

**ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG**  
REGIONAL OFFICE PALESTINE

# **Education in Palestine: Current Challenges and Emancipatory Alternatives**

A study by

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November 2015



## **Disclaimer**

The production of this publication has been supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine (RLS). The content is the sole responsibility of the author and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of RLS.

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## **List of abbreviations**

ALS	Alternative learning systems
ASP	American School of Palestine
CiC	Campus in Camps
CREA	Community of Researchers on Excellence for All
ITL	International Teacher Leadership initiative
LtoL	Learn to Lead
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
oPT	occupied Palestinian Territories
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PNDC	Palestinian National Debate Championship
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine
SENAR	National Service For Rural Learning
SHF	Salman Halabi Forum
TCC	Teacher Creativity Centre
TLW	Teachers Leading the Way
UDL	University Debate League
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine for providing the opportunity to conduct the study presented in this report.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of those individuals who gave their time to talk to me about their experience and views:

Issam Arouri, political activist and Director General of Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre

Sam Bahour, political activist and businessman

Dahouk Dawoudi, parent and Birzeit University faculty member

Dr. Munir Fasheh, founder and former Director of Tamer, and retired university faculty member

Intisar Hamdan, Teacher Creativity Centre, Programme Manager

Dr. Maher Hashweh, Birzeit University faculty member

Mona Jibril, Al-Azhar University faculty member

Edward Muallim, Ashtar Theatre, Director General

Kholoud Nasser, Ministry of Education, Director General for General Education

Renad Qubbaj, Tamer Institute for Community Education, Director General

Awwad Sharaf, Al-Quds University faculty member

Dr. Jihad Shweikh, Birzeit University faculty member

Dr. Basil Skaik, Al-Azhar University faculty member

Dr. Rabab Tamish, Bethlehem University faculty member

I am also grateful to my academic supervisor, Dr. David Frost for his support, guidance and editing.

Hanan Ramahi

## Preface

What constitutes a good education is always contentious.

In Palestine the debate about education began many years ago, but it is only recently that the analysis has become truly critical, focusing on the deep structures of learning and schooling. The available data in the Occupied Palestinian Territories indicate that both the curriculum content and modes of assessment in formal education do not respond adequately to the various challenges and demands of the political and socio-economic conditions within this colonial context. Students in schools, colleges and universities are taught to become passive recipients of pre-packaged knowledge as a result of an outdated pedagogy that is associated with power structures and patriarchal elites.

The curricula and teaching methodologies in Palestine fail to enhance critical thinking and the capacity to apply logic amongst the students from variable age categories. Facts are packaged, and are to be taken as absolute. Cultural and social taboos are strengthened while gender and class divisions are widened.

It is inevitable that this has a major impact on the goals and mechanisms of the Palestinian national struggle towards liberation, self-determination and genuine sovereignty. Moreover, it has harmful consequences for social and cultural development.

However, the goals of education must be wider than that and it must be recognized that they can also be realised beyond the school doors. The various progressive social actors have an important, if not a determining, role towards developing approaches, philosophies and tools towards an effective emancipatory education that set minds free, accelerate creativity and open new perspectives and horizons for genuine human liberation.

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine has established a program focused on emancipatory education in an attempt to contribute to the debate on this matter and to support action. The intention is to support organisations, active groups and individuals to develop their “out of box” tools and to create new initiatives that can have significant impact.

This study by Hanan Ramahi is part of these efforts, an attempt to characterise the problem, highlight the variable factors and, most importantly, lay out prominent alternatives and perspectives, whether local or international. The intention is to

enable various organisations, academics and social and political activists in the country, and beyond, to upgrade methods and tools of education as a contribution to a systematic and fruitful struggle on both social and national fronts.

Salam Hamdan  
Program Manager  
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine  
November 2015

*Those who do not move, do not notice their chains.*

Rosa Luxemburg

## **Introduction**

Education plays a fundamental and crucial role in fostering social and political change. Emancipatory approaches to education are a means to mobilise disenfranchised members and groups of society towards democratic engagement. Central to this view is that teaching and learning should enable critical thinking and facilitate meaningful knowledge building to indigenous populations (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 1995). By raising awareness of the root causes of social marginalisation, economic inequalities and political exclusion, oppressed people are set free from fatalistic, irrational and deterministic mind sets and collectively empowered to improve their living conditions. This is done through praxis, the ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (Freire, 1970, p. 51). Pedagogical tools include dialogue, reflection, collaboration and action; these serve to enhance individual and collective agency, and communal ties in preparation for strategic collective action. This contrasts with traditional education models that emphasise self-improvement through academic qualifications that promote individual opportunities and rely on transmission modes of teaching (Apple, 1979).

This report presents the outcomes of a study, which sought to describe emancipatory initiatives in Palestinian society and clarify current challenges in the Palestinian education system with a view to identifying emancipatory alternatives that are relevant to the Palestinian context. The first section examines the historical and political forces that shaped educational provision in Palestine and later the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT). The second explores the views of a group of progressive-minded educators and key figures in the Palestinian community about the present pedagogic and social structures, and the need for educational change for a more socially just society. Current emancipatory initiatives and programmes being conducted in Palestine are mapped in the third section. In the fourth pertinent international models are identified for adaptation in the Palestinian setting. The final section clarifies the key challenges and puts forward a set of principles to guide change focused on emancipatory education in the oPT, and concludes with recommendations for further consideration and reflection.

## **Section 1**

### **Background: History, Politics and Palestinian Education**

This section traces the political and social forces that have shaped education in Palestine. Starting from Ottoman rule and reaching up to present Palestinian self-governance, education provision is examined in relation to socio-economic and political aims and impact.

#### **Education under foreign rule**

Historically, formal education in Palestine has been controlled and administered by foreign rule. Over the years these powers varied their education agendas to maintain the status quo. Under Ottoman rule education provision first emerged and was delivered in the Turkish language to the overwhelming majority Arabic speaking Palestinian population. Starting in 1917 during British rule, education was expanded to supply a growing need for civil servants for the British Empire (Barakat, 2007; Brown, 2003a). Accordingly, knowledge and learning came to be associated with the power structures and the ruling elite, and alienated the indigenous inhabitants from the means and processes of their own education. Concurrently, it represented a way to advance individual socio-economic and political interests over social welfare.

In 1948 Palestinian aspirations for educational self-rule were destroyed with the creation of the state of Israel and the ethnic cleansing of the majority of the indigenous population. Palestinian refugees in UN-administered camps were subject to the educational policies and curricula of the host countries (Hanafi, Hilal & Takkenberg, 2014). In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan and Egypt respectively disseminated their national curricula. Accordingly, formal education received by Palestinians in the oPT and the diaspora was not concerned with preserving Palestinian historic-cultural distinctiveness or advancing political and social aspirations (Brown, 2003a). Instead, a technicist educational ‘culture of positivism’ (Giroux, 1984) emerged to ahistoricise educational processes and undermine local and collective means to knowledge production.

These developments reinforced for Palestinians the role of education as a tool for securing socio-economic mobility and redressing the impact of national exclusion (Barakat, 2007). Award-bearing formal education was a means to survival, which may account for why for many years Palestinians have had the highest rate of participation in education in the Arab World (Fronk, Huntington & Chadwick, 1999). The instrumentalist function of education for socio-economic and meritocratic self-

promotion weakened its potential to enhance individual and collective agency in combating the hegemonic forces and patriarchal elites behind social injustice and political exclusion.

During the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, military authorities targeted the education system (Abo Hommos, 2013; Asaad, 2000), despite the increasingly reductive and purely functionalist role of education. Repressive measures reached emergency proportions during the *intifada* civil protest movement starting in 1987, when Israeli military forces closed down schools and universities for periods of up to two years and disrupted, through harassment, informal attempts at educational provision (Mahshi and Bush, 1989). The adverse impact on Palestinian education was enormous, leading to a long lasting decline in academic standards at all levels of education (Nicolai, 2007; Sfeir and Bertoni, 2003) reaching emergency proportions by 1993 (Rigby, 1995). Apparently, despite the increasingly alienating apparatus of the school system, Israeli occupation authorities nevertheless identified in traditional modes of education a significant threat to their military rule.

Ruthless Israeli policies did not entirely prevent Palestinians from preserving and asserting their historical and cultural identity. Individual and collective defiance of repressive military measures during the occupation, particularly during the first *intifada*, attests to self-reliance, a collective spirit and the power of community-based action (Mahshi and Bush, 1989). Nevertheless, direct foreign control of Palestinian education coupled with decades of Israeli military rule left the Palestinians unprepared and ill-equipped for educational reconstruction. Such is the background of education in the oPT and the setting for Palestinian education self-governance.

### **Education under Palestinian self-rule**

The 1993 Oslo Peace Accords ushered in a period of limited Palestinian self-rule in the oPT. The first-ever Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) was established in 1994 with the remit to prepare an aspirant Palestinian citizenry for institution building, state formation and the global information economy. The MoE serves approximately 75 per cent of students in the oPT, with 15 per cent attended to by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the remaining 10 per cent through private enterprise, mostly ecumenical ([www.moehe.gov.ps](http://www.moehe.gov.ps)). This entailed rebuilding an outdated educational system with severe shortages of qualified teachers and school buildings, and an outdated foreign curriculum.

For financial assistance the resource-deficient Palestinian National Authority (PNA) turned mainly to international sponsors. The World Development Indicators database for 2011 (World Bank, 2014) identified the Palestinians as being among the highest per capita recipients of assistance in the world; the US, EU and World Bank being primary donors. PNA reliance on international donors and expertise for wide-scale educational reform exacted a heavy price on Palestinian educational autonomy. The results of this dependence can be seen at the geo-political and policy formation levels, as discussed below.

In developing countries foreign aid at the programmatic level is conditional upon policy borrowing and reform transfer (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). International sponsors' advocacy of a global agenda on education has advanced donor values and interests over local ones, and compromised autonomy in establishing an indigenous education system. This has inhibited emergence of a comprehensive Palestinian educational philosophy and agenda (Baramki, 2010; Ramahi, 2013). The battleground over the construction of the first Palestinian national curriculum illustrates this connection (Murray, 2008; Velloso de Santisteban, 2002). The ensuing international controversy served to obfuscate a pivotal opportunity to engage Palestinians in an internal debate over pressing national issues like democracy, women's rights and religious tolerance (Brown, 2003a, 2003b). This and other factors led to questions about the impact of development aid in the oPT (Gerster & Baumgarten, 2011; Shinn, 2012) and illustrated the hegemony of a global education agenda fixated on student performativity and school rankings (Ball, 2003).

Financial dependence on key international actors led to the Palestinian economy and civil life becoming subject to the agendas of regional politics. US-led economic blockades that deprived PNA employees of their wages for months affected the livelihood of more than 53,000 teachers. The impact on the lives and work of these teachers cannot be overstated, especially given low teacher wages and a reduced socio-economic status. There can be no doubt that the quality of both teaching and students' learning were likewise adversely affected. Accordingly, economic dependency on foreign aid for educational reconstruction is tenuous at best and lays hostage an entire nation's education system and aspirations.

### **The effects of Israeli occupation**

Of the many detrimental effects of Israeli military rule on Palestinians is the continuous denial of geographic continuity and of imposed isolation. Travel to and from the discontinuous West Bank and Gaza is restricted severely through a system of military outposts and travel permits. This obstructs attempts to foster collaboration

and dialogue among oPT inhabitants. During the second *intifada* starting in 2000 Israel intensified its geographic segregation policy by posting hundreds of military checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and erecting the Segregation Wall to seal off the oPT from Israel (Ibheis & Ayad, 2012; [www.miftah.org](http://www.miftah.org)). The effect on Palestinian education has been devastating. The Wall effectively deprived entire villages from access to schools and learning centres. Subsequently, the goals of MoE officials in the oPT were reduced to ensuring basic student and teacher access and provision instead of seeking new forms of intra-national dialogue and collaboration.

The Ministry has since had to resort to emergency planning. Nearly half of the teaching force and thousands of students have had to be reassigned to schools that are more accessible, and pose less risk and harm to individual safety (Kassis, 2004). This compromised the suitability of teacher assigning and disrupted student life. In times of crisis MoE policy-making is forced to respond to Israeli military measures, thus diverting attention away from national strategic planning and long-term educational goals. Consequently, the entire Palestinian education system has been disrupted and student learning severely compromised. Student enrollment has declined (Ibheis & Ayad, 2012), particularly among females whose parents fear the dangers of travel and soldier harassment at military checkpoints ([www.stopthewall.org](http://www.stopthewall.org)). Pushing an entire nation into survival mode is not conducive to educational or pedagogic innovation. Thus is the current state of the education system in the oPT.

## **Conclusion**

Education in Palestine remains a site of international and regional political struggle. Forms of control have varied in accordance with the needs of the colonial governing powers. In post-Accord Palestine, Israeli military authorities currently enforce severely repressive measures that have led to the deterioration of educational quality and in some cases exclusion.

The next section of this study explores a group of Palestinians' views of the current state of education in the oPT, and provides an opportunity to illuminate the power hierarchies inherent in social relations and cultural norms that operate within the field of education.

## **Section 2: Views from Progressive Palestinians**

This section explores the views of progressive-minded members of the Palestinian community about the current state of education and emancipatory alternatives. By progressive is meant individuals calling for social and political change for improved living conditions and social justice. Fourteen participants were interviewed; respondents included university faculty, Palestinian education NGO heads, political activists, an MoE official, a theatre director and a parent (see Acknowledgements). There was a broad range of perspectives that converged on the dire need for significant changes to the education system in the oPT. Conversely, there was less unanimity in the views expressed about the nature and aims of that change. Respondents used this opportunity to voice their critique of oppressive pedagogical practices and the socio-cultural norms that reinforce them. The key themes that emerged are discussed below under the headings *main problems, the focus of change, and emancipatory alternatives*. During the interviews, care was taken to avoid influencing participants' understanding of emancipatory education. Extracted quotes refer to the general category of the speaker in order maintain participant anonymity.

### **Main problems**

Respondents identified several problems with the education scene in Palestine. Two main sub-themes emerged throughout the interviews. They are discussed below under the headings of '*educational outcomes*' and '*pedagogical practice*'.

#### ***Educational outcomes***

Interviewees disclosed an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction with educational outcomes. For most this was reflected in deteriorating levels of student performance in both primary and secondary sectors. The following comment reflects a common view.

*Public schools are failing our youth. The quality of education has been worsening rapidly... Students are promoted to higher grades despite inabilities to read and write... It's intolerable.*

(University faculty member)

Basic formal provision is considered substandard and incapable of providing basic literacy. It was said that inferior educational outcomes are leading to low student performance in the tertiary sector. Several university faculty members reported that

their students are not capable of performing basic analytical and communication skills necessary for a post-secondary education. Alarming, one indicated that up to 90 per cent of her students did not meet basic university level academic standards:

*The vast majority of my students can't do a research paper. They're so used to memorisation that they can't think for themselves. There is no self-confidence or ability to think critically. How can they advance in life or contribute to society? How did we let things get so bad?*

(University faculty member)

Many decried the emphasis on transmission modes of teaching that lead to what Freire called 'the banking concept of education' (1970, p. 72) in formal educational settings. Young adults are conceptually challenged when invited to think critically about academic subjects or life conditions. Alternative ways of thinking and knowing are not fostered by current education structures:

*There is a single correct answer engrained in the minds of people.... It's difficult for them to think of the bigger picture.*

(University faculty member)

An educational culture characterised by docility and silence perpetuates a single, authority-instilled way of thinking and meaning making. Institutional practices in formal education obstruct the advancement of criticality and socio-political awareness by the practice of standardised assessment within a culture of performativity.

Some respondents noted that the kind of education that facilitates critical thinking and independent, self-directive learning is simply not available to the vast majority of the Palestinian population. The very few private schools that offer such approaches are exclusive to a select socio-economic class. Graduates of these schools end up leaving Palestine for better career prospects elsewhere, thereby stripping the country of potential contributions to Palestinian society. This maintains inequalities of educational opportunity within Palestinian society and widens socio-economic disparities.

The majority of respondents criticised the worthlessness of learning in much of the education system. Students and youth are subjected to information that is more or less removed from their daily realities and needs. What is learned in schools and universities emanates from within these institutions and is rarely relatable to the world outside. The following comment encapsulates this view.

*There's a gap between what youth are taught and what matters to them. The whole thing sometimes seems useless. It's a waste of time and effort, and a great loss of potential.*

(Political activist)

There is an overall sense among respondents that Palestinian youth are being increasingly disenfranchised from their own learning and growth. The critical stage in the intellectual and social formation of children and youth, when education might foster critical thinking and social awareness, is being squandered by a national curriculum ill suited to the needs of a subjugated people. In its place, top-down transmission forms of teaching reinforce the development of passive, obedient adults stripped of human agency and the capacity to change the means of their oppressive conditions.

### ***Pedagogical practice***

Equally unanimous was respondents' dissatisfaction with the nature and aims of teaching, especially in state-run schools. With the overwhelming majority of students attending such schools, this was repeatedly cited as a fundamental impediment to providing an empowering, critical education to the vast population of Palestinian students and youth. Several reasons were given for this.

Out-dated pedagogic practices are viewed as the main reason behind the deteriorating state of teaching and learning. The majority of respondents emphasised the antiquated, transmission modes of teaching and their incompatibility with the needs of a generation of students and youth that have increasingly wider access to information than ever before. This view was clearly expressed by an NGO director working in the field of education.

*Teachers are still enforcing authoritarian styles of teaching. This isn't working with the new generation. Kids are more knowledgeable than some teachers these days. This needs addressing.*

(NGO director)

Top-down, non-participatory modes of teaching were identified as reinforcing a passive, submissive approach to learning and life. Criticality and independent thinking cannot be fostered through undemocratic ways of teaching where the teacher adopts an all-knowing role. Rather, teachers should act as facilitators of learning and use pedagogic approaches that enhance student agency, foster critical thinking and enable students to become familiar with alternative and opposing views.

Some respondents cited the MoE's teacher policies as a factor in the continuation of antiquated styles of teaching. Specifically, teacher recruitment, preparation and

development were identified as inadequate for supporting critical educational practices in appropriate for the oPT.

*The Ministry did not establish adequate teacher recruitment and education policies. What it has is a collection of foreign programmes that don't relate to the Palestinian context.*

(University faculty member)

Although this and similar views represent a reformist vision for the education system, they nonetheless identify non-indigenous programme importation as a detriment to effective teacher policies. This is an encouraging sign and foregrounds calls for a locally-based agenda for educational change to generate a distinctly Palestinian educational vision.

Members of the education community and Palestinian educational NGOs were generally critical of the Ministry's reliance on foreign aid. Internationally sponsored teacher educational programmes are believed to have disoriented teachers and had little or no impact on teacher development.

*The Ministry has burdened teachers with training programmes that are ineffective and unsuited for the Palestinian setting. It's not all the teachers' fault.*

(University faculty member)

Despite critical views of MoE policies, some respondents are sympathetic, citing the financial strains under which the Ministry is forced to operate.

*The Ministry has no funding and so welcomes NGO initiatives to develop teachers. But there are so many agendas out there and teachers are already burdened with high workloads. I'm not sure who is to blame.*

(NGO director)

Issues related to Ministry teacher policies recurred frequently during interviews. Unsuitable, ill-advised policies and reliance on foreign funding were repeatedly mentioned as responsible for the declining state of pedagogical practice and teacher quality. Regardless of where the responsibility lies, the majority specified traditional pedagogic practices as a fundamental obstacle to student learning and social growth.

Top-down teaching practices are seen to reflect a set of authoritarian beliefs and attitudes that are endemic of the larger socio-cultural scene. Some respondents acknowledged the prevalence of norms and values that reinforce authoritarian practices.

*The challenge is that the teachers themselves are products of the society that needs changing. It's a dilemma and I don't know if there's an answer.*

(Political activist)

Despite respondents' critical stance on teaching methods, there is recognition of the complex socio-economic forces working against teachers and the teaching profession. Teachers are regarded as underpaid, undervalued, and underrepresented. Some questioned the capacity for such individuals to facilitate an emancipatory pedagogy without undergoing a revolution against repressive socio-cultural norms and practices themselves. Several interviewees were painfully aware that, as products of a society in need of fundamental social-cultural transformation, teachers can hardly be expected to act as change agents for a socially just society without support for their own consciousness raising. In the oPT the reality remains that teaching practices are failing to empower individuals and communities or to promote praxis, all precursors to social and political change.

### **The focus of change**

Respondents were mixed about the kinds of change they would like to see taking place in the Palestinian education system. Suggestions include increasing the educational budget, improving teacher salaries, revamping the national curriculum, eradicating nepotism and political favouritism in public offices, restructuring teacher education, reforming pedagogy, and dismantling schooling altogether and replacing it with individualised, self-directed learning. Respondents focused more on formal provision than informal ones. Key recommendations are outlined below.

A comprehensive and unified Palestinian educational vision and strategy was deemed essential by several members. It was hoped that this would counter the effects of an incoherent and unsuccessful education reform policy. The following comment illustrates this point.

*We're not coming up with solutions. There isn't much of a [Palestinian] vision. The Ministry doesn't have anyone who could come up with a vision... You need individuals from outside the Ministry. There's no magic solution. We need to sit together and come up with a plan.*

(University faculty member)

The call for an inter-Palestinian dialogue for the future of education implies a new, inclusive direction. Several other respondents called for finding common ground between Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza. In the current climate of political division, religious difference and social exclusion, it may be a formidable

challenge to adequately represent all facets of Palestinian society. Nevertheless, for several it is foundational and therefore a necessary starting point.

Whether calling for change from within or without the system, most respondents were unequivocal about the need to focus on teachers as mediators of social change. Transforming teachers' values and beliefs appears to be key to developing a pedagogy of empowerment, which is reflected in many of the respondents' comments.

*We need groups of teachers with progressive thinking, and someone to lead them and invest in them. Then work from within the curriculum, with different pedagogy and assessment criteria that enable authentic and relevant learning.*

(NGO director)

*Even if you provide venues for informal ways of learning, unless teachers are committed to change it won't work... We need to start with the teachers. They need to change.*

(Theatre director)

The focus by nearly all participants on developing teacher capacity reflects the significance of human resources for facilitating educational change. This was true for both formal and informal education provision. A fundamental transformation was said to be required of the nature of teaching. Implicit were calls for changes in teacher attitudes and values from authoritarianism to democratic principles.

Some respondents were generally pessimistic about the possibility of realising tangible, wide-scale change, citing 'insurmountable' socio-cultural factors impeding such processes. Those that were more hopeful called for the dismantling of disempowering political structures, and for Palestinians to reclaim ownership of the means and processes of teaching and learning.

*We need to put Oslo [Peace Accords] aside. We need a revolution against the curriculum... We need to insert the arts - music, painting and the theatre to make change. If we don't do that it will be a catastrophe. We saw how this can make change in students and teachers. It creates a soft revolution.*

(Theatre director)

A 'soft revolution' in formal education provision is seen as having the potential to diffuse progressive social values and ways of thinking within society as a whole. Albeit a slow process, it promises to embed the means and processes of raising awareness for social and political transformation of the norms and practices that continue to hinder social freedoms and individual self-expression.

However, those who called for a drastic departure from mainstream education institutions did not see the viability of working through formal structures, as expressed in the comment quoted below.

*Education needs to be inciting, agitating against the current situation through informal not formal education.*

(University faculty member)

Advocates of experiential and problem based forms of learning called for a complete transformation of the means of learning. An alternative indigenous approach is proposed in place of schooling and teaching. One respondent, a leading educator calls for a methodology of complete independent, self-inspired and self-guided learning in place of schooling.

*What's practical is to create your own learning. The problem is in the medium. We need learning that develops naturally, without control [schools, teachers]... Education needs to be purposeful, self-directive and independent of structures.*

(NGO founder and former university faculty member)

The very notion of a medium is viewed here as antithetical to self-directed and purposeful learning that involves collaboration and action. Central to this approach is learning that empowers and fosters regeneration, eliminating reliance on outside agents. Although an uncommon perspective, it goes straight to the heart of the idea of emancipatory education where individuals and communities create knowledge and base their learning on their needs and realities.

### **Emancipatory alternatives**

Respondents were less forthcoming with proposals for concrete emancipatory solutions. Most gave general, overarching recommendations that provide no practical alternative to the current educational scenario. This suggests the absence of a unified philosophy and vision of education. It may also indicate the lack of a clear and shared understanding of the concept of emancipatory education.

Those who proposed concrete options identified emancipatory pedagogic practices among them, as illustrated by this comment from a respondent from an educational NGO.

*We can all as humans be part of the educational process and part of the choices within the education system. It should be diverse and not top-down or*

*judgmental... have open horizons for dialogue and group learning... independence, critical thinking... a person who can express himself, engage with social issues. This is what Freire suggests, that we work with people from what is available. It should enable people to rise to a better place from within their society, which they're familiar with.*

(NGO director)

This is a call for implementing organic pedagogic practices that relate to immediate social and political issues. It refers to inclusive and authentic learning that emanates from local needs, empowers individuals and communities to improve their living conditions thus freeing them from reliance on outside agents. Another interviewee argued against adopting a purely Freirian pedagogic model and instead building on it by emphasising the local religious and spiritual beliefs that call for resistance to oppressive structures.

A further concrete recommendation was to establish viable emancipatory educational programmes that are documented and disseminated broadly in the Palestinian community.

*The better solution is to create successful models... groups of people working together... I don't think the solution is through the system; rather through independent initiatives trying to create successful models... Even if we work with the Ministry we should create experimental models and study them and see how they work.*

(University faculty member)

Creating successful models that can be shared by establishing networks of emancipatory-minded educators was amongst the more practical recommendations. One educator likened this to planting seeds all over Palestine and watching them grow. Central to sustainability is robust research to investigate the extent to which such models are having emancipatory impact. Enhanced human agency, increased collaboration, action and reflection on outcomes are among the features that can be evaluated.

Given the limitations of the Palestinian context, 'working with what we have,' as one educator put it, may best be operationalised through small-scale, locally sourced initiatives. Some interviewees suggested Palestinian NGOs as being best suited to conduct emancipatory educational projects. The reasons for this include the freedom and flexibility to engage in experimental approaches, their non-direct political associations and their organic links to the local community through Palestinian actors.

## **Conclusion**

The overall tenor of the interviews indicates considerable dissatisfaction with established methods of teaching and learning outcomes in the oPT. Recommendations for change in the education system are generally at the technical level, being concerned with skills, academic learning and aptitudes for competing in the market. The value of reproducing capitalistic structures tends to be assumed rather than made subject to critique. This falls short of a vision for emancipatory education or a critical pedagogy. Few respondents suggested informal approaches to teaching and learning. While most considered education as a way to improve the condition of Palestinian people, the extent to which it was viewed as a means to transform repressive socio-cultural and political structures and economic disparities was minimal. The following section describes initiatives and programmes in Palestine that feature emancipatory education components.

### **Section 3: Palestinian Emancipatory Education Initiatives**

For over two decades there have been Palestinian initiatives focused on emancipatory approaches to teaching and learning. While some have been more successful and sustainable than others, they all mark advancement in educational provision and opportunities. More recently, new programmes have arisen in Palestine that extend the range of emancipatory models. This section of the study provides a description of programmes that include some that predate Palestinian educational self-governance and others more recently established. The nine organisations and individual initiatives listed below are presented in this section.

1. Tamer Institute for Community Education
2. Salman Halabi Forum
3. Teacher Creativity Centre
4. Afkar for Educational and Cultural Development
5. Campus in Camps
6. Ziad Khaddash
7. American School of Palestine
8. Filastiniyat
9. Ashtar Theatre

What follows is a brief overview of their initiatives and programmes.

#### **1. Tamer Institute for Community Education**

Self-expression among youth; the Colourful Neighbourhood  
Ramallah, West Bank and Gaza City, Gaza Strip, oPT  
[www.tamerinst.org](http://www.tamerinst.org)

The Tamer Institute for Community Education is a not-for-profit organisation founded on the belief that the absence of environments that foster learning and critical thinking are the root cause of the deterioration of quality performance and the lack of development in modern Palestinian society. Tamer was founded in 1989 by Dr. Munir Fasheh to promote community education. This coincided with the rise of grassroots movements in response to Israeli repression and severe restriction of education provision during the first *intifada*. At the time neighbourhood committees were established to oversee the continuation of formal education through popular means. However, Tamer remained critical of the transmission mode of teaching that does not promote critical thinking and transformational learning aimed at raising awareness of the socio-cultural and political forces of oppression. The Institute saw a

need for an approach that facilitated individual and community empowerment to change the social and political conditions of Palestinian society in the oPT. While Tamer did not underestimate the oppressive and destructive impact of the Israeli occupation, it sought to foster change intended to counter oppressive structures, both political and hegemonic.

Tamer works with children and young adults to promote reading and the expressive arts including art, drama and theatre, in order to create opportunities for reflection and self-expression. By focusing on youth as the hope for the future, the Institute seeks to provide spaces and opportunities for young Palestinians to narrate their personal stories in order to foster agential practices among. Explorations of personal experiences through creative writing and reading are one of Tamer's approaches to self-empowerment and personal growth. Youth group programmes are similarly employed as a vehicle to cement community and social capital among youth groups that feel marginalised.

Tamer implements its vision through a variety of programmes that include:

- The 'National Reading Campaign in the Palestinian Society' is represented by the slogan: 'Something Awaits You in this World, Stand for it!' It is a campaign that aims to 'irritate silence and stillness, and to shake the feelings of weakness and marginalisation [calling] out for community members to read despite our difficult living situation.' A 20 year old volunteer said this:

*When I started participating in Tamer's the National Week for Reading I had no idea that I would feel such internal change. Things have changed in a significant way for me.*

- The bi-monthly supplement in Al-Ayyam, a major Palestinian newspaper, is led by an executive and editing committees made up of young people between the ages of 14 and 21.
- The Kharabesh Gallery is a cultural space for young artists to express their creativity.
- 'Serb,' flock in Arabic, is a programme that supports a group of young people who use drama and photography to examine what is happening in Palestine. They travel around the country documenting what they see.
- The Tamer Institute also has a publishing unit that produces books containing stories for children and young adults. These books engage young people and stimulate their imaginations, and have won several international awards.

The comment quoted below illustrates the transformative power of publishing for young people.

*I was merely a student living in Jerusalem, with hopes, dreams and personal identity. I always doubted that one day I'd be able to express it. When I wrote for the first time, I felt embarrassed and feared showing what I'd written to anyone. Yet when I sent it to Yara'at they published it. Since then, I've been writing and writing, and publishing without embarrassment or fear. At that time, I joined as a member of the Yara'at editorial board, and have since been editing material and writings sent by youth from all over Palestine.*

(Shireen Yasin, 20 years, Jerusalem)

One of most innovative and creative projects led by Tamer is the Colourful Neighbourhood in the Al-Zaitoun Quarter of Gaza City. While not being explicitly an educational programme, it is nevertheless an emancipatory activity, which has a great deal to tell us about community education. The Colourful Neighborhood is a unique example of a community's determination to transform their suffering and destruction into beauty and joy. The project is a response to Tamer's call for the Building Hope initiative to beautify Gaza. Residents of the Deir Al-Latin neighborhood came together to transform their environment from one characterised by gloom to one of optimism. They did this with the support of Tamer by painting the walls, alleyways and plant pots of the neighborhood in a kaleidoscope of bright and cheerful colors. Since then Deir Al-Latin has become an attraction for residents of adjacent neighborhoods and curious Gazans.

The project was led by Mohammad Al-Sa'eedi, a paint labourer in his 50's who took it upon himself to improve his and his family's living conditions in the way that he could. Drawing on his talents in the art of decor, Mohammad, also known by friends as the 'Doctor of colour selection,' decided to beautify the outside of his home by painting it in 'happy' colors. Using affordable local materials supplied by Tamer and local residents, and assisted by Institute members and volunteers, his work caught the attention of his neighbors who asked to join in. Eventually, the entire neighborhood of Deir Al-Latin came together in a collective endeavor that reaffirmed their individual and collective agency in the face of the continuing Israeli siege. The project brought together all segments, young and old, men and women, with all contributing in kind or in labour. Eventually, the alleyways of more than 50 homes were transformed into an oasis of aesthetic delight, where plastic buckets and tires became decorative pieces, and where dirty walls covered with political graffiti became neutral grounds for all to enjoy. This replaced previous images and slogans

that fomented political division and factionalism, a scene that permeates the Gazan landscape.

Tamer's work in the Colourful Neighbourhood was taken up in several other locations in Gaza such as Al-Shati refugee camp, caravans in Khoza'a and the Seaside Park, where happy colours replaced dreary scenery. This attests to the power of community action to enable individuals and entire communities to transform their realities into visions of the possible. Drawing on local strengths and employing available resources, with the help of Tamer Gazans learned that they are independently capable of changing undesirable conditions for better ones. This liberates them from the need for outside agents, whether Palestinian political figures and representatives or foreign experts and funders, to act on their behalf. Below are comments that illuminate the experiences of some of the Deir Al-Latin residents:

*We used bright colors to inject some happiness and joy into the lives of the young and old. This is very therapeutic, especially the young who are devastated by wars and destruction. So I call upon all the people of Gaza towards an intellectual revolution, towards the aesthetic.*

*Seeing people coming together was a beautiful thing. I wish all of Gaza could cooperate in this way.*

*This is a message to the world that Gaza deserves life and beauty.*

*Gaza is not a graveyard for the dead. It is creative in the art of life.*

*We broke daily routines. We challenged our reality. We showed the world that we are a life-loving people, despite our miserable conditions. Through these colours and neighbourhood cooperation we proved our love for life.*

*It made us forget the wars that took place... something pleasurable.*

Tamer's Building Hope initiative demonstrates very well the power of collective action around an aspect of culture. At the centre of this activity is the exercise of will and agency within the context of social solidarity. This is an emancipatory initiative unlike any of its kind in Gaza where an act of hope has replaced a landscape of despair and powerlessness.

## **2. Salman Halabi Forum**

Popular University

Ramallah area, West Bank, oPT

decolonizenow@gmail.com

The Salman Halabi Forum (SHF) for colonial studies and knowledge liberation is part of an informal popular university that strives to liberate knowledge production and dissemination from elite and institutionalised centres of higher learning. SHF was founded in 2012 by former Birzeit University faculty member Khaled OdetAllah, and a group of educators and youth who were disaffected from mainstream universities and colleges. Largely based in the Ramallah area, programme activities are founded on the centrality of the Palestinian cause and have two aims: the study and illumination of colonial systems of knowledge in a manner that transcends academic research without negating it; stimulating the development of emancipatory educational models drawn from international and local experiences. The focus on national and indigenous culture is aimed at generating discussions about contact with colonial systems of oppression and subjugation. The Forum takes its name after an early 19<sup>th</sup> century rebel from the Levant who travelled to Egypt through historic Palestine to assassinate the leader of the colonial French army with a knife that he took from Gaza.

The Forum has two educational objectives. The first is to subject the colonial regime in Palestine to serious study in order to reveal and analyse its tools and instruments. The second is to draw on revolutionary and emancipatory experiences for raising a combative awareness among people that takes the Palestine cause as the focal point for any project. Most topics and discussions take a largely Islamic viewpoint.

The Forum rests on the assumption that knowledge is a right for all. Accordingly, attendance is free of charge with the only requirement being regular participation. Provision takes the form of lectures and seminar series led by knowledgeable individuals. Programmes are announced on its Facebook page and through local media. The Forum rejects both institutional awards such as certificates or degrees, and the concept of academic titles. SHF lectures are available on YouTube.

### **3. Teacher Creativity Centre**

Democracy promotion

Ramallah, West Bank and Gaza City, Gaza Strip, oPT

[www.teachercc.org](http://www.teachercc.org)

The Teacher Creativity Centre (TCC) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation devoted to promoting access for Palestinian children and youth to quality education in a manner that ensures commitment to and integration of the values and standards of human rights and democratic practices. TCC was established in 1995 by a group of teachers who felt that the first *intifada* had changed teacher-student relations in the oPT to a more participatory, cooperative model, but which reverted to a more authoritative one following the establishment of the PNA. The Centre aims to reinstate a more participatory approach to teaching. Thus, TCC owes its origins to a desire to transform pedagogy towards emancipatory practices.

TCC is founded on the belief that ‘democracies need democrats.’ This insight forms the core precept of their civic education programme. Programmes are aimed at creating an informed Palestinian citizenry that is actively involved in governance. To do so, TCC strives to equip Palestinian students and youth with necessary competencies, locally sourced knowledge, and the skills and tools that enable responsible and effective intervention in the political and civic aspects of Palestinian public life. Concurrently, TCC works with the MoE to fortify the national curriculum’s civic studies with programmes and activities that enrich democratic practices and raise social and political awareness. Focus is given to enhancing teacher capacities and skills in promoting human rights in the schools.

TCC’s civic education programme works by enabling teachers to develop children and young people’s civic disposition and confidence, and civic knowledge and skills. This is done through the following four sub-programmes:

*Foundations of democracy:* This is concerned with building the capacities of teachers and school students in ‘Concepts and Foundations of Democracy.’ The sub-programme is focused on the concepts of justice, responsibility, authority and privacy. Case studies and scenarios are employed to generate activities designed for a better understanding of these concepts.

*Citizenship:* Through problem-solving techniques, students start to identify and list developmental problems and the concerns of their communities. After selecting the most urgent problems, students start gathering information on the public policies and legislation related to this concern or problem. Then students are required to suggest solutions for this concern or problem, selecting finally the most applicable one

through voting. This is followed by dialogue with various social and development actors to obtain social recognition for the selected solution, and advocacy for its adoption.

*Democratic debate:* This is concerned with building the capacities of school students in debating techniques, public speaking, research and other related topics. Good listening skills and respect for others' opinions are emphasised.

*Social audit:* Students are empowered and coached to monitor and audit developmental projects implemented by the government in their communities to combat corruption. This promotes values of accountability and transparency in society, and ways of holding government accountable to the citizens.

TCC's continued operation for 20 years now attests to its contribution to the democratisation of Palestinian society through the development of teacher capacities for facilitating and enriching civic studies and values. An example of the social audit stands out in the village of Deir Ballout where a group of 9<sup>th</sup> grade girls conducted a project called 'sarkhit niswa,' Arabic for 'women's shout', in which students exposed the exploitation of female farmers, who make up 90% of the village's labor force. The girls invited municipality and ministry officials, confronting them with socio-economic injustices faced by these female farmers. The project created an environment that nurtured social and political awareness within the entire school and in the village, and provided an opportunity to advance gender equality and voice for a group of female farmers and students.

#### **4. Afkar for Educational and Cultural Development**

Palestinian National Debate Championship

Ramallah, West Bank, oPT

[www.afkar.ps](http://www.afkar.ps)

Afkar, ideas in Arabic, is an NGO founded in 2009 and currently run by a team of dedicated teachers and educators dedicated to contributing to the improvement of the educational and cultural systems in Palestine. By enhancing the quality of education in schools, universities, summer camps and other educational and cultural centres, students can become proactive members of society, capable of positively influencing their communities. Afkar strives to cooperate with national, regional and international actors for more effective learning development.

Afkar has been primarily working to develop two pillars that are fundamental to its mission. The first is student empowerment and self-esteem necessary for exercising

leadership for human rights, democracy and the promotion of civic values. The second is capacity building for local educational partners to foster safe, creative and engaging learning environments for Palestinian youth. Afkar adopts a participatory approach to education where teaching shifts to a more engaging dialogue between facilitator and learner. The approach features a process of reflection and action, which, according to their programme manager ‘requires the ability to educate by valuing the contributions of the learner.’ A central feature of this approach is student development of critical thinking and analytical skills.

Afkar employs debate as a means to foster a culture of dialogue and tolerance of opposing views and ideological positions. Students are taught the techniques of rational debate through the development of analytical and critical skills. In 2009 Afkar initiated a debating programme in four state-run schools. The programme’s initial success led the MoE to expand it the following year into 140 schools. By 2012 the Palestinian National Debate Championship (PNDC) was inaugurated and conducted in all 17 government directorates.

PNDC is a year long debating programme that coaches 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students to participate in national debates. In addition to developing higher order thinking, the programme focuses on the role of values, practices and attitudes in arguments and reason. Topics are generated by students and based on local realities in order to foster engagement and experiential learning. The programme works in the following way: Afkar works with the Heads of Student Activities in each Directorate, who in turn train ten teachers in ten different school. Teachers then select and coach ten students on the techniques of debate. Students participate in intra-directorate debates, from which four are selected and given advanced workshops for national competition between the 17 directorates.

PNDC continues to have wide-reaching impact. Over one hundred schools and more than a thousand students are involved annually. The programme is supported by more than 200 supervisors and coordinators within the participating schools. Debating clubs have been established in schools to promote sustainability. The following comment from a supervisor illustrates the positive response from the professionals involved.

*For the first time ever, I have received fruitful and enjoyable training that boosted my spirit and willingness to work hard with my colleagues.*

(A Directorate Supervisor)

This comment from a student shows the educational potential of this initiative.

*For me, being a debate contestant has given me a great opportunity to discover my abilities in oratory skills which helped me practice my critical thinking skills and encouraged me to read more to be able to logically convince others.*

(A student participant)

There seems to be no doubt that this programme has potential to foster the values of rational dialogue and democratic engagement. The capacity for participatory education is equally enhanced for both students and teachers, and to some degree Directorate officials.

### **5. Campus in Camps**

Popular University in Palestinian refugee camps

Southern West Bank, oPT

[www.campusincamps.ps](http://www.campusincamps.ps)

Campus in Camps (CiC) is an informal university based in Dheisheh refugee camp and set in refugee camps in the southern West Bank. The English term for university in Arabic translates into ‘Al-Jami’ah,’ which literally denotes a public place for assembly. Accordingly, CiC is a public space that seeks to use the adverse political and social conditions of life in refugee camps as transformative learning opportunities for communal-driven interventions. The origins of this programme date back to 2007 when an ongoing dialogue between the UNRWA Camp Improvement Programme, directed by Sandi Hilal, and Munir Fasheh, Alessandro Petti and the refugee camp communities of the southern West Bank matured into CiC. Formally inaugurated in 2011, CiC is a not-for-profit organisation.

CiC aims to join theory and action through praxis to foster an approach to learning in which the environment of the camp becomes a vehicle for learning and involves project-based interventions. Young, motivated Palestinian refugees who are interested in engaging their communities are provided with the intellectual space and necessary infrastructure to facilitate debates and translate them into practical community-driven projects. Activities respond to the communities’ urgent desire to explore and produce new forms of representation that transcend the static and traditional symbols of passivity and poverty to empower individuals and foster social renewal. The CiC structure is constantly reshaped to accommodate the interests and subjects born from the interactions between the participants and the social context at large.

The initiative engaged the first cohort of young participants in a two-year programme. In the first year, members focused mostly on establishing a common language and a common approach through a process of unlearning layers of alienating knowledge. This is achieved through education circles, seminars, lectures and the publication of the Collective Dictionary - a series of publications containing definitions of concepts considered fundamental for the understanding of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps. Academics and guests not from universities give lectures and seminars on citizenship, refugee studies, humanitarianism, gender, research methodologies and public art. The first year culminates in a two-day open public presentation wherein participants develop publications that represent a new form of collective learning and knowledge production.

The second year situates learning as a product of experiential activities and social engagements. Knowledge is created through gatherings, walks, events and urban actions involving direct interaction with camp conditions and communities. The camp is transformed from a purely humanitarian space to an active political arena in which a variety of 'common spaces' are created. New spatial and social formations emerge that transcend the idea of the camp as a site of dispossession, poverty and political subjugation. Among these spaces are the 'garden for socializing,' the 'square as a common learning area' and the 'pathways: a venue for reframing narratives.'

Although CiC remains in its infancy, the first two-year programme represents a unique and successful experiment in relocating university learning from the elite and exclusive confines of the institution to open spaces where daily experiences are lived. Knowledge building is reclaimed by common people and is shifted to places of daily activities. Programme structure and activities are contingent upon changing community needs and realities. The following statements reflect the experience of participants:

*Campus in Camps is a place where everything around us has new meanings and dimensions that are connected to the reality of our lives.*

(Ahmad Lahham)

*It is the only place where the doors of creativity are open.*

(Needa Hamouz)

*A place where we meet to learn to unlearn and become co-authors of what we say and define.*

(Isshaq Al Barbary)

*It is a trip into reality, where we can work on ourselves without outside influences. It is where I found the spirit I had been searching for.*

(Ayat Al Turshan)

It is evident that through this radical reworking of the idea of the university that refugees in camps are empowered to create the kind of knowledge that serves their needs and enables higher awareness of their daily life conditions. CiC attests to the power of transforming sites of political dispossession and marginalization into places of the possible and regenerative.

## **6. Ziad Khaddash**

Critical pedagogy

Amin Al-Huseini Boys' School

Al-Bireh/Ramallah, West Bank, oPT

Ziad Khaddash is a published short story writer who for 19 years has been teaching Arabic language and creative writing to middle grade students in a state-run boy's school in Al-Bireh, West Bank. Ziad is an example of an individual attempting single handedly to foster emancipatory teaching and learning inside a public school classroom situated within a conservative community. He employs critical pedagogy to engage his adolescent students in transformative learning.

For Mr. Khaddash one of the fundamental aims of education is to enable individuals to exercise their creative potential in order to enjoy life. This he believes is being obstructed by the current Palestinian education systems through top-down forms of instruction and authoritarian-styled classroom and school environments. The repetitive, routine nature of the academic year and monotonous professional interaction is equally stifling to teacher creativity. For him schools are prisons for teachers and learners alike; he considers that they are equally victimised by restrictive educational mandates and repressive socio-cultural structures.

Mr. Khaddash's teaching methods are highly unusual in formal education settings. He challenges orthodoxy by creating learning opportunities that deviate from the routine teaching and learning practices and facilitate 'seeing the unusual in the usual.' Some of his methods are outlined in brief below:

- Planning with students a joint escape from school by jumping over the fence as an act of protest against the authoritarian schooling system.

- Going with students on an excursion to the historic Palestinian city Jaffa, in modern-day Israel, to witness the ocean in order to broaden imaginary horizons.
- Conducting a lesson while having students stand on chairs to question the normal.
- Having students scream at the top of their voices to express rage and to experience the aftermath.

Mr. Khaddash's methods are highly purposeful, whereby he explains thoroughly to students the aims behind such activities. Far from merely cathartic exercises, he incorporates reflection and critical thinking to enable students to 'comprehend something new' and shift traditional modes of thinking. After exercises representing acts of protest, students are guided to express their position, defend it and fight for it. This is done through narrative writing.

To advance students' literary creativity, Mr. Khaddash has established the Lovers of Mahmoud Darwish Club, named after the prominent Palestinian poet, which aims to enhance students' self-confidence, cultivate creativity and release individuality, aspects that Mr. Khaddash believes are being neglected by both the school and home.

Before employing unconventional teaching approaches that involve damage to school property or students subversion, Mr. Khaddash confers with the school principal for approval. Hence, activities are thoroughly considered for potential risks or threats to student and school safety. The principal's support is instrumental for facilitating such activities. On his part, the principal consults with Ministry officials. Mr. Khaddash indicates that the latter's response is usually neutral, preferring to maintain equivocal about his initiatives.

Mr. Khaddash's work has had a profound influence on students and colleagues. Videos of his pedagogic approach and of student accounts, posted on YouTube, show self-assured, agential and critically-minded students expressing themselves confidently and with purpose. A former student of his, currently at university, declares that because of Mr. Khaddash's teaching his 'thinking has no boundaries.'

Mr. Khaddash's critical pedagogy has also transformed the school principal's perceptions of student capacities for creativity and innovation, especially in relation to those whose level of academic performance has been perceived to be average. Less engaged adolescents have been transformed into active, productive students in

school. The Ministry, however, has remained uninvolved in Mr. Khaddash's initiatives at Amin Al-Huseini Boy's School, showing neither signs of support or disapproval.

## **7. American School of Palestine**

Teachers Leading the Way

Al-Bireh/Ramallah, West Bank, oPT

[www.asp.ps](http://www.asp.ps); [www.teacherleadership.org.uk](http://www.teacherleadership.org.uk)

Teachers Leading the Way (TLW) is a programme designed to enable teachers to lead educational change and build locally-relevant professional knowledge at the American School of Palestine (ASP) in Al-Bireh, West Bank. Based on the 'teacher-led development work' methodology (Frost, 2013), the programme enables teachers to collaborate within and between schools in order to transform the conditions of teaching and learning. It uses strategies, tools and techniques developed within the UK-based HertsCam Network ([www.hertscam.org.uk](http://www.hertscam.org.uk)) designed to empower teacher teachers to think critically and independently, act agentially, collaborate with school and community members and build school-based knowledge. Tools and techniques were adapted by ASP members to meet the needs of the school's, and Palestinian socio-cultural and educational context. TLW is an extension of the International Teacher Leadership initiative supported by activists and researchers in Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and UK (Frost, 2011; [www.teacherleadership.org.uk](http://www.teacherleadership.org.uk)). The programme was introduced recently in Egypt and Palestine by local educators who recognised in ITL an internationally adaptive, context-friendly and locally-sourced framework for emancipating teachers in resource-limited, disempowered social and political settings (Ramahi and Eltemamy, 2014).

TLW is predicated on the key values of moral purpose and human agency, where teachers are supported to exercise leadership in the drive for context-relevant community-driven learning. Leadership is conceived as a non-hierarchical, participatory practice of influence that invites all teachers, regardless of role, status and authority, to take action to improve teaching practices and student learning. Teachers are not assigned a topic or problem from management but are free to choose their own concern to focus on in their project.

TLW is a year-long school-based intervention guided by a framework that offers strategies, procedures and tools to guide teachers through their leadership of development projects initiated and designed by themselves. Participation is voluntary

with groups ranging between eight and 15 teachers and mid-level school management. An experienced member of the ASP staff guides programme activities, which include group sessions, individual supervisions, network events and an annual conference. Participation in these is recorded in a portfolio of evidence that leads to certification. The programme is cost-effective which encourages school adoption and the convenience of being school-based facilitates teacher participation.

Interim findings from the first year of TLW development at ASP indicate the extent to which the programme has been successful in empowering teachers to lead educational change and transform their views of learning, precepts of emancipatory learning (Ramahi, 2015a). Participants report a shift in learning from a purely outcomes-oriented view of a set of predetermined knowledge to a self-selected, self-directed and self-produced process-led approach to inquiry where the activity of learning supersedes the end results (forthcoming Ramahi, 2015b).

Bellow is a sample of teachers' changed attitudes since joining the TLW programme.

*It's like someone who was shackled and this program removed these restraints and opened the door for me to work freely. I will obtain outcomes that I want without being afraid ... Now, this program opened the way for my ideas to be investigated in practice.*

*A major transformation has taken place in my thinking. The idea now has to emanate from me and not be ready made from elsewhere. This for me is the biggest thing. I am the source of ideas. After I've collected the information properly then I will come up with some correct solution.*

*Our society doesn't allow us to think on our own or express our individual thoughts. All of a sudden I'm going to solve my own problems. I'm the owner of the idea and the solution... I'm doing this for the first time.*

Evidently, in one school in Palestine teachers are responding positively to the opportunity to exercise leadership and act agentially to improve teaching and learning. There is ample evidence to suggest the development of individual freedom, intellectual transformation and a break from the restraints imposed by authoritarian socio-cultural norms and customs.

## **8. Filastiniyat**

Palestinian University Debate League

Ramallah, West Bank and Gaza City, Gaza Strip, oPT

[www.filastiniyat.org](http://www.filastiniyat.org)

Filastiniyat was founded in 2005 as a not-for-profit media organisation committed to ensuring and supporting the equitable participation of Palestinian women and youth at all levels of public discourse. With branches in both Ramallah and Gaza, Filastiniyat has a wide range of programmes that promote gender awareness, empowerment and voice. These include the Female Journalist Club, the Feminist News Agency and the Filistinyat Online Radio, which provides airtime opportunities for emergent female journalists. It also supports youth related activities such as the Youth Economic and Social Empowerment and Youth Community Empowerment programmes. Similarly, Filastiniyat is involved in media monitoring, research, networking and advocacy.

An important branch of the Youth Community Empowerment programme is the University Debate League (UDL), established in 2013 to promote democratic practice and a culture of dialogue. UDL involved ten universities from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Within each university, UDL team members trained 86 students between the ages of 18 and 25 in debating skills that include critical analysis, argumentation, reason, logic, rationality, proof, acceptance of opposing views and openness to disagreement. Universities proposed participants on the bases of character, achievements, acumen and knowledge. Debates were held within each university from which a 3-student group was selected and given additional training and preparation. A national competition generated finalists from the West Bank and Gaza strip, who then competed for first place.

Filastinyat relaunched UDL in 2014 in an effort to sustain democratic practices and cultures of dialogue amongst youth in university settings. Participants from 2013 were included in the new cohort as a way to embed debating skills among the previous members, foster continuity among participating students and enhance capacity building. Filastiniyat is currently negotiating conducting UDL in 2015.

Participating universities from the West Bank include: Arab American University, An-Najah University, Al-Quds University, Hebron University, Bethlehem University, Al-Ahliyah University, Birzeit University and Palestine Polytechnic University. From the Gaza Strip: Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University and Islamic University. UDL incorporates a single debating team made up of Palestinian students from Israeli universities.

The impact of UDL is best relayed from the point of view of participating students. In Gaza the programme is the first of its kind to promote a culture of dialogue through debate among youth and university students. Some students commented on

the power of dialogue and its connection to their personal development more broadly as illustrated below:

*Dialogue in front of an audience means a stronger character.*

*I have a calmer approach to dialogue. I no longer feel entrenched in my thoughts without having a background about it.*

Some students talked about the impact of participation on their personal and interpersonal skills.

*I have more information and am more capable of analysis.*

*It made a difference in my life on the personal and knowledge levels.*

*It made a difference in my relations with people and within society.*

*It taught me how to convince the other, developed within me a merry personality and the ability to mix with people.*

Involvement in this debating activity clearly helps to foster tolerance for the viewpoints of others as indicated by the following comments.

*It has influenced my life by helping me to see things in more than one way and from different perspectives.*

The fact that this activity involves networking across a number of universities was noted as a particular benefit.

*An activity that we rarely get a chance to experience from within our universities.*

*Despite the competitive atmosphere and the desire to win, participants had a desire to develop good relations with students from other universities.*

Evidently, the UDL is making a significant contribution to civic life in Palestine. Youth are provided opportunities to build personal and interpersonal skills in a wider context than they are accustomed to. One of the many benefits is the awareness of alternative viewpoints and positions on various matters; this is one way to foster socio-political awareness that is hoped to lead to tolerance and diversity, precursors for a more socially just society.

## **9. Ashtar Theatre**

Theatre of the Oppressed

Ramallah and Jerusalem, West Bank, oPT

[www.ashtar-theatre.org](http://www.ashtar-theatre.org)

Ashtar is a theatre production and training organisation with a progressive international vision. The aim is to promote creativity and commitment for socio-cultural and political change through a unique combination of specific training and acting programmes, services and theatre performances. The theatre targets Palestinian youth and international participants, and travels to remote areas in the oPT to reach marginalised people who are unable to access its programmes and services. Ashtar is the vision of Edward Muallem and Iman Aoun, two prominent Palestinian actors who established the theatre in Jerusalem in 1991. Ashtar is the first theatre training organisation for youth of its kind in Palestine.

Through theatre education and performances, Ashtar equips young Palestinians with essential skills that go beyond acting. In addition to an increased level of self-awareness and confidence, Ashtar's training methodology helps develop social skills such as leadership, communication and teamwork skills. Through inclusion of an international dimension, Palestinian youth engage in a global space that fosters cultural exchange and promotes awareness of local and international social and political issues. Commonly passive audiences are invited to participate in the performance and thus transformed into proactive and involved audience members. Theatre at Ashtar is thus a means to unleash the creative potential of youth for individual empowerment and social transformation, a vital and engaging democracy-building tool.

One of the most exciting of Ashtar's programmes is their Theatre of the Oppressed. This draws on the international movement started in Brazil in 1970s, which aimed through drama to create a platform for social and political awareness. Theatre of the Oppressed promotes an interactive dialogue and commitment for socio-political change within Palestinian society by fostering democratic practices among young Palestinians. This is done through its integrated methods approach where audience members are invited to join in performances by contributing their own interpretations and making changes to the storyline.

Ashtar's team annually produces a Forum Theatre play that covers an essential critical topic and is performed widely to Palestinian audiences. Several training programmes are conducted annually in Palestine, the Arab world and internationally, to promote Ashtar's emancipatory vision. Every other year Ashtar celebrates the enhanced creativity of its participants' by holding an International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Participating actors and organisers have joined from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sweden, South Africa, Germany, Portugal, Brazil and Norway. Their experiences have been captured on

video material and serve to illustrate how well the method works among Palestinian audiences. For example, an actor from South Africa commented on the way audience members are invited to join in.

*People stepped in really fast, which was interesting because it's also the context of Palestine. Where in other places people will take a longer time to step in; but I think people stepped in really fast... In contexts where you have intensified oppression people respond faster. Where you have a sense of neutrality, like in Canada and other places people take a longer time to respond.*

(Rozena Maart, international participating actor, South Africa)

An organiser from Brazil highlighted the important role that theatre has in illuminating the reality of oppression.

*To stimulate people to believe, not from people from the outside, but through yourselves. Like this (apartheid) Wall in Palestine that you pass every day, after a year you cannot see it anymore. The theatre lets you see again what you are not able to see... It makes you conscious, aware of the daily reality... We stimulate people to represent their problems and to see their problems because in daily life many women are oppressed but they don't see their problem... We help people to understand the problem and what they could do in the future, the next time it happens.*

(Barbara Santos, General Coordinator, Theatre of the Oppressed, Brazil)

The example of this programme tells us a great deal about the emancipatory power of creative fields such as theatre and the transformative impact it can have on both actor and audience. Ashtar bridges the artistic and the political in a socially engaging medium that unleashes creative potential and raises awareness of pertinent daily realities and conditions.

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued in the first section of this study that the education system in Palestine suffers from a history of external interference and unhelpful 'policy borrowing.' However, the brief descriptions of these 9 organisations and individual initiatives, and the examples of their inspirational home-grown and adapted programmes clearly show potential for informal education to advance emancipatory education in the Palestinian context. They represent a wealth of outstanding practice from which we can derive principles that can guide the development of education policy and innovations in pedagogical practice.

## **Section 4: International Emancipatory Education Initiatives**

This section describes a sample of international approaches to emancipatory education that have potential for adaptation in the Palestinian setting. Programmes were selected according to the extent to which they include elements of emancipatory pedagogy and have implications for the principles on which the development of policy and innovation might be based.

One of the programmes presented here targets students. Schools around the world, mostly in developed and industrialised nations, are adapting to meet the increasingly growing need to expand the sources, processes and tools of learning beyond the school. The programme focuses on developing student agency, leadership and participatory activities through inclusive and action-based forms of learning that relate to student needs and realities. This program was selected for its potential adaptability for different educational and socio-cultural contexts.

As indicated in earlier sections of this study, emancipatory education has to involve consciousness raising for teachers. Increasing access to information through technological advancement renders traditional transmission modes of pedagogy obsolete. Consequently, teaching, in both formal and informal educational settings, has to become facilitative to enable learning and growth. In developed countries there are signs that teacher education and professional development are adapting to meet these changes. For teachers to become agents of emancipatory education they need to embrace a pedagogy focused on empowerment, enhanced agency, collaboration and action. One of the programmes presented below is an international one that employs emancipatory methods to empower teachers to become agents of change in their profession, school community and educational system.

Emancipatory learning is strongly linked to adult and community education. One of the reasons for this is the potential to generate knowledge that is useful to changing the daily lives of people. For adults this is indispensable given life commitments, responsibilities, and time constraints. Unless learning aims to improve present conditions it is unlikely to attract and sustain adult interest. Similarly, communities rarely come together unless there is something to be gained, a common good. Through local empowerment initiatives, marginalized communities and disempowered adults are enabled to influence the factors and decisions that impact their lives. This goes beyond involvement and participation, and implies ownership and action that explicitly aim at social and political change for improved living conditions and representation. The programmes presented here aim to empower

adults and communities through health improvement, developing agricultural enterprise for women and linking faith to action.

Five programmes are presented in outline below in the form of a brief description with reference to further readings.

1. Learn to Lead
2. Alternating Pedagogy
3. Excuse-me, I'm gonna fight for it! (Com licença, vou à luta!)
4. Alternative Learning Systems: Health Literacy
5. The Freire Institute

### **1. Learn to Lead**

[www.learntolead.org.uk](http://www.learntolead.org.uk)

‘Learn to Lead’ (LtoL) is a UK-based programme that breaks new ground in the field of student participation and engagement. LtoL focuses on students’ ability to lead and influence their school community towards school improvement and individual growth. All students are provided with meaningful opportunities to learn and exercise collective agency, making a difference to individual students, schools and the wider community. This creates a greater sense of ownership amongst students, enabling them to learn through taking responsibility, building their confidence and contributing to the individual and collective good. School senior leaders note LtoL’s potential to transform the school culture, change attitudes, improve relationships and redefine the nature of learning and teaching.

LtoL normally begins in schools with an online, whole-school survey to elicit the views of students and staff about their school and community. The results are then discussed by all students and staff in smaller planning sessions. These are subsequently publicised in the school, after which students throughout the school self-elect to join project teams that focus on the priorities identified. Once formed, the teams are provided with training that aims to prepare them to become self-managing groups in which leadership is shared and reliance on the adult facilitator diminishes over time.

The LtoL model moves engagement to a higher level of activity from individuals to team members, while it builds individual leadership capacity. Students are enabled to think for themselves, and act for and with others. The programme: ‘offers a coherent and comprehensive approach which allows for flexibility and continues to evolve by being receptive to the experience of the school where it is adapted’

([www.learntolead.org.uk](http://www.learntolead.org.uk)). There are two models, one for the primary and another for the secondary levels.

## **2. Alternating Pedagogy (Pedagogia da alternância)**

[www.revistaescola.abril.com.br](http://www.revistaescola.abril.com.br)

Schools in Brazil serving rural communities in remote regions have always faced the challenge of student attrition. This is due partly to difficulties in reaching schools and partly to the inconsequential nature of the education received by students. What was needed was a way of enabling students to gain knowledge that is relevant to their daily and contextual realities. In 1969 the Jesuit mission in one Brazilian state started an educational programme aimed at providing students with useful learning opportunities to equip them with the skills needed to manage their rural environments and to reduce challenges to geographic access to schools.

Alternating Pedagogy is designed to alternate the place of learning between school and home. Students attend school for three weeks and spend the fourth in their home environments. School hours are from 7:30 am to noon and from 13:00 to 15:00, between which students apply their learning in the field. Students are taught subjects in the fields of agronomy and ecology in order for them to attend to their family's farms and live stock, and home economics to prepare them to manage domestic life. Lessons given in school are developed into projects that students conduct during their week at home, where they apply the techniques learnt in the classroom. During this time teachers prepare their lesson plans and make field excursions to visit students in their homes. These visits are used to assess the resources available to students and the nature of the projects most practical for students to conduct.

The programme has now been successful in 20 of the 26 Brazilian states. Nearly 260 schools employ the Alternating Pedagogy model, with over 20,000 student participants. Students are reportedly more engaged in their learning and empowered as members of their families and communities. Fewer students are dropping out of school and all of them are spending less time commuting to and from school. In 1999 the Brazilian Ministry of Education regulated Alternating Pedagogy and is currently considering adopting it as a national policy in public rural schools. This has led the community to view work in agriculture as a reason for studying, in contrast to working in agriculture as an alternative to not having academic qualifications. This is prompting students to further their university education in fields of agricultural and other related fields such as agronomy and forestry.

### **3. Excuse-me, I'm gonna fight for it! (Com licença, vou à luta!)**

National Service For Rural Learning

[www.senar.org.br](http://www.senar.org.br)

This is one of many distance-learning programmes provided by SENAR, the National Service for Rural Learning, which is a government agency in Brazil with the remit to promote education among the rural population. SENAR's mission is to promote social activities and rural development for men and women working in rural areas to improve their occupational performance, promote social integration, enhance life quality and citizenship awareness.

'Excuse-me, I'm gonna fight for it!' is an online course designed to empower women working in agriculture to become decisive participants in rural enterprise. Through this course, women are provided with guidance about ways to improve their capacity to manage and administer their property, whether as heads of family or as assistants to their husbands.

The course is taught online and is comprised of five modules of 40 hours each. These cover entrepreneurship, financial management, strategic planning, legislation and leadership. The course is free of charge and open to female participants. Individual modules have age and educational background requirements.

The fact that the course is run by a government agency and develops business skills does not strip it of emancipatory features. For women in rural areas, to be educated in the day-to-day management, administration and leadership of their family or their own business in empowering in itself. Once equipped with skills that men have, women can share the operation of their lives and livelihood, and be prepared to take ownership when needed.

The seemingly mainstream, innocuous nature of this course may render it non-threatening for conservative rural communities, such as those in Palestine, which might hesitate before welcoming organisations or agencies intended on empowering women. In fact, emancipatory programmes for gender equality are likely to be viewed with suspicion and the work of foreign agenda, and accordingly rejected. Hence, the apparent conventional nature of the programme may facilitate its acceptance and adoption by conservative rural society and equip women with some basic rural enterprise skills.

#### **4. Alternative Learning Systems: Health Literacy**

(See articles by Emea Vida Estacio, and by Emea Vida Estacio and David F. Marks)

Traditional approaches to adult health education have little or no connection with the learner's real life circumstances or experiences. Questions arise about the value of health literacy programmes: whether they are meeting the needs of service users or whether they are being implemented to reduce health care system costs. Critics argue that much of the advice about the link between health and literacy is Eurocentric and does not take into account the culture, language or conditions of disadvantaged peoples. Alternative approaches are emerging in which critical health literacy supports the development of social and community competencies by situating health promotion within its social, economic and political context (Estacio, 2013).

Alternative learning systems (ALS) is a project that was conducted in a small indigenous community in the Philippines to promote community-based health literacy. The intervention is predicated on the recognition that language and worldview form an integral part of indigenous people's lives. ALS uses sustainable health education to strengthen individual and community capabilities, and preserve and celebrate indigenous knowledge, culture and tradition (Estacio, 2013; Estacio and Marks, 2007).

The Ayta community was engaged in a year-long project that included several planned activities to encourage community engagement, reflection, and deliberation on health related issues that mattered to the Aytas. Seven community workshops, eight organisational meetings and 13 story telling sessions were held, activities conceived within a participatory action research framework. Culturally sensitive and appropriate methods were employed to establish rapport and generate knowledge to inform, implement and evaluate collective action (Estacio and Marks, 2007).

#### **5. The Freire Institute**

[www.freire.org](http://www.freire.org)

The Freire Institute is a training and research provider that draws its inspiration from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. The Institute builds on the earlier work of the Ecumenical Institute for the Development of People, whose founder and first president was Freire. The organisation seeks to enable grassroots groups around the world to transform their personal and collective realities. Through courses and workshops the institute supports educational programmes intended to raise awareness of the social and political conditions that perpetuate inequalities and guide meaningful change for more equitable societies.

One of the Institute's programmes is 'Inspire' which aims to link faith and action. Inspire draws on the spiritual culture of a community to engage its members in a dialogue of values and commitments in the context of their wider social environment. Faith and values are renegotiated as a means to informing vision-building and action for a more socially just world. Workshops are designed to provide participants with a framework to explore the relationship between spirituality, religion and action for justice. Groups are encouraged to share experiences, gain a better understanding of their social environment, develop a clear and meaningful vision and engage in the practical planning that is needed for successful movements. Equally important is that the programme provides hope and inspiration, vital ingredients that enable people to lead change for more just and equitable societies. Inspire can be tailored for a range of different faith groups.

The Freire Institute is just one of a number of groups inspired by Freirean philosophy. For example, the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All (CREA) based at the University of Barcelona has conducted research that directly supports radical action to address social inequalities. Their projects are all based on commitment to dialogic learning and social transformation in community contexts (e.g. García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

The examples presented above have their origins outside Palestine and the point has already been made in this study that there is good reason to be sceptical of externally sourced initiatives. However, there is no doubt that there are valuable lessons to be learned from an examination of suitable cases from across the world. These include: ways to work with and from within formal education systems, as well as from without; addressing a wide spectrum of social concerns such as health, agricultural enterprise and faith; and providing non-threatening women's empowerment programmes that can gain entry into potentially resistant communities. It is important to draw from these examples by identifying the principles embodied in the practices at the core of such programmes.

One of the main problems with the policy borrowing referred to in Section 1 is that it often leads to a centrally dictated change for the whole system. Policy makers too often reach for the levers of implementation when they should be enabling activists and practitioners on the ground to develop practice according to sound principles. The next and final section provides a set of the principles that might be offered as the basis for review and development of emancipatory practice.

## **Section 5: Implications and Recommendations**

This section presents implications and recommendations for prospective emancipatory education initiatives in Palestine based on study outcomes. It is argued in Sections 1 and 2 that the situation in Palestine calls for the aims of emancipatory education to be realised in both formal and informal settings. It has also been shown that education does not happen solely within schools but also within a wide range of social settings. Some of the obstacles to emancipatory education are also discussed in the early part of this study. Therefore, it is important to identify key challenges to its development. This is followed by a set of principles extracted from Section 3 of this study, which could underpin the development of future emancipatory education initiatives in Palestine. Finally, the section ends with recommendations and a brief conclusion.

### **Ten key challenges for education policy**

In developing emancipatory education programmes policy makers and activists of all kinds need to have strategies for addressing the key challenges set out below.

#### ***Challenge 1: Debunking the transmission mode of teaching***

As discussed in Sections 1 and 2 of this study, a major obstacle to innovation is the widespread belief in the value of the transmission mode of teaching whereby teachers attempt to pass on information to their students who are rendered impassive and incapable of critical thinking and self-directed learning.

#### ***Challenge 2: Generating an extended mode of professionalism***

The evidence presented in Section 2 of this study clearly indicates the need for a body of teachers who see themselves as change agents and advocates capable of taking responsibility for reform, innovation and knowledge building.

#### ***Challenge 3: Tackling the fragmentation of policy***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to overcome the harmful effects of factionalism in order to be able to work towards a coherent, national policy framework that serves all Palestinians.

#### ***Challenge 4: Questioning the value of credentials without capacities***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to question the widespread assumption that the pursuit of credentials and qualifications alone is the

key to personal growth and achievement. While recognising the importance of such cultural capital, it is also vital to recognise that capacities and dispositions are even more important for personal growth.

***Challenge 5: Developing a critical perspective***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to foster a critical perspective on the social, economic and political realities of life in occupied Palestine. Fatalism, defeatism and acceptance of the status quo stands in the way of what Freire called *conscientization* (1970). Assumptions need to be questioned and alternative perspectives acknowledged.

***Challenge 6: Questioning the respect shown to teachers as role incumbents***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to question the assumption that teachers should be respected because of their role as teachers rather than for the quality of their teaching and their relationships with the communities they serve. The extent to which they enable students to learn in ways that empower and enhance agency should be the key to teacher effectiveness.

***Challenge 7: Countering the negative influence of socio-cultural norms and values***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to counter the sometimes negative effect on education of tightly knit communities in which values and expectations can put limits on the participation and achievement of some, especially women.

***Challenge 8: Questioning the appropriateness of externally sourced initiatives***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to question the assumption that the source of innovation is inevitably external and linked to the priorities and goals of international sponsors. This involves the promotion of local alternatives and initiatives that are sensitive to local conditions and proven to succeed.

***Challenge 9: Advocacy for initiatives that fit the Palestinian context***

In order for emancipatory education to flourish, there is a need to articulate and advocate for a pedagogy that is responsive to the social and political reality of occupied Palestine as viewed from disenfranchised and marginalised segments of society. This is closely linked to Challenges 5 and 8 above.

***Challenge 10: Disseminating accounts of breakthrough practice***

As is indicated by the small number of brief outlines presented in this study, there is a need to show the way forward by capturing detailed accounts of breakthrough

practice and innovatory programmes which can then be disseminated and studied by teachers and activists throughout the country.

### **Thirty key principles for emancipatory education**

If Palestine is to develop coherent policies designed to support and encourage participatory and socially just forms of education, it is proposed that the principles listed below could be a useful tool with which to judge the extent to which a particular programme would contribute to the goals of emancipatory education.

To contribute to the realisation of the aims of emancipatory education, a programme, initiative or practice would be guided by a set of the following principles.

***Principle 1:***

Emancipatory education empowers individuals and enhances human agency.

***Principle 2:***

Emancipatory education features collective action.

***Principle 3:***

Emancipatory education involves the promotion of joy and optimism.

***Principle 4:***

Emancipatory education fosters cross-generational interaction and collaboration.

***Principle 5:***

Emancipatory education enables tangible improvements in social conditions.

***Principle 6:***

Emancipatory education contributes to consciousness-raising and the development of a critical perspective on social, economic and political realities.

***Principle 7:***

Emancipatory education helps to build democratic and civic values such as individual freedoms, and develop democratic skills and practices.

***Principle 8:***

Emancipatory education enables dialogue and debate.

***Principle 9:***

Emancipatory education provides opportunities for voice.

***Principle 10:***

Emancipatory education enables and welcomes knowledge creation through action, as well as study and research.

***Principle 11:***

Emancipatory education identifies new spaces and environments for learning and discourse.

***Principle 12:***

Emancipatory education fosters creativity in both informal and formal settings.

***Principle 13:***

Emancipatory education engages young people in meaningful activity that enhances their personal growth and raises their social and political awareness.

***Principle 14:***

Emancipatory education builds leadership capacity.

***Principle 15:***

Emancipatory education features participation and collaboration.

***Principle 16:***

Emancipatory education invites and enables teachers to become agents of change for teaching and learning that empowers youth to improve their life chances and living conditions.

***Principle 17:***

Emancipatory education features networked initiatives that connect people across the country.

***Principle 18:***

Emancipatory education nurtures tolerance and respect for different viewpoints.

***Principle 19:***

Emancipatory education enables international connection and networking.

***Principle 20:***

Emancipatory education facilitates the dissemination of inspirational narratives.

***Principle 21:***

Emancipatory education encourages participants to extend the scope and intensity of their reading.

***Principle 22:***

Emancipatory education recognises and responds to local economic, social and political realities.

***Principle 23:***

Emancipatory education promotes partnerships between students and teachers.

***Principle 24:***

Emancipatory education enables learners to take responsibility for the learning process.

***Principle 25:***

Emancipatory education enables everyone to exercise leadership regardless of position or status.

***Principle 26:***

Emancipatory education fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for learning and the conditions of learning.

***Principle 27:***

Emancipatory education addresses gender imbalance and contributes to the amelioration of the negative impacts of traditional and patriarchal social relations.

***Principle 28:***

Emancipatory education makes full use of modern, digital technology including the Internet.

***Principle 29:***

Emancipatory education enables teachers to create their own knowledge to free themselves from dependence on ‘experts.’

***Principle 30:***

Emancipatory education seeks local, culturally appropriate solutions to conservative issues and topics.

The principles offered above can be used to inform discussion about emancipatory education. They can also be used as a tool to review current practice and programmes, and as a checklist against which to assess the contribution of future proposals. This list is neither exhaustive nor should initiatives be expected to fulfil all its criteria. Rather, it is to be viewed and used as a guiding tool for discussion and evaluation.

## **Recommendations**

This study illustrates several tensions surrounding the provision and facilitation of emancipatory education in Palestine. Foremost is the argument between working from within the formal education system and from without through informal means. Another is the source of funding and whether it is to be sponsored by the PNA, by foreign or local educational NGOs, or by Palestinian private enterprise or individual initiatives. There is also the matter of how to characterise effectively emancipatory education: should it claim an emancipatory agenda or should it take on more subtle, subject-relevant descriptions that may appeal to larger targeted audiences, and potentially lead to more inclusion. Similarly, it is important to evaluate the extent to which currently operating initiatives and programmes are succeeding for further support, emulation and propagation. Finally, the actual meaning and definition of emancipatory education and the extent to which it is understood by Palestinian society, including educational experts, needs attention. These are some of the key issues that will need to be addressed by parties intent on promoting an alternative educational agenda in Palestine that centres on emancipatory principles that I will now discuss.

Palestinians in occupied Palestine and the diaspora have historically relied on formal education for social, economic and political survival. As argued in Section 1, award-bearing forms of education represented the fundamental vehicle for self-improvement and social mobility. Following the 1948 and 1967 Wars, and up to the present, Palestinians have used secondary and tertiary degrees to secure migration into foreign countries. Accordingly, the value of formal education cannot be overstated in fostering concrete opportunities for combating exclusion and dispossession, and continues to be deeply engrained in the psychology and culture of generations of Palestinians. For this reason, it would be extremely challenging to create equal appreciation for non-formal, non-certificate-bearing models.

This is not to say that there is no hope or prospects for the spread of informal education programmes that offer emancipatory alternatives within Palestinian society. On the contrary, Section 3 clearly demonstrates its receptivity. Rather, the

point is that in the Palestine context formal education enjoys a reverence and stature that cannot be ignored. Therefore, on the one hand I recommend working with and from within the Palestinian education system to inculcate pedagogical principles and learning opportunities founded on the concept emancipatory education. Given the large population involved in the formal education system, whether teachers or students, working with a vast segment of Palestinians would ensure the widespread of features of emancipatory pedagogy and learning. This could have cumulative long-term impact. It also means that marginalised segments of Palestinian society such as females, who are traditionally only permitted access to conventional education pathways, may be exposed to such emancipatory practices as critical thinking, agency and conscientization, which they would not otherwise.

To do so will inevitably require working with and from within the formal Palestinian education system, as antithetical as that may sound to the advancement of an emancipatory education. Nevertheless, this need not be viewed as conflicting with an indigenous-based, emancipatory pedagogy if that is what the Palestinian context needs. The question that must always be returned to is what a locally relevant education would look like for the promotion of criticality and awareness among the mass population and not just for the select few that may be privy to informal emancipatory-oriented educational models. The Palestinian context must be at the forefront of any and all discussions surrounding development of future emancipatory education. Wholesale rejection of the official education system would be a lost opportunity to instil long-term, albeit slow change in teacher and student perceptions of the purpose of learning, a ‘soft revolution.’ Therefore, it is recommended that work be done to implant emancipatory pedagogy and learning in the formal education system to the extent possible. This can be through teacher education and pedagogy, curriculum reform and student performance assessment criterion, to name a few. Such measures are hoped to provide opportunities to transform teacher and student understanding of the underlying sources of social and political oppression, and to develop a vision towards taking action to change it. A slow but steady shift towards praxis from within the formal education system would mark a tremendous achievement for proponents of emancipatory education, and cultivate criticality and enhance awareness among both the large teaching force and vast student population.

Conversely, and equally important, is to combat the hegemony and depth to which formal education structures are entrenched in Palestinian culture and society with alternative, emancipatory informal methods of pedagogy and learning. Social institutions that reach a stature of blind reverence and adherence in any society and at any time need to be questioned and challenged regardless of the apparent value they may be adding. The authoritative structures and doctrinaire practices of schools, colleges and universities in Palestine need to be contested at all levels. Henceforth,

there is urgent need to advocate for an education strategy whose methods and tools enhance the capacity for individuals to identify and take action against the underlying causes of social marginalisation, political exclusion and economic disenfranchisement. In present day Palestine informal education may be the most capable and effective way to do so because of the liberty its operatives have to introduce innovative methods to teaching and learning, and the relative freedom by some from ideologically driven authority and agenda.

Section 3 of this study maps the presence of innovative, emancipatory-oriented education initiatives and programmes throughout the oPT. Some of these are sponsored by private Palestinian citizens and enterprise, and operated by Palestinian educational NGOs; and while others are associated with foreign governments, agencies, organisations or experts, programmes are adapted to accommodate local needs and realities. The longevity of some of these organisations and programmes, and accounts from participants illustrate receptivity and success in parts of Palestinian society for educational activities that extend beyond the school and university to non-official institutional settings. Notably, there is ample response to activities that enable individual agency and promote self-expression. This may be a reaction to traditional Arab emphasis on the importance of family and kinship ties over individuality and independence. It may also be a reaction to social reverence towards authority both institutional and personage. Equally significant is the desire to create locally based knowledge that relates to the Palestinian condition and expands understanding of the forces that shape socio-economic and political realities. This may represent a reaction to a disconnection from officially sponsored knowledge and discourse.

Similarly, programme funding has been clearly shown to be a matter of significant concern in Sections 2 and 3. Following the establishment of the PNA, Palestinians have become increasingly uneasy with foreign sponsored initiatives and international NGOs for the conditional and agenda-driven nature of their work in Palestine. Therefore, the more critical and emancipatory driven the programme, the more it will need to account for both its sources of funding and ideological agenda. Locally sourced initiatives are more likely to enjoy operational and programme independence. However, in the absence of such funding it is acknowledged that Palestinian educational NGOs may be the better suited to conduct alternative educational models. Private, independent initiatives are similarly to be supported; however, attention will need to be given to their viability, potential impact and sustainability.

To a large measure, programme sources influence the extent of impact and sustainability. The more an initiative adapts or draws on the Palestinian context with

its socio-cultural and political realities, the more it is likely to succeed. Several initiatives in Section 3 illustrate this tendency and have been welcomed by participants in large part because they are acknowledging and responding to local needs and conditions. This need not translate into wholesale adherence to norms and customs that may be at the heart of social and political repression. Rather, it is an advisable strategy to work with when dealing with societies that are sensitive to preserving local values and practices. Socio-culture transformation of indigenous communities is most effective when local people are invited to contribute to change processes that preserve dignity and lead to the development of collective agency. In other words, emancipatory education must guard from becoming the ‘white man’s burden.’ In some cases proponents may need to suffice with introducing a select set of emancipatory principles and supporting its organic development among individuals and communities.

If the aim of emancipatory pedagogy and learning is to educate Palestinians in ways that enhance their abilities to recognise and change the socio-political forces that perpetuate their disempowerment, the manner and shape in which it is introduced is another fundamental precept to the extent of its success. This is a call for cultural sensitivity and respect. The term emancipatory in Arabic is translated into ‘taharruri.’ Among the majority conservative segments of the population, for some this expression may have liberal connotations that veer towards the social and sexual. Therefore when introducing it, it is prudent to offer ample explanation of the awareness raising, criticality enhancing dimensions of the concept. This suggests the need to focus on the aims and anticipated outcomes in order to generate appeal and sustain interest. An effective way to do so is to highlight the socially-directed purpose and goals of an emancipatory education. Since the turn of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Palestinian society has been exposed to severe political events and victim to continuous economic deprivation. This history gives reason to believe that they are seasoned to appreciate initiatives that are genuinely intended to enhance social and political awareness for mobilising action towards a more socially just society. For this reason an eclectic sample of international initiatives was selected in Section 4 that extends beyond the manifestly political and into social institutions such as health, agricultural enterprise for women, religious practice, and teacher and student leadership. The heterogeneous composition of these programmes is intended to cast a wide appeal among Palestinian society and infiltrate through socially oriented programmes.

Equally important to looking to international models is to assess the success of currently operating Palestinian initiatives and programmes for identifying lessons to be learned. Section 3 provides a set of local programmes and initiatives that illustrate the kind of emancipatory activities and aims that have met with success to various degrees. There is a need to conduct independent evaluations of these models for the purposes of documentation, evaluation and dissemination. Evaluations, however,

should refrain from quantitative analyses of causation or correlation to improved student academic results. Rather, qualitative, illuminative evaluation methodology should be employed to portray development and growth of human capacities that illustrates individual and communal experience, and is based on a customised set of criteria. Publications of such studies would extend knowledge among Palestinians and Arab readership of successful emancipatory education initiatives, and archive them for future reference.

Among the benefits of disseminating such studies and evaluations would be to provide more written material on the concept of emancipatory education itself to a Palestinian audience. As discussed in Section 2 of this study most of the progressive members of the education and activist community were not clear on what constitutes an emancipatory education. This is an important outcome that must be taken into account when advocating for such an education. The fact that some university faculty members could not conceptualise alternative aims to learning from formal, certificate-bearing degrees indicates a need to familiarise Palestinian society with the notion of emancipatory education. Facilitating the development of a corpus of rigorous, robust literature aimed at empirically studying emancipatory educational models in the Palestine context may be only second in importance to the existence of these initiatives and programmes themselves.

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped that the recommendations offered above will be helpful in the search for models of education that can contribute to the personal growth of Palestinians and their communities, and to the development of a social justice in Palestine. Perhaps educational change towards an emancipatory model on the basis of these proposals will create an approach to education that gives Palestinians ‘permission to narrate’ (Said, 1984), that is to say, to become the authors of their own educational destiny. For Palestine, the over-arching challenge is how to legitimise emancipatory models of education, to enable the facilitation of such approaches and to obtain commitment from all stakeholders, notably teachers, students, adult learners and community members.

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