day I was taking the attendance register. Shabbir Khan told him: "Hey Feroz Khan you are absent too much, don't be! If you keep being late, then you'll fail! Don't do that! Come to school regularly so you can get into the army when you grow up. If you can't get into the army then you'll be a teacher!"'*¹

*'Even in our village they give a policeman a lot of importance but not a teacher.....'*²

What kind of teacher is needed for education in a world of uncertainties when the teacher is her/himself a product of the same world of uncertainty, cultural intolerances, populism and the teacher deficit discourse? How can a teacher be equipped to help children develop as 'global citizens', as critical thinkers and creative problem solvers; develop the social emotional skills of students when nowhere do we explore the emotional world of teachers? When teachers feel under-valued, how can we expect them to value children, build their self-esteem and develop pluralistic qualities and skills?

*'I'm helpless..... I'll go home today I'll go to the naala³ I'll water them, the fruit trees. I'll bring some wood to burn at home. I don't have the money to buy fire wood. I arrive back carrying the load myself. The thing is that people in the community find out that we work as much as they do and they think, "What is the point of being educated and becoming a teacher?'*⁴

My presentation derives from my doctoral research on primary school teachers' perceptions of feeling valued in northern mountainous and rural Pakistan- what does it mean for teachers to feel valued?

*'When people compare then people consider a teacher to be a lowly creature. A head of a district is everything..... For them teachers are nothing....'*⁵.

When teachers do not feel valued, adopt 'artificial smiles' in front of the children, or strive to find meaning as teachers and a justification of their existence, how great can our expectations of them be? When they are perceived as 'lowly creatures' rather than a 'somebody' of significance and are

¹ Choudhry Khan, S.B. (2012) *A Lowly Creature, or a Somebody? A Qualitative Analysis of the Perceptions of Feeling Valued Among Primary School Teachers in Northern Pakistan Focus group 1: line 439.*

² *Ibid* Focus Group 1: line 192-3

³ 'naala': upper pastures

⁴ *Ibid*. Interview with 'Diyanat' (pseudonym) lines 328-334

⁵ *Ibid*. Interview with 'Kabir' lines 192-213

increasingly demoralised, how available are they for 'transformation' or to deal with the uncertainties that children bring into the classroom? My findings revealed that feeling valued is a basic need in teachers and therefore foundational to teachers feeling motivated and committed. What then are the implications for developing in teachers the capacity for self-efficacy and the ability to develop in children 'core human values', such as empathy (what are these now in a shifting world of socio-cultural ambivalence?); critical thinking, resilience and other 21st Century skills and qualities needed to thrive and create peace in such a world itself so uncertain?