Community Education: To Reclaim and Transform What Has Been Made Invisible

MUNIR FASHEH
Tamer Institute for Community Education, East Jerusalem, and Birzeit University, West Bank

In this article Munir Fasheh discusses the role of education as an agent of hegemony and presents an alternative model of community education that is empowering and suited to the needs of the learners. Munir Fasheh, a Palestinian mathematics teacher, presents a powerful analysis of his formal education and how it limited his ability to see and understand the complexity and richness of his illiterate mother's math. Further, he argues that the development of community education is critical to the empowerment of the Palestinian people and is a necessary development of the intifadeh, *which reflects a collective human response to an oppressive situation. Fasheh values the basic message of the human element in any educational, transformational process and emphasizes the "treasure that exists in every individual." He analyzes the impact formal education has had on the Palestinian community and offers a model of community education that "reclaims people's lives, their sense of self-worth, and their ways of thinking from hegemonic structures, and facilitates their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action."*

In describing anyone or anything that cannot survive on its own, Palestinian Arabs in the Galilee say, "It is like an Israeli hen." The difference between the Israeli hen and the indigenous Palestinian hen is that the first cannot survive, grow, or produce eggs without special shots, a special mixture of food, specific temperatures, and a specific schedule; it requires some kind of "scientific and rational" planning and constant support from outside. In fact, any change in the food mixture or in the conditions surrounding the Israeli hen can lead to its inability to produce eggs, at least for a while. In short, if this "technological" hen is taken out of its "artificial and ideological" environment and put into the "real" environment, it will have difficulty surviving.

By contrast, the indigenous Palestinian hen survives because of the characteristics it has developed through the ages, thriving on what it finds in the environment

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and through its ability to adapt to diverse conditions. It will even consume its own excrement, if need be, in order to survive. These qualities—internal strength, "feeling at home" within the environment, and the ability to adapt to diverse conditions—have helped the indigenous hen to survive for thousands of years.

Human beings and communities require these same qualities for survival and growth; but they also require the qualities of empowerment, creativity, and increased capacity for learning. The role of education in promoting or hindering the development of these qualities is crucial.

I believe that most graduates of the formal educational system within the Palestinian community are like the Israeli hen: their survival depends on external support, and their values are based on artificial, induced, or symbolic qualities. Such graduates live on a special mixture of courses and curricula that are "scientifically and rationally" planned and prepared for them by experts, mainly from abroad. Further, such graduates are in general alienated from their own environment and are mostly blind or insensitive to its basic problems and needs. When the surrounding conditions change, or when real-world situations must be dealt with, such graduates become confused: the "correct" answers and ready solutions they learned in the schools and universities suddenly become useless and meaningless.

The Contrast between My Math and My Mother's Math

The contrast between the educated Israeli hen and the indigenous Palestinian hen parallels the contrast between the mathematics that I studied and taught in schools and universities for more than twenty years and the mathematics of my mother, who is illiterate. This contrast illustrates the importance of one's relationship to the environment, in both the ideological and the real sense.[1]

To borrow an expression from T. J. Jackson Lears, the ideological environment serves to mark "the boundaries of permissible discourse, discourage the clarification of social alternatives, and make it difficult for the dispossessed to locate the source of their uneasiness, let alone remedy it."[2] This environment "functions to 'position' people in the world, to shape the range of possible meanings surrounding an issue, and to actively construct reality."[3] Shaped as it is by existing power relationships, the ideological environment reflects the ideas, perspectives, interests, and behavior of dominant groups and nations, through local elites and urban centers.

The real environment, on the other hand, represents what formal education under these conditions normally marginalizes or excludes. It extends from the immediacies of the historical process as experienced by people, to the social institutions (material, spiritual, and intellectual), productive activities, and cultural traditions that shape people's responses.[4]

[1] For a further discussion of this point, see Munir Fasheh, "Education as Praxis for Liberation: Birzeit University and the Community Work Programme," Diss. Harvard Graduate School of Education, March, 1988, sec. 2.1.

[2] T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review, 90* (1985), 569-570.

[3] Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, "Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The Case for Democratic Schooling," *Harvard Educational Review, 56* (1986), 131.

[4] See Fasheh, "Education as Praxis for Liberation," sec. 2.1.

It was a drastic event in my life—the 1967 Israeli-Arab war—that caused me to realize certain fundamental things about life, including education and its relation to the environment and the community. That war raised in my mind the first serious challenge to the kind of education—and later to the math—I had been given (and was teaching), both at the school and university levels. In particular, I became aware of my illiterate mother's math.[5]

When the 1967 Israeli-Arab war broke out, I was twenty-six years old, with a master's degree and five years' experience teaching math at various levels. The war shook the foundations of my small, comfortable, and seemingly consistent and meaningful world, a world created by formal, institutionalized education. The war revealed how little we—the formally educated—knew. Almost none of our conceptions, convictions, and expectations matched what was going on. Although I started questioning education in general almost immediately after the war, I did not at that time consider the possible relation of math and physics to many of the problems in today's world, nor did I question the fundamental assumptions upon which math and science were based. In fact, as a result of the war I became more convinced that one task I had as an educator was to expand the use of logic and science in the world through teaching.

I thought that what we needed was more math, a "New Math," as well as better and more diversified ways of teaching it. For six years (1972–78) I was formally involved in math instruction at several levels and in different ways in the schools of the West Bank. But the "New Math" I was in charge of introducing into the schools was, I realized, fundamentally alien, dry, and irrelevant to both students and teachers. In order to overcome this problem, I encouraged the incorporation of cultural concepts, independent avenues of exploration, and personal feelings into the work. I encouraged teachers, for example, to ask small children such questions as, "Which do you like more, five or two, and why?" and not only questions like, "Which is greater, five or two, and why?" I also stressed the idea that most if not all children are logical in their own way and that the job of teachers is to explore and discuss that personal logic. In addition to classroom teaching, I established math clubs, magazines, general discussion meetings, and in-service courses.[6] This approach revitalized the teaching, introduced both structure and logic, and was important in developing creativity and enthusiasm among both teachers and students. It did not yet lead me, however, to question hegemonic assumptions behind the math itself. It was discovery of my mother's math that led me to question such assumptions.

Math was necessary for my mother in a much more profound and real sense than it was for me. Unable to read or write, my mother routinely took rectangles of fabric and, with few measurements and no patterns, cut them and turned them into beautiful, perfectly fitted clothing for people. In 1976, I realized that the mathematics she was using was beyond my comprehension. Moreover, although mathematics was a subject matter that I studied and taught, for her it was basic to the operation of her understanding. What she was doing was math in the sense that it embodied order, pattern, relations, and measurement. It was math because

[5] See Fasheh, "Education as Praxis for Liberation," sec. 1.2.

[6] See Munir Fasheh, "Math, Culture and Authority," *For the Learning of Mathematics, 3* (Canada: Concordia University Press, 1982), 2–8.

she was breaking a whole into smaller parts and constructing a new whole out of most of the pieces, a new whole that had its own style, shape, and size, and that had to fit a specific person. Mistakes in her math entailed practical consequences, unlike mistakes in my math.

The value of her math and its relationship to the world around her, moreover, was drastically different from mine. My math had no connection to power in the community or the practical world of making things; it was connected solely to symbolic power through the Western hegemonic culture that had engendered it. Without the official ideological support system, no one would have needed my math; its value was derived from a set of symbols created by the hegemony of the dominant culture and by the world of education. In contrast, my mother's math was so deeply embedded in the culture that it was invisible to eyes trained by formal education. Her math had no symbols of power. Its value was connected to concrete and immediate needs and actions.

Seeing my mother's math in context helped me see my math in the context of power. This social context limited her empowerment by minimizing the value of her experience, discrediting her as a woman and an uneducated person, and paying her extremely poor wages for her work. She never understood that social context and was vulnerable to its hegemonic assertions. She never wanted any of her children to learn her profession, sewing clothes; instead, she and my father worked very hard to see that their children were educated and did not work with their hands. As a result, it came as a shock to me when I realized the complexity and richness of my mother's relationship to mathematics. Mathematics was integrated into her world as it had never been integrated into mine. In retrospect, I wish I had learned more about her work and the knowledge embedded in it (though that knowledge was unarticulated) so that I could have combined it with the formal math I had learned. She knew in practice much more than she was able to tell. In contrast, I was able to articulate words and manipulate symbols much more than I was able to put them into practice.

My mother's math was biased toward life, action, production, and personal experience, and it was linked to immediate and concrete needs in the community. My math, on the other hand, was biased toward the manipulation of symbols and theories linked mainly to technological advancement and techniques that usually lead to military, political, and economic power and control. What was lacking in my mother's knowledge was articulated structure and theory, while what was lacking in my knowledge was practice, relevance, and a context. In this sense, neither her knowledge nor mine was a praxis; each form of knowledge lacked one part of the dialectical relationship between life and mental construction, between practice and theory, between the world and our consciousness of it, between reality and our perceptions of it.

I was initially attracted to math and physics because of what I felt to be their role in making the world more intelligible, by finding patterns and relationships and describing them in words, formulas, and theories. It was fascinating for me to realize, for example, that there is a single principle (the law of gravity) that explains falling apples, rising balloons, the rotation of the moon around the earth, and tides. Math and science were attractive because they could help explain phenomena and predict events. I was fascinated by the power of logic to make ab-

solute statements that transcend place, time, and speaker; by the fact that one could reduce a whole system of ideas and statements to very few basic axioms. In addition, math and science enabled people to do such concrete things as build bridges, construct radios, make planes, and facilitate surgery.

I was also attracted to math and science because of the claims made about them: that math and science require higher intelligence than other fields; that science eventually would solve all problems; that math and science enable people to discover objective, universal truths and absolute laws; that expressing ideas in numbers is superior to other forms of expression; that math and science transcend national, racial, and gender boundaries. Furthermore, I was attracted to math and science because of the claims about their role in improving the human condition, generating tolerance, reducing inequities, and raising people to a higher level of civilization. This was the image of math and science I had internalized and this was the image I preached. Although I was aware that math, science, and technology were also used to produce bombs and pollution, I believed this to be an aberration, an abuse. When pressed to explain the paradox, I responded with the answer that I had internalized: that it was people who abused math and science; at worst, I parroted back the notion that math and science were neutral and thus could be used to any end. I was convinced that the ethical, moral, humanitarian dimension of math and science was both the fundamental role and the norm. In short, I was attracted to study and later teach math and science because they were associated with things that were pleasurable, ethical, intellectual, and useful, and because of the claims that linked math and science to progress and to the improvement of the human condition.

In 1967, I started to see the practical limits of the education I had been given. The Six-Day War started a process that made the real environment and its power relations more visible. My sense of the intellectual, moral, and humanitarian dimensions of math and science gradually gave way to a sense of the central functions of math and science: creating power and generating hegemony. The stunning Israeli military victory in 1967 was a victory of superior math, science, and technology—not a victory of moral superiority or greater personal courage. The message of the highly sophisticated war planes and bombs was loud and clear. Thus, although it is true that math, science, and technology produce planes, for example, that can transport people for harmless purposes, they frequently produce war planes whose function is to kill and destroy. In almost every country in the world the number of war planes is many times the number of civilian planes. Just as it is misleading to emphasize the protein and other values in meat that has been poisoned, it is deceptive to stress only the technical skills and knowledge one can acquire through education while ignoring its potentially dangerous consequences. In addition to the destructive machinery, certain values and patterns of thinking and behaving that are associated with current models of learning are equally destructive.[7]

My mother's sewing demonstrated another way of conceptualizing and doing mathematics, another kind of knowledge, and the place of that knowledge in the

[7] See Christopher Argyris, *Inner Contradictions of Rigorous Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980); and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970).

world. But the value of my mother's tradition and of her kind of mathematics and knowledge, though not intrinsically disempowering, was continually discredited by the world around her, by what Paulo Freire calls the "culture of silence,"[8] and by cultural hegemony. Although I was not yet ready to question the theoretical bases of positivistic math and science, this discovery allowed me to recognize the need for a different type of education, and to respect all forms of knowledge and their relation to action.

Formal Education, Hegemony, and Power

The discovery of my mother's math was a discovery about the world and about the relation between hegemony and knowledge. Hegemony does not simply provide knowledge; rather, it substitutes one kind of knowledge for another in the context of a power relationship. Power, in this sense, is almost defined by what is excluded. While I was struggling to make the mathematics I had learned meaningful, what I was seeking was, in fact, in front of me, made invisible to both my mother and me by the education I had been given and that she had desired for me. To recognize my mother's activity as math was for me to recognize that education and knowledge are not only about facts but also about the inner logic of society, both within itself and in relation to outside forces.

The most crucial issue this discussion raises is that of the relation of education to the world it inhabits, the relation of the learner to his or her community and environment. The education I received prepared me to live in a world created by that education and hegemony. It left me blind to its ideological dimension, to the relationship between the knowledge transmitted to me and power. This blindness, which I believe is characteristic of hegemonically educated Third World people, left me unfit to live in the real world and its environment, unaware of its needs and resources. Like the Israeli hen, I was constantly sheltered from events in the real environment, and I looked for support and a sense of worth from outside. My strength did not emanate from internal qualities but from external sources. Hegemony is characterized not only by what it includes but also by what it excludes: by what it renders marginal, deems inferior, and makes invisible. As a result, the effects of hegemonic education make it possible to define the real environment by what formal education marginalizes or excludes.

Hegemony is to be understood here as a form of domination.[9] It often precedes political and military conquests and continues after them. But unlike military conquest, hegemonic conquest permeates almost all spheres, and those being dominated facilitate their own domination. Hegemony is always linked to an ideology that reflects the manners and interests of the invaders and their culture. This ideology embodies certain conceptions, values, language, relations, and interests that are translated into daily practices. Crucial to the hegemonic relationship is the belief of the conquered that the lifestyle and values of the hegemonic group are inher-

[8] Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1970), p. 9.

[9] For more details on hegemony see Fasheh, "Education as Praxis for Liberation," Sec. 2.2. For Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony see Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

ently, naturally, and objectively superior. Hegemony is successful when the invader's ideology is taken or even assumed to be universal and superior; when, like the math I valued, it is believed to transcend class, gender, culture, and national boundaries.

Ideology is a worldview that embodies a particular language and certain conceptions, values, relations, and interests that are translated into daily practices and that produce a certain consciousness. Consequently, the role of intellectuals and institutions is of primary importance, since the reproduction of a hegemonic ideology is achieved through them. Intellectual development in a colonial hegemonic context is designed to provide ideology without a basis in power. This allows intellectuals to participate vicariously in the moral, intellectual, humanitarian, and technical aspects of Western culture, as well as in educational, scholarly, and research activities. The training of colonial intellectuals directs them to derive their sense of worth and status from this vicarious participation, alienating them from their own culture, history, and people. The indigenous population, however, often supports this process by giving status to such intellectuals. Generally speaking, hegemonic education produces intellectuals who have lost their power base in their own culture and society and who have been provided with a foreign culture and ideology, but without a power base in the hegemonic society. I personally have seen this process as I have worked with and observed Palestinian intellectuals over the past twelve years. I have observed that, because they lacked a power base at both ends, these intellectuals tend to sharply overvalue symbolic power and tokens—such as titles, degrees, access to prestigious institutions, and awards—associated with the dominant culture.

Ultimately, I found that the power of Western hegemony rests on the claims of superiority, universality, and ethical neutrality of Western math, positivistic science, technology, and education. These claims of Western superiority extend into social, cultural, moral, political, and intellectual spheres. But continuing to accept Western math, science, and education as universal and authoritative is detrimental to creating a healthier and more humane world. Like any other human activities, math, science, and education need a critical analysis, not only at the implementation and application stage but also, and more important, at the level of the basic premises and values that govern their conceptions, practices, and production.[10]

In short, the 1967 war, its aftermath, and the discovery of my mother's math convinced me that education can do one of two things: it can either introduce hegemony into the community, or it can reclaim and develop what has been made invisible by hegemony.

Education of the second kind, which I refer to in this essay as community education, requires us to use our senses again, to make things visible, and to allow people to speak. Like many other peoples in the Third World, Palestinians have been denied the value of our experience and have been robbed of our voice and sense of self-worth. Value, language, and visibility are at stake here because they have been taken away from a people's fundamental activities. My mother, for example,

[10] See, for example, Argyris, *Inner Contradictions*, and Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

was unable—and was never given the chance—to articulate her work and her thinking. Meaningful education, or community education, thus reclaims people's lives, their sense of self-worth, and their ways of thinking from the hegemonic structures, and facilitates their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action.

A Historical Note on Palestinian Education

The roots of the educational system that evolved in the region that includes Palestine go back to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Palestine in 1798.[11] Along with the military invasions of the Middle East (which have never ceased since the time of Napoleon), there were also invasions on the economic and sociocultural fronts. Publishing and education were the main avenues for the sociocultural invasions. By the early twentieth century, for example, English, French, German, American, and Italian schools were already active in Palestine, effectively working to gain "converts" to their respective cultures. Since the British occupation of Palestine following World War I, education for Palestinians has been held hostage by outside powers: first by the British and later (since 1948) by some Arab governments (depending on the region) and by Israel.

In spite of its colonialist character, however, formal education helped provide economic security and upward mobility for many Palestinians in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of losing land and other means of earning a living in 1948, Palestinians turned toward education as a primary means for survival. In spite of the hardships and the impossibility of any central or national planning, by the early 1970s the number of Palestinians studying in universities in proportion to their population as a whole was among the highest in the world.[12] The goal of education was simple and clear: getting degrees in order to get jobs. The types of degrees that Palestinians sought were determined by the professions, areas of specialization, and types of jobs that were available, mainly in neighboring Arab countries. Certain crucial needs—such as those related to the economic development of the community; the intellectual, social, and creative development of children; and the development of relevant research paradigms—were neglected. In addition, needs related to women's issues and to organization, management, and communication skills were ignored. In the 1970s and 1980s, conditions changed significantly. Many types of jobs that were traditionally in demand became less available, which led to growing unemployment among traditionally educated Palestinians. Moreover, formal educational institutions became even less able to function during these years because of military harassment and closure orders.[13] And even when they are functioning, conditions are not conducive to teaching or studying because of increasing class size, shrinking salaries and budgets, escalating fear and harassment of teachers and students, lack of proper facilities, and so forth.

[11] Antoine Zahlan, *Science and Science Policy in the Arab World* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

[12] Nabeel Shaath, "High Level Palestinian Manpower," *Journal of Palestinian Studies 1*(2), (1971), 92, 94.

[13] For example, prior to the *intifadeh*, Birzeit University was ordered closed seventeen times for long periods.

Although the hegemonic trend in formal education has been by far the dominant one among Palestinians, attempts have been made by Palestinians to develop relevant projects and programs in education. More than fifty years ago, for example, a well-known Palestinian educator, Khalil Sakakini, became completely disenchanted with formal education and established a school in Jerusalem that stressed children's intellectual and social growth and happiness, rather than the teaching of a rigid and fixed curriculum. Moreover, evaluation in the school did not depend on grades but rather on achieving competencies by having the children become competent at whatever they did. More recently, there have been attempts to establish the Palestine Open University in Beirut,[14] and certain other non-hegemonic schools and programs in universities in the West Bank. Since 1971 I have personally been involved in various non-formal education activities, both within and outside schools.[15] Most of these attempts, however, were forcibly destroyed, blocked, or marginalized. The beginnings of the Palestine Open University were completely and deliberately destroyed by the Israelis during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.[16]

There have been many attempts to develop relevant programs in education within the West Bank universities. The Israeli government would not give a permit, however, to An-Najah University to establish a school of agriculture, which would strengthen people's connection to the land and to production. Nor was Birzeit University given a permit (for more than ten years) to establish a school of fine arts, which would promote people's expressions of their culture, hopes, worries, realities, and visions. Nor would Israel allow Bethlehem University to establish a program to train tourist guides, who could open the eyes of tourists to the existence of the Palestinian people and to their reality, history, and culture.

[14] *Palestine Open University Feasibility Study* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980).

[15] In addition to establishing math and science clubs at all levels in the schools, and producing magazines in math and science geared to students and teachers, I was involved in a number of other activities. In early 1972, I helped establish the voluntary work group in the Ramallah district (in the West Bank), which mainly involved students and teachers. In 1973, I participated in introducing the Community Work Program into Birzeit University as a requirement for graduation. In this program each student has to work for at least 120 hours in community-related projects during his or her stay at the university. I was involved in 1974 in starting children's activities (for ages 6–13) in the Ramallah and Bireh public libraries, which included programs in drama, art, crafts, mathematical games, simple science experiments, poetry, music, and literature. I helped to develop a course in math for entering college freshman science students, dealing mainly with what is missing in our schools and culture, and also developed a method for teaching math to illiterate adults. In still another area, I wrote a book dealing with the concept and practice of religion in contemporary terms. Finally, I was involved in initiating several student activities at Birzeit University, such as the International Summer Work Camps, where students come from abroad to join Palestinian students for several weeks working on community projects in Palestinian villages and refugee camps. Currently I am involved with two projects: the Economic Development Group, which is concerned with economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, emphasizing self-reliant and people-centered approaches in development; and establishing the Tamer Institute, an institute of community education in the West Bank. The principles underlying the institute's philosophy and practice are these: 1) education is perceived as praxis—it considers context, personal experience, and the producing of something material, social, spiritual, or cultural as primary factors in the educational process; 2) the central goals are the empowerment of people and the changing of structures, both socially and mentally; and 3) the strategy is to work with existing groups and to use existing resources to meet basic needs and solve fundamental problems.

[16] The university has since been established under the name of Al-Quds Open University in Amman, Jordan, in 1985.

A few small programs dealing with essential needs in the community still exist in some universities, but these programs have been marginalized and limited through measures introduced by the Israeli government, as well as by the formal character of standard education among the Palestinians. These programs include the Community Work Program, the Community Health Unit, the Literacy and Adult Education Program, and the Center for Environment Studies, all at Birzeit University; the Center for Rural Development and Research at An-Najah University; and the Nursing, Hotel Management, Tourist Guides (though not licensed), and Preschool Program at Bethlehem University.

At the school level, the most significant attempt to make education more meaningful has been the program entitled "Education for Awareness and Involvement," which was launched at the Lutheran schools in the Jerusalem area. The purpose of this program, according to one of its pamphlets, is to "help students become more aware of themselves and their community and readying them for involvement in the solution of the problems of their society and its development." In the lower grades and at the preschool level, the Early Childhood Resource Center and the pioneering work in some of the kindergartens in Zababdeh and Beit Sahur represent the main attempt to develop an education that is more meaningful to Palestinian children.

Current Events and Their Impact on Education Among the Palestinians

Just as the impact of the 1967 war started a process that made the real environment and power relations more visible, events since the *intifadeh* in December 1987 are proving that fundamental changes in education are usually not generated from within education itself, and do not happen as a result of preaching, conferences, or resolutions, or by grand designs or expertise on the subject. Rather, such changes are usually generated in response to drastic changes, events, or crises in the environment, by people who are ready to seize the opportunity created by the new conditions and who are competent in recognizing and dealing with the accompanying challenges and needs. At this time no one can completely foresee the full impact of the current conditions on Palestinian society and on education in particular. We can be sure, however, of one thing: that the current conditions and changes will have tremendous consequences, both positive and negative, on Palestinian children and their education.

At the visible level, all educational institutions have been closed by the Israeli government since December 1987 (with the exception of a few weeks).[17] This means the loss, so far, of two academic years for all students. The closure affects 310,000 students at the school level and 18,000 students at the postsecondary level. These numbers represent more than one-third of the total population of the West Bank. More than 13,000 West Bank teachers have been without work for almost two years. By September 1989 there were already two years' worth of preschoolers who did not properly go through the first grade, in addition to this year's new class. Since 1948, education has offered the only path for many Palestinians to

[17] *Palestinian Education: A Threat to Israeli Security?* (East Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, 1989); see also M. Kretzmer, "Class Dismissed," *The Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 25, 1988.

make a good living, and clearly, closing schools for such an extended period will have drastic consequences. In addition, all attempts by some private schools and by those operated by the United Nations to distribute educational materials have been considered illegal, and all attempts to teach children at home have been deemed criminal acts under Israeli law in the West Bank.[18]

At the invisible level, the arbitrary use of terror by Israeli soldiers and settlers against Palestinian children will probably have far-reaching effects. What happens to the seven- or twelve-year-old child living in a refugee camp who has been experiencing almost daily the killing or torturing of family members and friends, the beatings and breaking of bones, the breaking into of homes and the destruction of furniture and equipment, living under curfews that extend (sometimes without electricity or water) for weeks and sometimes months? What type of person such a child will become is beyond my ability to imagine.[19] One thing is certain: that these children will internalize this arbitrariness and terror. The most comprehensive and accurate study of children under the *intifadeh* is, by far, the one produced by Anne Nixon of Save the Children in East Jerusalem.[20] The report tracks and details the high percentage of child death, injury, and detention by using extensive case studies, records, and statistical analysis. It also examines collective punishment, and its devastating psychological effects on children and family functioning after one year of the uprising. Finally, the education section of the report examines two primary areas of concern: the denial of the right to education because of school closures, and the schools (when they are open) as a locus of violence.

The Israeli occupation has imposed a climate of terror and misery on the Palestinian people. The corresponding courage, actions, and hope exercised by Palestinians is best described in the words of M. Scott Peck in his book *The Road Less Traveled*: "Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the making of action in spite of fear."[21] He goes on: "Evil is the exercise of political power, that is, the imposition of one's will upon others by overt or covert coercion. . . . I have come to conclude [however] that . . . evil backfires in the big picture of human evolution. For every soul it destroys, it is instrumental in the salvation of others."[22]

Under these conditions, talking about education among Palestinians in the future necessarily means talking about more than just opening schools and going back to the syllabi and tests. It will not be easy, for example, under the old system to control a child who has discovered his power and his dignity. It is not going to be easy to teach history to a child who feels that he or she has been making history. During the past two years, Palestinians have been experiencing a passion of hope and a sense of empowerment as never before. After almost half a century of world silence and inaction concerning the plight of the Palestinians, the children

[18] Stanley Cohen, "Education as Crime," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 18, 1989. See also *Punishing a Nation* (Ramallah, West Bank: Law in the Service of Man, 1988).

[19] Israeli Defense Minister Rabin declared his policy for dealing with the uprising in the following words: "We must put the fear back into the Arabs. We must use force, might, beatings." *The Uprising: Consequences for Health*, pamphlet (Jerusalem: Union of Medical Relief Committees, August, 1988), p. 1.

[20] Anne Nixon, *Status of Children in the Uprising* (Stockholm: Save the Children, in press). Available from Save the Children in East Jerusalem.

[21] M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (London: Century, 1987), p. 131.

[22] Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, pp. 278-279.

and the very stones have cried out, and their cry has been heard. Palestinians are learning through daily experience that the combination of misery, hope, understanding, creativity, empowerment, and action is exactly what goes into the making of human beings. That is indeed the message they exemplify for education everywhere.

I personally witnessed two events during this period that will help illustrate what Palestinians have been learning. I once watched a boy of seven or eight hiding behind a wall watching several soldiers trying to pull down a Palestinian flag that was hanging over an electric wire. This means of raising the Palestinian flag has been a common practice since the beginning of the *intifadeh*: children attach a flag to one end of a string and a stone to the other end, and then throw it over an electric wire so that the flag will hang high. These actions always draw soldiers, with their sophisticated equipment, to the site of the "crime." On that particular day, the soldiers could not get the flag down through "conventional" means, so they extended a long tube, ignited the top, and burned the flag. After the soldiers left, the boy ran and came back with another boy, threw another flag over the wire, and hid behind the wall—to wait for new soldiers to come. Through this creative, innocent "game" this boy feels empowered, that his actions can make a difference: he can manipulate—almost daily—the fourth-strongest army in the world! That boy is now aware of and able to use the power that exists in every human being.

The second event concerns another common scene in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A number of soldiers were harshly beating a young man in his early twenties in the central district of Ramallah. Several women rushed toward the scene shouting and trying to pull the soldiers away from the young man. Suddenly, a woman carrying a baby ran up and started shouting at the young man, "I told you not to leave the house today, that the situation is too dangerous. But you didn't listen; you never listen to me." Then she turned to the soldiers and said, "Beat him; he deserves this. He never listens. I am sick of my life with him." Then back to the man she cried, "I am sick of you and your baby; take him and leave me alone." She then pushed the baby into his arms and ran away. The soldiers were confused. Finally they left the man and went on. A few minutes later, the woman reappeared, took back her baby, told the young man to go to his home, and wished him safety and a quick recovery. I then realized that they were total strangers to one another.

The woman was not acting or pretending; and she was not a superhuman or a hero (as many like to characterize Palestinians today). Nor, on the other hand, was she a subhuman or a member of a non-people (as many Israeli and Western experts have been trying to portray the Palestinians for decades). She was simply acting humanly, as a concerned, responsible, and compassionate human being. Her power and her inspiration stem exactly from this fact and from her understanding that her survival and that of her community are at stake. She acted spontaneously, creatively, and courageously; feeling a sense of community and solidarity beyond the usual uttering of slogans. For this woman, the combination of thinking and acting within a particular context, of praxis, was a natural part of living. It was also obvious that she felt empowered, that she could make a difference. Self-reliance (internal strength, making decisions, and taking action) and

mutual help (compassion and communal feeling) could hardly have been combined more clearly within a single event. Her action brings out the hope in human beings: how incredible, how unpredictable, how creative human beings can be.

This woman was practicing a human logic different from the purely rational, mathematical logic that we are taught to consider as the peak of human thought and capability. In this human logic, the conclusion she desired—saving the young man from brutal action—was important; but just as important was that she take some action—she felt a sense of responsibility about going through the process even if it did not lead immediately to a conclusion. Finally, her behavior shows that in order to deal effectively with systems of control, the meaning of words must be produced in the form of action, in the context of action. Some words that gained concrete meaning through her action are solidarity, empowerment, creativity, courage, and human logic. Those people who witnessed this incident also learned a great deal.

Incidents like these help Palestinians rediscover and reclaim their internal strength, their sense of self-worth, and an understanding of the importance of self-reliance for survival and growth. One expression of this development has been the widespread growth of organizations at the grassroots level. Most significantly, many neighborhood committees have been formed to deal with basic problems and needs in the community.[23] The activities of these committees included storing and distributing food, responding to health needs, taking care of the wounded and the needy, communal gardening, teaching children in homes, mosques, and churches, and alerting the community to army raids and settlers' attacks. Popular education dealing with these issues, as well as with school subjects, flourished for a few months after the beginning of the *intifadeh*.

But these neighborhood committees were dealt a severe blow by the Israeli military order of August 18, 1988, which made it a crime for anyone to be involved in popular committees, including those concerned with gardening and teaching children in homes. The penalty for engaging in such activities was up to ten years' imprisonment. This order significantly curtailed the activities of the neighborhood committees.[24] It is actually ironic when one considers the role of home teaching in the survival of the Jews in Europe for many centuries.

In short, the Palestinian *intifadeh* will probably prove to be the most inspiring, far-reaching, and authentic contribution of the Arabs since Islam. There is no historical precedent, for the fight is mainly between trapped young people and one of the strongest and most sophisticated armies in the world today. No one can guess at this point the full impact of the *intifadeh* or the direction which the course of events will take in the future. One thing is definite, however: the impact and

[23] Grassroots groups actually started forming in the early 1980s. They included women's committees, medical and agricultural relief committees, and groups working in educational and economic development.

[24] Dr. Jad Ishaq, a professor of botany at Bethlehem University, was jailed for six months because of his involvement in community gardening in his hometown, Beit Sahur, in the West Bank. My sister is a teacher of Arabic and mathematics for the first three grades in the Friends' Girls' School in Ramallah, and was teaching about ten children between the ages of four and twelve at our home. She had to stop teaching after the declaration of the order criminalizing teaching children at home.

consequences will be drastic. The *intifadeh* has already shaken the region—conceptually, socially, psychologically, and economically.

Community Education and the *Intifadeh*

Since the beginning of the *intifadeh*, the Palestinian community in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been undergoing a dramatic transformation. New experiences are being lived, new realities created, new needs felt, new problems and challenges faced, new convictions formed, and new mental maps of reality and how to change it are being drawn in people's minds. We need an education that will not impose obsolete, ready, fixed, or irrelevant mental maps of reality on people, but that will help people clarify and develop maps that reflect, as accurately as possible, the world around them and that can help them transform their conditions. Palestinians need an education whose focus is the world of practice and whose purpose is to produce knowledge in the context of action. Like many others, Palestinians have been involved in molding students to make them fit a certain preconceived concept of education. The time and current circumstances are appropriate for reversing this process and building an education that fits the learners.

Events since December 1987 have made Palestinians even more interested in the issue of education, and many are taking a new look at the overall educational practices within the Palestinian community. In response, the Tamer Institute for Community Education has been created to address educational issues that exist under current conditions, as well as to consider issues that will arise in the future.[25] The Institute seeks to affect formal, non-formal, and informal education in new ways.

Education and community transformation in light of the *intifadeh* are among the most serious challenges facing Palestinians today. I have several convictions about the role of education in community transformation, especially in relation to the conditions under which the Palestinian people are now living. First, education should be informed by the real *needs* in the community; prepackaged education should not be allowed to determine the range of *wants* or *demands* that people accept. This obviously means real needs in the community must be identified. In fact, one of the ongoing projects of the Tamer Institute is to identify and prioritize the real needs within the Palestinian community in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and at the same time, to identify the new and existing human, technical, and institutional resources that are necessary to meet those needs.

[25] The Arabic word *tamer* means a person who works with dates. In Arabia, dates were a main source of nutrition for many people. They could survive for a relatively long time on dates alone—that is, on what the land produced. In addition to being good, nutritious food, dates are a symbol of spiritual nourishment in the Sufi tradition, where understanding is part of spiritual growth. Part of the work of a *tamer* is transplanting available seeds from one palm tree in order to fertilize another. If this is not done, the dates will be of very poor quality. One main function of the Tamer Institute is to match available resources with real needs, in the hope that the "fertilization" process will yield good "fruit." Any community that ignores this dimension as a main component of its development will eventually build a relationship of dependency on others.

A teacher, in the Tamer Institute's educational philosophy, is perceived as a *tamer*: providing nourishment for the body, soul, and mind; helping in the survival of the community; and helping "fertilize" what the community needs with what it has. The principles of the Tamer Institute were enumerated above in note 15.

Second, the Palestinian community, like others, needs a feeling of self-worth, empowerment, and self-acceptance. The Palestinian people have been denied the value of their experience and robbed of their voice. Formal education, which usually stresses rote learning and, at best, the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills, ignores the importance of such feelings, and thus creates broken souls. Feelings of self-worth, however, should not be false, superficial, symbolic, or a gift from others; instead, they should emanate from the inner self, from internal strength, and from healthy psychological, intellectual, and spiritual growth. They should be connected to concrete things and, wherever possible, to production that enhances life. The difference between my mother's math and my math again comes to mind.

Producing something, whether materially, socially, culturally, intellectually, or spiritually, is important in building feelings of self-worth and empowerment and in encouraging creativity. A child of six or seven, for example, who learns about language through engaging in writing about something he or she has experienced, felt, or thought about, will recognize language as a means of exploring the environment and expanding his or her world and knowledge. Critical to empowering children is the presence of at least one adult who is ready to listen to or read what the child says or writes, and who will discuss the child's explanation of phenomena, events, and words. Reflecting on one's experience and taking action to change surrounding conditions is the best way to think concretely, meaningfully, accurately, creatively, and thus, effectively and empoweringly.

Of course, education that aims to build feelings of self-worth and empowerment is much more tedious and time-consuming than education that is geared toward teaching technical knowledge and skills. Building self-acceptance is much more difficult than denying one's self-worth; producing something is much harder than consuming it; conceptualizing is much harder than verbalizing; and theory-building is much harder than memorizing and applying theories. In other words, an education that is geared toward empowerment and the wholesome growth of learners is an act of love, while education that aims only at transmitting technical knowledge and skills is basically an expression of laziness.

Third, a main goal of community education is the building of human resources —which is not the same thing as labor force or credentialed people. Human resources (credentialed or not) are people who can perform necessary functions in the community in a competent, creative way and who have not lost the ability to learn. These are people who do not think merely in terms of technical or budgetary issues, but have freed their imaginations from ready and packaged solutions and have acquired the habit of periodically restructuring their lives, both mentally and socially. In fact, an education that is geared toward the building of human resources and empowering people constantly oscillates between life and the mental reconstruction of it. It is not a final and fixed product. Such an education always contains an element of potentiality. It incites people to action as well as to thought. It breaks in from beneath existing structures, so to speak, in order to revitalize them, to restructure them. It is a constant rearrangement of ideas and a constant creation of meanings. This oscillation between life and structure is crucial. Without structure we cannot deal properly with problems and needs; without life (with-

life (without freedom, spontaneity, creativity, concreteness, and growth) we will soon be dealing with obsolete or marginal problems and needs. This praxis, this constant restructuring of life (both mentally and socially), is at the core of community education.

Conceiving of education as oscillating between life and the mental construction of it means reintroducing practice and context into the learning process. No meaningful learning will take place if the process is devoid of context and practice. For example, in learning how to drive a car one does not start by learning general theories about driving and then applying that knowledge to a particular car in a particular place. Rather, one starts by practicing and learning how to drive a specific car in a specific place, thus learning how to drive any car in any place. In this type of thinking, evaluation means making sure that the learner knows how to drive the car safely and competently; the learner is not given a number measuring his or her relative performance on an irrelevant test. This principle applies to learning any skill or competency. It is a mystery and a pity that this obvious principle more often than not stops at the gates of institutions of formal education.

Building human resources also requires diversity in educational settings, practices, structures, and objectives. Experiences, needs, and interests differ so much from one learner to another that trying to use the same curriculum for all learners is both impossible and undesirable. It is like claiming that one suit should fit all people; those people who do not fit the suit are labeled unfit or failures. Diversity is at the core of life and of learning. The ideal for Palestinian education in the future should not be a fixed, standardized, centralized, rigid curriculum for all (no matter how "Palestinian" that curriculum is). Rather, a curriculum is needed that is flexible and dynamic enough to provide a supportive environment for learners, and to respond to their various needs and to a constantly changing environment. This does not mean that there is no need for a well-structured and strictly executed element of the curriculum to develop specific skills in certain areas. But this should constitute a relatively small part of the curriculum and should be put into practice according to a clear agreement between learners and teachers.

Fourth, networking, communication, and the exchange of ideas and experiences among groups involved in various activities are essential components in community education. Networking and coordination are essential for the following reasons: first, activities in any community are closely interrelated; second, coordination and mutual help avoid duplication and waste, a basic principle in thinking and acting developmentally; and third, because of the oppressive reality that characterizes most societies today, and because of the huge tasks that most societies face, education cannot do the job alone—joining efforts is crucial. Networking and exchanging ideas and experiences should not be confined to individuals and groups within a single community, but should extend across countries, especially within the Third World community interaction.

Fifth, an education that responds to real needs, empowers people, builds networks, raises questions about assumptions and consequences, keeps oscillating between life and structures, and facilitates the transformation of mental and social structures is usually not compatible either with existing economic, political, and

social orders or with the dominant values and mental patterns. Real manifestations of this kind of education are usually (and almost everywhere) fought harshly and promptly. The Israeli law of August 1988 criminalizing the teaching of children in homes is one example.

This basic incompatibility of a responsive system of education with the existing order explains a number of otherwise puzzling phenomena: why dictatorial governments in Third World countries don't hesitate to spend lots of money on formal, institutionalized, centralized education and forbid the formation of even small discussion groups outside that formal system; why logics other than Aristotle's are not part of the regular curriculum in schools;[26] why learners are not encouraged to tell their own stories; why people's voices and experiences are rendered inaudible and invisible; why words like hegemony, praxis, compassion, commitment, self-worth, and empowerment are usually absent from or marginal in educational discussions, courses, and schools of teacher training and education.

Conclusion

A basic premise in community education is that social reality will never be completely free of pain or injustice; that prior to and beyond any curriculum, any educational activity, or discussion, there is a concrete and often oppressive and evil reality; and that the purpose of education is not to ignore, conceal, or distort this reality, but to transform it.

The idea of transforming reality is linked to hope, and hope is linked to the belief that change is possible and that we are all responsible for it. Community education embodies the hope that today's technological-military logic and power can be swept away by human logic and human strength. The hope that the *intifadeh* embodies is a hope that transcends the Palestinian situation to reach out to humanity at large. In the big picture of human conflicts, the *intifadeh* is not a struggle between Palestinian young people and Israeli soldiers (although it is taking that form at this point), but rather, it is a fight between human power and technological military power. The victory of the *intifadeh* is not a victory for the Palestinians over the Israelis but a victory for humanity, including both Palestinians and Jews. The *intifadeh* embodies the hope that humanity cannot be crushed indefinitely. Like the wildflower seeds in the Palestinian landscape, humanity can dry up for a while, but with the first rainfall it will bloom all over again. Like a poppy growing up through cement to reach the sunlight and fresh air, humanity strives through oppression to reach toward the light. The role of education in this process is crucial. This is the message that Palestinian children exemplify for education today.

[26] See, for example, R. Wozniak, "A Dialectical Paradigm for Psychological Research: Implications Drawn from the History of Psychology in the Soviet Union," *Human Development, 18* (1975), 18–34.