



**MAKING
THE GRADE:
THE STATE OF
EDUCATION IN
PALESTINE**



... a need to maintain a Palestinian identity ...



Dina, Ramallah, 5th grade

Defying occupation, poverty and rampant fear of Israeli violence, Palestinians have a 99 percent literacy rate, the highest in the Arab world.

But getting educated comes at a cost for students and their teachers who must contend with more than 1,100 Israeli Military Orders that regulate everything from curfews to what can and cannot be studied in school. They face random school closures, harassment by Israeli residents of illegal colonial settlements and by IDF soldiers at checkpoints on the roadways and at the Apartheid Wall. Teachers report massive vandalism at the hands of IDF troops, children as young as 12 can be held in administrative detention indefinitely and even toddlers 4 and younger can suffer at the hands of a cruel, overzealous Israeli soldier.

All of this adds up to an insecure environment that in many areas would render an educational system defunct. But according to many experts, Palestinians value education and in it they see a constructive way to resist the occupation under which they've been living for more than four decades. They also see education as the roadmap toward a better life – one that one day may include peace and a free Palestine.

“Throughout 50 years of dispossession and more than 35 years of occupation, Palestinians have repeatedly turned to education as a primary means of survival – both as individuals and as a people. There has been a dramatic shift in educational access and attainment among Palestinians over this time. In 1948, only 25 percent of children were enrolled. Today, enrollment is near 90 percent at the primary level (ca. 2005),” according to *Fragmented Foundations: Education and Chronic Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, written by Susan Nicolai for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Save the Children UK in 2007.

To put it in more tangible terms, children repeatedly told researchers that education was tantamount in their lives, according to Nicolai.

“When asked to cite the most important thing in their lives, quite typically young girls replied, ‘school, finishing my education and graduation.’ ... A principal from Jenin explained this emphasis on education as due to a need to maintain a Palestinian identity, investment in human resources in place of land, and a hope that education can be used in a positive way to fight the occupation.”

The Palestinian education system has had a long, complex history that saw foreigners administering the system from the days of the Ottoman Empire, through the British Mandate and then occupation until 1994, when the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education was formed. After 1948 and the creation of the state of Israel, the Jordanian government oversaw education in the West Bank while Egypt administered the system in Gaza.

In the early days, tensions were high as Israel did not withdraw immediately from the occupied territories and soldiers often terrorized students and teachers alike.



Students in Al- Khalil walk to Qurtuba School down the street that passes the Israeli army checkpoint, before it turns and leads to the school.

But then after Israel waged the Six Day War in 1967 and illegally occupied what was left of historical Palestine, the education system fell into the hands of the Zionists, who immediately cut funding, reduced staff and censored curriculum. During the first 12 years of the occupation, the education system fell under the direct authority of the Israeli Military Governor. Even after the Camp David Accords were signed in 1979 and a civil administration was formed, it was staffed entirely by military personnel in uniform, Nicolai writes.

“Only minimal funding was provided, and that mainly went to cover teacher salaries. Schools, libraries, laboratories, and teaching standards were all in steady decline. Construction of new schools came virtually to a halt, and teacher training received little or no support. Moreover, teachers whose political views were not acceptable were dismissed or transferred to distant locations, while staff numbers were reduced in most areas,” according to Nicolai.

In addition, the Israelis censored textbooks and expunged any references to Palestinian heritage, geography, connection to armed resistance or anything to do with Arab nationalism or Zionism. Strict controls were placed on other subjects such as religion, literature and civics as well. “Military Order No. 107 prohibited outright over 55 textbooks in schools,” Nicolai wrote, and maps were changed to show Israel and its borders inclusive of occupied territory.

During this period of the occupation, civic groups and nongovernmental agencies set up a network of non-formal education as a way to make up for the lack of attention Israel was giving to schooling Palestinians. Nicolai quoted one observer as saying the efforts were “developed with a mandate to deliver services ‘during a period when the Israeli civil administration was letting our society crumble.’”

When the Palestinian Authority was formed in 1994 in response to the Oslo Peace Accords, the education system was finally in the hands of Palestinians. In the early days, tensions were high as Israel did not withdraw immediately from the occupied territories and soldiers often terrorized students and teachers alike. Needless to say, the transition was not a smooth one. Israel was uncooperative and the newly formed Ministry of Education and Higher Education found itself having to craft an education system entirely from scratch.

Initially, the education ministry made few changes and enacted a series of emergency measures aimed at creating a viable system that was coming off the remnants of the first intifada, which had had a devastating impact on schools, closing elementary and secondary schools and universities for extended periods of time, some for as long as two or three years, Nicolai writes.

The most common word school children wrote to describe the Apartheid Wall was “prison” ...

One child wrote, “It breaks my heart.”



Ahmed, Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip, 3rd grade

Finally, the ministry crafted a five-year plan that looked to the quality of education. Enrollment was up and great strides were made in the quality of education. But, then Ariel Sharon, who was running for political office, appeared at al-Aqsa mosque – the third holiest site in Islam – with several IDF troops in tow. Sharon provocatively announced that Jews would one day reclaim the site and build the Third Temple there.

The second intifada was born and with it came harsh Israeli measures that have had a devastating impact on the education system.

“By the time the second Palestinian uprising, or al-Aqsa intifada, began, much progress in the education sector had already been made,” Nicolai wrote. “There were challenges between 1994-2000, including the difficulty of travel between the West Bank and Gaza. However, during the second intifada, closures, curfews, permits, demolitions and the new separation wall made coordination and development of the education system nearly impossible.”

There are 2,190 schools in the West Bank and Gaza. The education ministry runs 76 percent of those schools and educates 67 percent of all students. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (UNRWA) administers 13 percent of schools and educates 24 percent of the students and private schools administer the remaining 11 percent.

Palestinian education statistics by provider (2004-2005)				
Provider	Schools	Students	Teachers	Classes
Government	1,659	733,735	33,398	21,292
UNRWA	273	254,582	8,075	5,960
Private	258	62,010	4,945	2,592
Total	2,190	1,050,327	46,417	29,844

Source: *Fragmented Foundations*, Nicolai

WEST BANK

Students in the West Bank have a number of obstacles – both literal and figurative – to overcome in order to obtain a solid education. Most children in the occupied territories exhibit symptoms of psychological distress caused by the rampant violence perpetrated upon the civilian population by IDF troops. Anxiety, crying, bedwetting and eating disorders are just some of the manifestations of this trauma, Nicolai writes.

50 percent – Number of students who have witnessed or experienced violence
Greater than 90 percent – Number of students who report “not feeling safe and exposed to attack”

Source: *Fragmented Foundations*, Nicolai

SO, JUST EXACTLY WHAT DO PALESTINIAN STUDENTS HAVE TO ENDURE TO GET AN EDUCATION?



HERE IS A BRIEF LOOK AT THE CONDITIONS WEST BANK CHILDREN ENDURE.

APARTHEID WALL

Nearly 50 percent of West Bank children report having to take longer, more circuitous routes to school because the Apartheid Wall obstructs their free passage from home to school.

When completed, the wall will be about 450 miles long - twice as long as the 1948 Green Line, according to Israeli human rights group B’Tselem in its 2008 annual report, *Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*. Palestinians will lose an additional 12 percent of the West Bank - the land that lies west of the barrier or in the enclaves created as the Wall winds around villages and towns. In total, at least 500,000 Palestinians live in areas severed by the Apartheid Wall, B’Tselem reports.

Many teachers and students must pass through gates to get to school, especially in Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Salfit, Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Nicolai writes. “In several places, school days have been shortened because of gate opening times. While less than 1 percent of children have claimed they dropped out because of the Wall, a PCBS (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics) survey found that a quarter of those were dropping out due to poverty, ‘to which the Wall is likely to have been a significant contributing factor,’” Nicolai states.

How Students Deal With the Apartheid Wall	
Students using alternate routes	48.1 percent
Changing schools	16.5 percent
Moving residence	4.5 percent
Absent because checkpoint closed	77.6 percent
Using permits	11 percent
Enrolled in local branches	3.4 percent
Other	4.5 percent

The most common word school children wrote to describe the Apartheid Wall was “prison,” according to a study conducted by Save the Children. “A snake that spreads its poison,” was another description. Children often described their own stress by saying the Wall “destroyed our lives,” or describing it as “a deadly barrier.” One child wrote, “It breaks my heart.”

The ministry of education estimates that nearly 3,000 students in Jenin, Tulkarem and Qalqilya must confront hostile IDF soldiers at Apartheid Wall checkpoints everyday because the Wall separates them from their schools.



Palestinian school girls in Al-Khalil are hit by stones thrown by teenaged Israeli settlers.



Mrs. Feriel, the headmistress of the Cordoba school (center), tends to one of her pupils who had her nose bloodied in the attack. An Israeli soldier is also present.



An Israeli teenaged settler throws stones at school girls in Al-Khalil while an IDF soldier watches.

ARRESTS, DETENTIONS, DEATHS

Increasingly since 2000, Palestinian youths have been subjected to arrests, administrative detentions and even death at the hands of Israeli soldiers. In the month of June, the Israeli military courts imprisoned 355 minors, some as young as 12 years old, according to a report prepared by Defence for Children International – Palestine Section.*

- Each year, about 700 Palestinian children are arrested and prosecuted through the Israeli military court system.
- Between Jan. 1, 2004, and June 30, 2009, at least 3,850 Palestinian children have been detained.

Children as young as 12 can be held for six months without being charged. Under Israeli military law, those uncharged detentions can be extended indefinitely. Children are often held in prisons in Israel, in violation of international law. Being imprisoned in Israel makes it impossible for these children to receive family visits because their families are not allowed to travel there.

SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE ALSO THE TARGETS OF DEADLY VIOLENCE, AND DEATH AMONG YOUTHS IS ON THE RISE.

- Between Jan. 1, 2004, and June 30, 2009, Israeli violence killed 851 Palestinian children
- Of those deaths, 528 occurred in Gaza (at least 325 children were killed in Operation Cast Lead)**
- 29 percent of the children killed in Operation Cast Lead were 8 years old or younger
- In 2008 alone, IDF forces killed 455 Palestinians - 87 of them were minors

** (Figures vary by agency. Figures range from 325 to 355 children killed.)

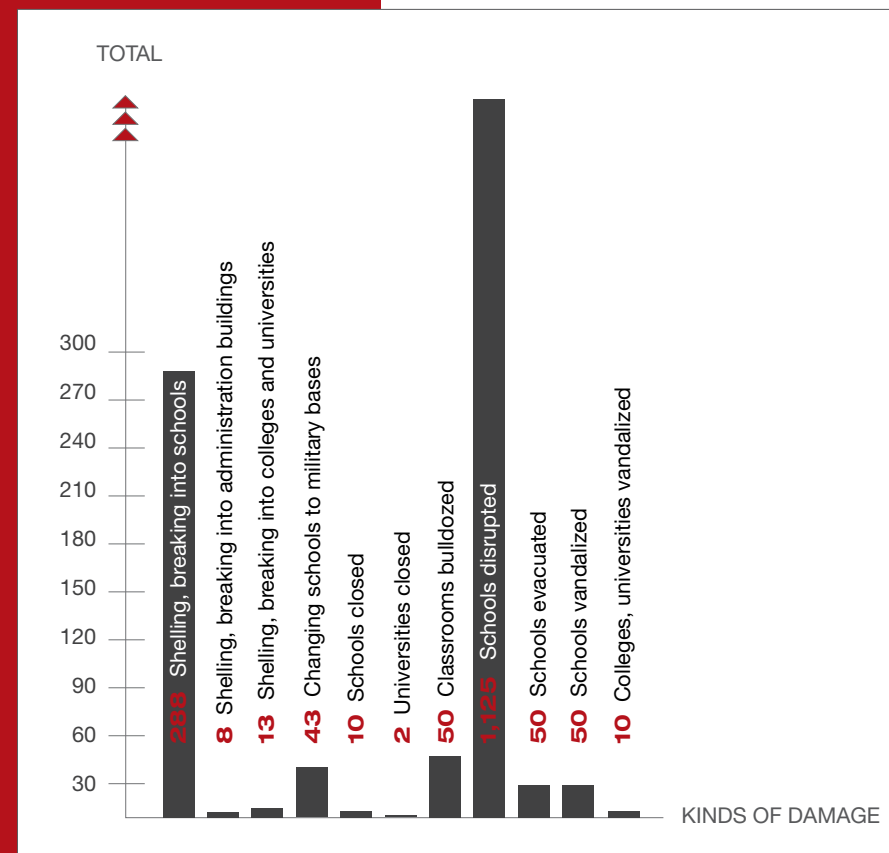
SETTLER VIOLENCE

With the increase in the population of illegal Israeli colonizing settlers – especially those of fervent religious Jewish sects – has come increasing violence against the indigenous population, especially children. Settlers set fire to olive groves and wheat fields. They taunt and harass students walking to school. In many cases, IDF soldiers who have been assigned to protect the children from the settlers, often participate in the assaults.

In 2007, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented 76 cases of settler violence, which includes verbal harassment, physical assaults and murder, according to Defence of Children International.

- Since 2007, Defence for Children International documented 27 separate incidents of settler violence against children, in which 34 children were injured.
- Of those children, Mohammad S., 17, was shot and killed.

The total estimated cost for the attacks and vandalism against schools is about \$2.3 million, according to the education ministry.



During May, the IDF conducted 501 search operations, a 12 percent increase compared to the 2008 monthly average, according to OCHA's humanitarian report. The arrest rate remained relatively the same at 322 arrests in May, compared to 328 in April. About two-thirds of the operations occurred in the West Bank.

CLOSURES, DISRUPTIONS AND ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

The Apartheid Wall is not the only physical barrier to attendance. Checkpoints, curfews and Israeli vandalism on Palestinian schools all work together to disrupt the consistent delivery of education.

For instance, in Nablus and Jenin alone, curfews were extended for 42 days and 48 days, respectively, meaning 500 teachers could not reach their schools regularly during the 2003/04 academic year. In 2003, the IDF closed 1,289 schools for three consecutive

weeks, according to Nicolai in *Fragmented Foundations*.

“UNICEF claimed in 2004 throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories more than ‘226,000 children in 580 schools found going to school impossible, irregular or very risky.’ There have also been sharp declines in teacher attendance, as teachers often live on the other side of checkpoints or outside closed areas,” Nicolai writes.

“In the course of the past few years, Palestinian children from two small villages in south Hebron, who walk every day to the elementary school in At-Tuwani village, have faced regular harassment by Israeli settlers, including being verbally abused, physically assaulted, chased and having stones thrown at them. Though the Israeli authorities have failed to bring an end to the harassment, the IDF has committed to escorting these children to school. Yet, despite the commitment, the soldiers often abandon the children partway along the route, leaving them vulnerable to settler attack. This month, Christian Peacemaker Teams, an international NGO working in the area, reported that in three occasions (in May), the soldiers rode in jeeps, forcing the children to run in order to keep up with the Jeep escort. Children expressed unhappiness with the escort to the NGO staff, reporting that, in cases, soldiers either revved the Jeep’s engine, frightening the children, or approached the children in their Jeeps at high speeds.

~ The Humanitarian Monitor, May 2009, OCHA



IDF attacks on students and teachers and Israeli vandalism of educational facilities is not uncommon. The education ministry reported the IDF shelled or broke into 288 schools between Sept. 28, 2000, to May 28, 2004. In addition, other schools were turned into military bases. Colleges and universities were not exempt either.

Attacks are frightening. Here is the testimony given in 2001 by a teacher in al-Zir Basic School for Boys, Hebron Governorate, as recorded by Nicolai:

“Two military Jeeps passed by the school and there were not any confrontations. Then suddenly from the two jeeps a gas canister was thrown at the first classroom. A soldier got out of the jeep and threw that canister through the window of the classroom. The students would have suffocated but for the teachers’ efforts, which helped the small children of 6 years old.”

DEMOLITIONS AND DISPLACEMENT

Israel routinely issues home demolition orders or evacuation orders to whole neighborhoods when it randomly declares areas as closed military areas or as nature preserves.

In May, “Entire communities located in such areas in the Jordan Valley are facing new threats of wide scale displacement as the Israeli military distributed evacuation and demolition orders affecting over 300 people, including almost 170 children,” OCHA’s May humanitarian report states.

“Since 1967, more than 20 percent of the West Bank was declared by the Israeli authorities as closed military zones, where Palestinian access is prohibited (excluding the closed area between the Barrier and the Green Line). The large majority of these areas are located in the Jordan Valley and along the eastern slopes of the Bethlehem and Hebron governorates. ... These communities represent some of the most vulnerable in the West Bank ... They have limited or no access to services such as education or health ...” the OCHA report states.

POVERTY

High poverty rates in the West Bank and Gaza have put undue burden on families and the education system meant to serve them. According to World Bank figures, half of all Palestinians fall below the official poverty line of \$2.30 per capita per day, and 16 percent live below a subsistence level of \$1.60 per capita per day. Prior to 2000, child poverty had been decreasing, but since Israel’s redeployment after the onset of the second intifada, it has increased 26 percent to 42 percent.

1,200 NORTH GAZAN STUDENTS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL THIS YEAR BECAUSE THERE IS NO ROOM FOR THEM



These figures were published before Israel enacted its siege on Gaza and before Israel’s deadly attack in December and January 2009. The education system in Gaza is particularly dire.

On July 28, 2009, the United Nations and several international agencies warned that Gaza’s education system was unprepared for the upcoming school year. Deprivations caused by Israel’s blockade and the massive destruction caused by Operation Cast Lead have rendered the education system nearly defunct.

“The blockade has caused untold suffering to children in Gaza, who face another academic year in terrible conditions,” Philippe Lazzarini, acting humanitarian coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, said in a written statement.

“During the 23 days of Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, 18 schools were completely destroyed and at least 280 were damaged. Today, one month before the start of the new school year, more than six months after the ceasefires, none of these schools have been properly rebuilt or rehabilitated due to lack of construction materials. Since the imposition of the blockade, students have faced chronic shortages of educational supplies including textbooks, paper and uniforms ... Even prior to Cast Lead the education system was already under severe duress due to the two-year blockade that has caused a crisis of human dignity in Gaza, the statement said.

ACCORDING TO DATA FROM THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER AGENCIES, HERE’S A BREAKDOWN OF OPERATION CAST LEAD’S IMPACT:

THE ISRAELI OFFENSIVE, OPERATION CAST LEAD IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY...

- Destroyed 18 schools and damaged another 262
- Six of these destroyed schools were in north Gaza, affecting 9,000 students who have to relocate to other schools
- Destroyed six university buildings and damaged 16
- About 88 percent of UNRWA schools and 82 percent of government schools operate on shifts to accommodate overcrowding
- In north Gaza, the 9,000 displaced students were relocated to 73 schools in the same area; 4,000 of those students were split between two schools
- 1,200 north Gazan students may not be able to go to school this year because there is no room for them



An Israeli soldier tries to restrain a settler from continuing her attack.



A young Palestinian girl is seen shortly after a May attack.

DURING OPERATION CAST LEAD, THE IDF ...

- Killed 250 students
- Killed 15 teachers
- Injured 856 students
- Injured 19 teachers

GAZA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS ...

- 105 new schools to replace those destroyed, damaged or worn out from serving as shelters to the more than 51,000 people displaced by Israel's offensive
- Construction materials such as 25,000 tons of iron bars and 40,000 tons of cement
- Food and nutrients for its children, who are suffering malnutrition:
 - › 20 percent of school-aged children are iodine deficient
 - › 62 percent of school-aged children are anemic
 - › 22 percent of preschool children lack Vitamin A

Furthermore, the conditions in Gaza are having a negative impact on student performance and attendance. There have been four major military attacks in Gaza since 2005, which have killed at least 528 children, according to Defence for Children International. The impact is seen on standardized test scores. In the first semester of the 2007/08 academic year, only 20 percent of 16,000 sixth-grade students passed standardized tests in math, science, English and Arabic, according to UN agencies.

Abject poverty, caused by the siege, has resulted in increased child labor, which also negatively impacts school attendance and performance. Unemployment stands at about 44 percent, according to a June report by the International Committee of the Red Cross. More than 70 percent of Gazans live in poverty with income of less than \$250 per month. This poverty has resulted in an increase in child labor, UNICEF reported in June.

Sajy al-Mughanni, communication officer for the UN children's agency UNICEF in Gaza, blamed Israel's 25-month siege for the growing poverty as well as the increasing number of working children in the region. He told the International Middle East Media Center that, "We do have a high level of unemployment in Gaza. In terms of child labor, we don't have specific numbers. But we do use our teams to go out in the field, to do an assessment and try to intervene with the families. I can confirm to you that the phenomenon of child labor is growing. The increase of this phenomenon can be mainly attributed to the Israeli blockade."

A large part of the problem stems from the fact that Palestinians have no part in forming the pedagogy or curriculum for its Arab students ...



PALESTINIAN STUDENTS IN ISRAEL

The United States government and other supporters of Israel like to point to that country's democratically elected government as a beacon of justice in the Middle East. What they fail to mention is that Israel supports a segregated school system, which offers advantages to Jewish students but deprives Palestinian citizens of Israel of their basic rights.

State funding of public education epitomizes the racism in the school system. The state of Israel spends \$1,100 per Jewish pupil but only \$190 per Arab student. There is also a shortage of more than 1,000 classrooms for Arab students, according to the Israeli Ministry of Education.

In addition, recent developments in the Knesset ensure that the curriculum for all students including Arabs will be even more Judaized than ever before. References to the Nakba, the Palestinian narrative of events from 1947 to 1949 that culminated in the deaths of 13,000 Palestinians, the forced exile of 750,000 more and the utter destruction of more than 500 villages, will be erased from all textbooks. Students must also now learn the Zionist national anthem, which celebrates a "Jewish connection to the land," according to journalist Jonathon Cook. The Palestinian Muslim and Christian connection to the Holy Land is entirely disregarded; it's erased from the dialogue. The 1.3 million Arab citizens of Israel find the song offensive and hurtful.

Dr. Yousef Jabareen, director of DIRASAT, The Arab Center for Law and Policy, told American Muslims for Palestine in an e-mail, "These are intense days here." In addition to the above factors, students are showing a decline in standardized test scores, which will negatively impact their chances of getting into a university. "It has long been the case that Israel's Arab students have performed significantly worse than their Jewish peers. The reasons for the gaps range from socioeconomic disadvantages (more than half of Arab families are below the poverty line, more than three times the rate of Jewish families), to cultural biases in the standardized curricula (more lessons on Jewish heritage and religion), the hard fact of unequal budget allocations," Jabareen wrote in an op-ed article that appeared in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

In 2008, only 32 percent of Arab students passed their matriculation exams compared to 51 percent of Jewish students, according the Israeli Ministry of Education. For Arabs, the decline was sharp: in 2006, 51 percent passed the exams.

"Additionally, those who pass score lower than the national average on both these and the psychometric tests required for university or college admission, and as a result, 45 percent of Arab applicants are not accepted to higher education programs. Currently Arabs account for only 10 percent of students in bachelor's programs across the country," Jabareen writes.

The Arab minority constitutes 20 percent of Israel's population, but has little to no real influence over its own education policy, budgets, standards or curricula ...



A large part of the problem stems from the fact that Palestinians have no part in forming the pedagogy or curriculum for its Arab students, he continued.

“It would seem that as long as Arab educators, academics and policymakers are excluded from planning, there will be no improvement. The Arab minority constitutes 20 percent of Israel’s population, but has little to no real influence over its own education policy, budgets, standards or curricula,” Jabareen writes.

In contrast, the state’s religious Jewish school systems – which often has conflicts with the mainstream public – has its own pedagogic council that decides on a vast range of educational issues.

And the increasing weight put on Jewish heritage and Judaism lessons put Arab pupils at a disadvantage and further alienates them, Jabareen said.

For years, DIRASAT has worked to bring equality to the school system. Jabareen advocates for the creation of an Arab pedagogic council that, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, would address Arab education in Israel. In 2008, a committee then headed by former education minister Yuli Tamir, had recommended curriculum reforms to encourage a “shared life” and common values among pupils, including more encounters between Jewish and Arab students, the journalist Cook wrote in an article that appeared in the Palestine Chronicle.

The proposal was quashed by the current education minister, Gideon Saar, the same man who authorized the disbursement of 8,000 national anthem kits to all students.

DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION		
Issue	Jewish Population	Arab Population
Rate of adults who have completed 16 or more years of schooling	19.6 percent	8 percent
Kindergarten enrollment (age 4)	90.2 percent	78 percent
Average class size	24.3 students	29.3 students
Special needs children who don't get needs met	39 percent	71 percent
Drop-out rate all students	3.4 percent	6.8 percent
Drop-out rate males (9th grade)	4.4 percent	15.8 percent
Passed the matriculation exams needed for university or commensurate employment	46.4 percent	29.6 percent
Rejected university applicants	19.6 percent	43.6 percent

Source: DIRASAT

... only 70 university students managed to exit Gaza ...

DISPARITIES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS		
Issue	Jewish Population	Arab Population
Unemployment	9.7 percent	11.5 percent
Poverty rate for families	28.7 percent	61.3 percent
Social welfare (government) spending per capita	NIS 378	NIS 246
Social welfare spending (government and private) per capita	NIS 493	NIS 328

Source: DIRASAT

UNIVERSITIES

Pursuing a higher education in Palestine requires a certain amount of fortitude. The obstacles present in the primary and secondary education systems are only intensified for young adults pursuing academic degrees. Palestinians are not free to move throughout the West Bank, they are prohibited from entering Israel, and Gazans are not free to leave their enclosed small strip of land. All of this converges and works against students.

The Palestinian university system is founded on an integrated system with facilities in Gaza and the West Bank. The idea was not to duplicate degrees, so that means some professions are taught in the West Bank, for instance, and others are taught in Gaza, according to Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement.

Speech therapy, occupational therapy, medicine, dentistry, operating room management and health systems can only be studied in the West Bank. Because Israel prohibits Gazans from traveling to the West Bank, they take remote classes in a satellite campus. They often learn procedures via the Internet or videotape, Gisha reports. Since 2000, there has been a 90 percent decrease in the number of Gazan students studying in the West Bank.

“The prohibition prevents students from Gaza from studying critical professions such as medicine, physical therapy, health administration, speech therapy and occupational therapy,” Gisha states in a position paper titled, “Limitations on Access to Higher Education for Palestinian Students,” December 2006. “In Gaza, there is currently only one working certified occupational therapist, despite evidence of an estimated 24,000 disabled residents who could benefit from rehabilitation services. (This report was made before Operation Cast Lead in January 2009, where more than 5,300 people were injured.)

The restriction on movement also has negatively impacted university students who want to study abroad. More than 1,000 Gazan students apply to universities around the world each

Palestinian children, despite the trauma, disappointments and heartbreak they suffer because of the occupation, still are hopeful and cling to values that elevate them to positions far above the debased situation Israel is forcing upon them.

year. But between July and September 2008, only 70 university students managed to exit Gaza, according to UN agency reports.

Neither the West Bank nor Gaza offers doctoral degrees and students are routinely prohibited from entering Israel to enter doctoral programs.

Operation Cast Lead had a devastating impact on Gazan universities. Six university buildings were entirely destroyed and 16 were damaged. But West Banks universities and colleges haven't been immune to Israeli violence. The Palestinian education ministry offered these statistics for 2002/03:

- Bethlehem University – Dec. 8, 2002: IDF soldiers threw poisonous gas bombs into classrooms and took over the institution, holding it for five days. They damaged furniture, computers, doors, windows and books.
- An-Najah National University Nablus campus – Dec. 14, 2002: The IDF took over the university and forced students and teachers to leave.
- Hebron University – Jan. 14, 2003: The IDF damaged labs, computers and closed facility for six months.
- Palestine Polytechnic University – Jan. 14, 2003: The IDF closed it for three months.

THE TOTAL COST FOR THESE INCURSIONS CAME TO \$7.9 MILLION, THE MINISTRY REPORTED.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Yet despite these dire circumstances, Palestinians still pride themselves for their emphasis on education. Groups such as DIRASAT, B'Tselem and Defence of Children International continue to work toward a more just and equitable life for Palestinians.

Palestinian children, despite the trauma, disappointments and heartbreak they suffer because of the occupation, still are hopeful and cling to values that elevate them to positions far above the debased situation Israel is forcing upon them.

Writes Nicolai in *Fragmented Foundations*:

“Despite what seems a bleak situation, children continue to struggle to feel positive about what life holds in store. Palestinian children say that in order to cope with the occupation they try to develop traits to keep them safe, focus on personal improvement and strengthen their relationships. In their own words this means:

- ‘Being kind-hearted, helpful, educated, brave, strong, clever and self-dependent;
- ‘Working on interests such as singing, swimming, karate, becoming a pilot, or a general eagerness to learn;
- ‘Being sociable, beloved, and popular in the classroom, having friends or being patriotic.’”

*Being kind-hearted,
helpful, educated,
brave, strong, clever
and self-dependent...*



“The vast majority of children, 96 percent, believe that education is the ‘main means to improve their situation, both presently and in the future,’” Nicolai writes.

* Defence for Children International is based in Switzerland. AMP editors decided to keep the original spelling of the organization's name, although it is not American English usage.

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American Muslims for Palestine is a national grassroots organization, whose mission is to educate the American public on issues related to Palestine and its rich, cultural heritage. To learn more or to make a donation, go to www.ampalestine.org.



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708.598.4267 OFFICE

888.404.4AMP TOLL FREE

info@ampalastine.org

www.ampalastine.org

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