

## The Palestinian Civics Curriculum: Smoke screening the Illusion of the State

Dr. Mai Abu Moghli

University College London and the Centre for Lebanese Studies

Email: [m.abumoghli@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.abumoghli@ucl.ac.uk)

Phone number: +44 (0)7552388949

### Themes covered

- The politicization of curriculum making
- Equity, gender, diversity, and inclusion.
- The personal, the social and cultural in the curriculum.

### Abstract

This research examines the content of the Palestinian civics curriculum and how it is understood and perceived by teachers and students in the Occupied West Bank. The civics curriculum was chosen for this research as it is human rights heavy, and human rights education (HRE) is inherently revolutionary: 'If implemented effectively. It has the potential to generate social opposition, alongside rising demands for justice and accountability' (Cardenas 2005). Within the Palestinian context, HRE is key to link education to the struggle, not only against the colonial occupation, but also for political and social change and reclaiming a narrative dictated for generations by various occupying powers, and currently dictated by a ruling body that assumes building of a state under colonialism.

By asking the research question:

- What are the perceptions of teachers and students in selected Palestinian Authority schools in the Occupied West Bank about human rights in general and HRE in particular?
- To what extent does HRE inform students' engagement in social and/or political activism in the Occupied West Bank?

I reached the conclusion that HRE, embedded in the civics education curricula, is flattened, decontextualised and depoliticised to serve the interests of the ruling party, create an illusion of a state under colonialism, perpetuate socio-cultural oppressive practices and structures and implement donors' agendas. Civics curricula do not allow for students' engagement in human rights praxis. The cooptation of the values of human rights and civics engagement that is being done in the Palestinian curricula increases cynicism and disillusionment towards human rights amongst Palestinian youth. In spite of that, some teachers and students employ a number of strategies to reclaim human rights and their meaning, to root them in their own lives and day-to-day practices. Hence, this research provokes reflections and reconsiderations of the way human rights within civics curricula is being conceptualised and implemented. The idea that pupils and educators are passive recipients of hegemonic curricula imposed by the state and can therefore do nothing about

the role of education in reproducing social inequalities is essentially flawed (Pherali 2013). In this research I highlight the power of people's agency, where no matter how the curriculum is shaped at the top, there is always a way for individuals and groups to alter it to serve their own purposes and fit it within their value systems and structures.

The data for this research was generated over nine months in the Occupied West Bank, where individual and group interviews were conducted with students, teachers, ministry of education and (I)NGO representatives. Classroom observations were conducted during civics classes and the civics curriculum was analysed.

I based my research on critical theory, which allows for an understanding of how the research participants construct their perceptions and experiences in the political, social and cultural contexts that determined the nature and types of knowledge included in the curricula. It facilitates investigating the links between power and values (as curricula are value-laden) by considering the questions: what knowledge is important? Whose knowledge is important? Whose interest does this knowledge serve? And how do curricula serve different interests? (Cohen et al 2007). Through critical theory I was able to employ a political reading of the curriculum and the purpose(s) of education (Habermas 1984).

## References

Cardenas, S. (2005). Constructing Rights? Human Rights Education and the State. *International Political Science Review*. 26(4), pp. 363-379

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge

Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalisation of society* (Vol. One). Boston : Beacon

Pherali, T. (2013). Schooling in Violent Situations: The politicization of education in Nepal, before and after the 2006 peace agreement. *Prospects*, 43(1), pp. 49- 67