


A VOLUME IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION INQUIRIES:
PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION 2030

Education Around the Globe

*Creating
Opportunities
and
Transforming
Lives*



Diversity
Indigenous
Livelihoods
Peace
Empower

2030

Sustainable De
Equality
SDGs

edited by
Tonya Huber
James G. O'Meara

Education Around the Globe

**Creating Opportunities
and Transforming Lives**

International Educational Inquiries:
People, Places, and Perspectives of Education 2030

Series Editor:
Tonya Huber
Texas A&M International University

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Tonya Huber, Series Editor

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and Transforming Lives* (2021)

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Principles and Priorities for Progress in the Education 2030 Era

James G. O'Meara

This Education 2030 era represents a second call to action by United Nations members to end poverty and accelerate progress for those furthest behind with respect to sustainable development. Access to quality Education 2030 experiences provides the foundation for achieving sustainable development for all. Quality Education 2030 experiences equip local-global citizens with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to champion sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, and inclusion in ways that promote peace and nonviolence. Currently, differing levels of access represent challenges for those working to create the environments and provide the educational experiences designed to ensure that by 2030, no one is left behind.

In 2019, not all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education. The lack of equitable access to quality early childhood development, care, and preprimary education varies and, as a result, not all children are ready for success in primary education. The absence of universal, affordable, and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education limits the opportunities for youth and adults to develop functional levels of literacy and numeracy as well as the relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent

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jobs, and entrepreneurship. The lack of opportunity disproportionately impacts the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children. Unless we begin to engage with the vulnerable to develop local solutions with local community members, the goal of ending poverty and accelerating progress for those furthest behind, with respect to sustainable development, will remain unrealized by 2030.

This volume touches on several themes considered critical (OECD, 2016) to the realization of sustainable development in the era of Education 2030. Effective sustainable development through Education 2030 must contribute to progress in one or more of the following areas (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017):

1. *People*: to end poverty and hunger;
2. *Planet*: to protect the planet from degradation;
3. *Prosperity*: to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives;
4. *Peace*: to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies;
5. *Partnership*: to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development.

The authors contributing to this volume share their research to introduce the reader to the core principles of the Education 2030 Agenda (UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development, n.d.):

1. *Universality*: all countries, income levels and levels of development status.
2. *Leave no one behind*: leave no one behind especially those in need.
3. *Interconnectedness and Indivisibility*: the interconnected and indivisible nature of its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs).
4. *All segments of society*: specifically, race, gender, ethnicity, and identity.
5. *Multistakeholder partnerships*: mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise and technology.

Suleiman and Abadi (Chapter 1) highlight the importance of *peace* and *leaving no one behind* to the Education 2030 Agenda. Their inquiries highlight the challenges that continue to hamper the effective functioning of schools in Palestine, a region with ongoing conflict and instability. Their insights represent a valuable contribution to those seeking to ensure that we leave no one behind when working in the complex educational and social realities created by conflict.

Suleiman and Kunnah (Chapter 2) reinforce the need to consider *people* when implementing an Education 2030 Agenda for all *segments* of society. Their examination of a diverse school district located in California's San Joaquin Valley reveals the impact of student success; grading philosophies, and teacher pressures on inequitable practices in schools with high levels of poverty. The authors discuss implications for integrating meaningful and equitable assessment and grading practices to mitigate the impact of poverty on teacher grading decision making.

Blackburn, Reyes, and Huber (Chapter 3) continue the focus on people as it applies to implementing a *universal* Education 2030 Agenda to promote sustainable development for every *segment* of citizenry in every country regardless of income levels and levels of developmental status. Their perspectives on the gender dynamics in the Dominican Republic, especially for women living in the impoverished bateyes, highlight the interconnected and indivisible nature of the SDGs. Their discussion represents a powerful call to action for researchers to increase the quality of outcomes for SDG 4 (education) and SDG 5 (gender equality) via further explorations of the complex interaction of gender role beliefs and the impact of nonprofit education programs in small islands and developing states.

Charoni (Chapter 4) further reinforces this volume's focus on *people* as it applies to implementing a *universal* Education 2030 Agenda to promote sustainable development for all citizens and countries. This case study focuses on the work of the Foundation Pierre Smith Mondelus in the Milot commune in northern Haiti. The reported observations, testimonies, and test scores highlight the potential for nonprofit organizations to impact literacy levels and encourage community members to seek prosperity by looking for jobs, establishing businesses, and becoming self-sufficient.

Eloff, Cipriano Gonçalves, Chiromo, Elgafar, Mariaye, and Tchombe (Chapter 5) advance the discussion beyond people to *partnership*. Their account of the creation of a doctoral network in teacher education in Africa, designed to leverage the potential of doctoral networks for indigenous knowledge creation in Africa, by African scholars, provides an excellent example of the benefits of mobilizing and sharing knowledge and expertise to accelerate progress. The inclusion of technical and political partners across and beyond Africa (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Teacher Task Force) within the doctoral network in teacher education in Africa framework provides a timely reminder of the need to create *multistakeholder* global partnerships required for *mobilizing* the financial, technical, and political resources required to implement the Education 2030 Agenda.

Gibson, Pedersen Blanchard, and O'Donnell (Chapter 6) extend the discussion on *partnerships* by reminding the reader of the role for youth in implementing and revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development. Their description of the Smithsonian Science for Global Goals project, the Global Goals Action Progression guide for young people (ages 8–17 in or out of school), provides a roadmap for young people seeking to become advocates, partners, and stakeholders in the realization of the SDGs. Their intentions to empower young people to support the realization of the SDGs by identifying and engaging in local actions to promote planet, peace, and prosperity provides timely advice to those seeking to better understand the *interconnected and indivisible* nature of different SDGs.

Wynne, Barding, and Bailing (Chapter 7) provide another example from the US about the global, *interconnected and indivisible* nature of different SDGs. Their description of a self-reflective predeparture short course includes an explanation of how concepts related to diversity and inclusion, social justice, and the development of cultural competencies were combined with global citizenship education to enrich study abroad experiences and increase awareness among participants of the constructs of interdependent and interconnected global citizenship. Their curriculum and pedagogical recommendations should assist faculty seeking to build the capacity of their students to more effectively process their experiences with different *segments of society* as they spend time abroad.

Newton, Chhikara, Oudghiri, Rondeau-Madrid, Lolkus, and Phillion (Chapter 8) close this volume with a focus that builds off the discussion on study abroad experiences. The examples involve two very different contexts (Honduras and Tanzania) examined through a common lens of social justice. The use of a tridimensional social justice framework (redistribution, recognition, and representation) provided a useful lens for pre-service teachers to build competencies in empathy, global understanding, critical thinking, and social justice. This same framework has useful applications for anyone seeking to build a teacher candidate's capacity to examine *segments of society* (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, and identity) and integrate the principle of *universality* into their representations of their lived experiences while studying abroad.

How we work to end poverty and accelerate progress toward sustainable development for all is just as important as the targets we need to achieve in order to realize sustainable development for all. Civil societies like Foundation Pierre Smith Mondelus (Charoni, Chapter 4) and projects such as the Smithsonian Science for Global Goals (see Gibson et al., Chapter 6), must continue to develop innovative and complementary approaches that help advance our understandings of universality as we explore the interconnected and indivisible nature of different SDGs.

Researchers like the proponents of research networks for Africa (Eloff et al., Chapter 5) or peace for Palestine (Suleiman & Abadi, Chapter 1) must continue to build the partnerships and share their thoughts to help us chart progress and identify best practices that are innovative, scalable, and transferable. Teacher educators need to continue to generate Education 2030 curricula and pedagogy for promoting inclusion, quality, and equity for all segments of societies in developing and developed countries. This volume provides invaluable models for those seeking to join the efforts of civil society organizations, researchers, and/or teacher educators working toward sustainable development for all by 2030.

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PART I

PEACE, PEOPLE, PROSPERITY, AND UNIVERSALITY

CHAPTER 1

SUSTAINING EDUCATION IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Challenges and Opportunities

Mahmoud Suleiman and Jawad Abadi

ABSTRACT

For many decades, education in the Palestinian territories has faced difficult challenges that continue to hamper the effective functioning of schools. Coupled with the lack of stability in the region, the evolving complex socio-political realities have hampered efforts to provide meaningful educational opportunities for Palestinian students across the educational spectrum. While schools continue to survive by coping with difficult situations, they still struggle to reach sustainable stages for continual development and improvement. We examine the current state of education and its direction in the Palestinian territories within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations. While the SDGs are on the top of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and its institutions' agendas, the focus of this chapter will be on SDG 4 as a framework to understand the educational context in Palestine. The research approach involves hermeneutic phenomenology to provide an account of the complex

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educational and social realities facing the Palestinians and their schools. A hermeneutic analysis of the existing literature, education initiatives, strategic plans, evaluation reports, and educational standards, as well as providing a description of the lived experiences of participants in schools, will shed light on the challenges and opportunities that impact the improvement and sustainability within the territories. Implications for enhancing educational outcomes in this unique region will be provided within a global framework conducive to equity and social justice.

Keywords: educational challenges; equity; Palestinian education; sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the current educational system in the Palestinian territories, it is important to examine the sociohistorical context and complex dynamics that not only have the Palestinian educational institutions endured, but also the various aspects of their lives and struggles including their unique *place* in the region and world. We frequently use the word *place*, given its symbolism and connotations for plight, a sense of belonging and more importantly, as a homeland that long has been denied for the Palestinians. In the physical and geographical sense, this underscores the notion of a *place* where Palestinians have originally lived and have always hoped to live in peace. This notion has significance of pride in every Palestinian because it represents a sense of belonging, identity, heritage, and existence. In addition, it reflects their identity, aspiration, destiny, statehood, and dream.

Palestine is located in the heart of the Middle East which has been marked with turmoil, political fluctuations, and emerging religious and political conflicts for many centuries. Geographically, the vital strategic location of the Middle Eastern countries, along with their rich and fertile resources, have been the focus of colonial powers from western and eastern nations. Moreover, the symbolic significance of the region as the birthplace of human civilizations has made it a continual focal point for power struggles among regional and world superpowers to dominate these vital and strategic areas. Most importantly, the major three religions originated in the Middle East, namely in the Levant region, in which Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were born. In particular, historical Palestine has been at the center stage of the Middle East, embodying the economic, social, cultural, and religious wealth that appeal to most nations.

The complexity of dynamics among the peoples of the Middle East has been a target of study and inquiry. The current state of the Middle East can be seen as a reflection of the past interactions and events that shaped

the lives of its nations. Similarly, the vested interest in the Middle East affairs on the part of the superpowers indicates the vital impact the region has on the world's stability and survival.

These events and fluctuations have been manifested during the past century. With the colonial powers' mandates over 100 years ago to dominate several parts of the Middle East, a new world order had evolved. Subsequent to two world wars, the Middle East became a cluster of small nations and countries attached to the world powers whose policies and interests were fulfilled by ruling regimes and imposed governments (Barzilai, 1996; Citron, 2006; Lesch, 2007).

As far as Palestine was concerned, the way was paved for the creation of Israel in 1948, which marked a turning point in the history of the Middle East and certainly in the lives of the Palestinian people (Bard, 1999; Bickerton & Hill, 2003). Since then, several conflicts and wars erupted and put the region in the spotlight in the international arena and frequently on the top of the United Nations' agendas (Bregman, 2002). As a result, displacement of people caught in the conflict occurred along with the suffering of those involved in these conflicts. The Palestinians have felt most of the impact as they lost their homeland and became displaced and scattered all over the world. Since the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian people have been living in a diaspora, challenged by sociopolitical dynamics in their homeland as well as in different Arab regions, where over 4.7 million of them are registered refugees today according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (Jadallah, 2009). Other armed conflicts between the Arabs and Jews following the 1940s have only contributed to more hostility between the two peoples, both striving for nationhood and independence. Those who survived and endured tribulations remained in their homeland, thus coping with difficult challenges has become an unmarked part of their daily lives and lived experiences.

For education to be examined in a meaningful way, it should be understood from the sociohistorical context. We will explore how the Palestinian education system has evolved to its current state in light of the past and current complex events. As we highlight the challenges and barriers, we hope to draw implications for recontextualizing opportunities to enhance educational input and outcomes that can have promising consequences.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE PALESTINIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The history of the Palestinian education system is long and replete with tribulation and challenges. It involves a wide range of complex sociohistorical and political variables that have shaped social and educational

institutions over time. In addition, the geopolitical conditions and ever going conflicts have paid their toll on the Palestinian people and their aspirations for independence. The plight of the Palestinian people has always been marked by disenfranchisement, oppression by others, domination of foreign military powers, and underrepresentation in regional and international arenas (Bazian, 2017). By virtue of their vital geographical location, the Palestinians have been caught in the middle of conflicts and competing powers to conquer and occupy their lands. They live in one of the most contested places on earth that has been dominated by various forces throughout history, such as the Crusaders, the Ottomans, the British, and others (Bickerton & Hill, 2003). This stems from many ideological, geographical, economic, and political factors. One of the most important factors involves religion and ideology. Historical Palestine is the birthplace of the three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, its strategic location as a bridge for international trade has made it appealing to major world superpowers. Other factors include the vulnerability of its people, given the size of the country, its diverse demographics, and the environmental elements such as climate as well as geography.

During its recent history, Palestine has been a key place of interest for many in the world. One of the most influential groups that had interest in the land is the Zionist movement, whose ambitious agenda revolved around creating a homeland for displaced Jews after World War I and II (Bazian, 2017). Palestine was seen as a beachhead for achieving the Zionist dream of creating Greater Israel in the region. The turning point in achieving the foundational task of political Zionism occurred during the British mandate in Palestine. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the occupying British forces paved the way for the creation of the State of Israel, which became a reality in 1948 (Masalah, 1992).

As Nicolai (2007) pointed out, various powers that ruled Palestine, such as the “Ottomans, British, Jordanians, and Egyptians were successful in establishing the concept of schooling as central to Palestinian life” over the past two centuries (p. 31). Nonetheless, these ruling regimes introduced various educational agendas for the Palestinian students and used education as a *political tool*. Nicolai (2007) cited a renowned Palestinian political science scholar, Ali Jarbawi, who stated:

Education has always been used as a political tool here. During the Mandate period, British used formal education to produce elite graduates. Under the Jordanians and Egyptians, the Palestinian community was only rarely considered, while education focused on nationalist causes. In addition, with the Israeli occupation from '67, the curriculum was censored; historic references to our land—even back to the time of the Crusades—were all changed to say Israel. (p. 31)

Nicolai (2007) maintained that the use of education as a medium is a double-edged sword in these contexts since “it is not uncommon to see education simultaneously used as a tool by repressive regimes and a medium for protest by the oppressed” (p. 31). At the same time, education has become symbolic of resistance against oppression, resilience and, most importantly, hope for Palestinian children (Akesson, 2014).

It is worthwhile to provide a historical overview that can help in understanding the lived experiences of the Palestinians, the fragility and vulnerability of their education and social institutions, along with their resilience and plight throughout their quest for a meaningful life.

Since education is a key core value of the Palestinians, it has helped them continue to survive despite all the odds against them. It is only through a solid educational system that is keenly linked to their history that the Palestinians could have hope for a brighter future. The historical roots of their journey can have profound implications for their struggle for empowerment.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: FROM BALFOUR DECLARATION TO OSLO ACCORD AND BEYOND

One Place, Two Peoples

It is important to clarify the *place*; Palestine, which has been historically claimed by peoples who, despite their commonalities, have been at odds given their competing ideologies. Religious dogmas and national sentiments have driven contestants to claim their ownership of historical Palestine (Bickerton & Hill, 2003). In the recent history, disputes over the place both Palestinians and Jews call home have been mediated by world powers in an attempt to resolve centuries-deep conflicts. For the Palestinians, most efforts, if not all, have resulted in the loss of their homeland while yielding positive outcomes for Jews aspiring to resurrect their biblical history and accomplish their dreams of recreating the Jewish state (Segev, 1999).

For the most part, the tipping point in trying to resolve the complex disputes came after World Wars I and II. During WWI and with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and rise of British Colonial Power, interests in Palestine flourished from both the Arab side as well as the Jewish population. For Jews, they hoped to gain support from the Great Powers to establish sovereignty in Palestine. For the Arab nationalists, they hoped for an independent state; a homeland for the Palestinian people (Smith, 2007). However, in 1914, Herbert Samuel first proposed that Palestine may be considered a home for the Jewish people, a notion that did not

get much popularity at the time. Then, interests in Zionism and Palestine grew among the British which culminated in drafting a proposal known as the 1917 Balfour Declaration (Knell, 2017; Zipperstein, 1993).

The 67-word text, the Balfour Declaration, also referred to as the “promise,” has become one of the most significant documents in the recent history of the Middle East, albeit being the most divisive (Knell, 2017). The premise of this *promise* was intended to establish an independent Jewish state in Palestine without threatening the rights and civil liberties of non-Jews, to provide security for the Jewish community with political and national stability for the Palestinians. In the widely cited document, the Balfour Declaration, created November 2, 1917, by the British conservative politician and statesman Arthur James Balfour and addressed to Lord Rothschild, Balfour stated:

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations, which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in the Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object. It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

[ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR]

(Center for Israel Education, 1917; Laqueur & Rubin, 2001, p. 41)

For the next several decades, the Balfour Declaration became a living document that materialized in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Thus, a new era of conflict, divisions, fragmentation, and instability emerged not only in Palestine but also in the region and beyond. For Palestinians, the long hard journey and struggle for survival has become more difficult.

Catastrophe or Independence

The state of regional and worldwide upheaval during and after WWII resulted in transforming the Middle East in significant ways. In particular, the British mandate throughout the 1920s and 1930s had paved the way for the Zionist movement to establish a beachhead state in Palestine. While

the influx of Jewish immigrants from all over the world was taking place with the support of the superpowers, the Palestinians were migrating out of their lands fleeing persecution and war. The growing adversities and struggles of both the Jewish populations and the Arab nationalists in Palestine culminated in a bloody war in 1948 which ended with the creation of the State of Israel; a major defeat for the Palestinians and a remarkable victory for the Zionist movement. For Jews, this was a landmark celebration for independence while for Palestinians, it was a catastrophic event, which has been referred to as *al Nakba* or *the catastrophe*.

As soon as Israel was declared as a new Jewish State on May 15, 1948, many countries hastened to provide recognition and pledge support for the newly created country on the land of the Palestinians. The major superpowers such the United States, France, Britain, and many others immediately declared their recognition and established formal diplomatic relations. At the same time, other countries, especially in the Arab and Muslim worlds, rejected the establishment of the Jewish state in a predominantly Muslim region. For the next several decades, the world became divided on this turn of events and new geopolitical realities. For the Palestinians, the magnitude of the catastrophic loss of their homeland meant a loss of identity, statehood and hope. This state of frustration created an ongoing animosity and resentment that was reflected in a series of frequent wars with Israel (Bregman, 2002).

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 on substantial portions of the Palestinian lands was seen only as a beachhead for the remaining task for political Zionism and Jewish dreams. Israel grew stronger with the influx of Jewish settlers from around the world, coupled with military and financial support of world superpowers. Israel was expanded by another series of wars during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Israeli forces occupied the remaining Palestinian regions of the Jordanian-held West Bank, the Syrian-held Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip under the Egyptian jurisdiction.

One can imagine the magnitude of the human, emotional, cultural, and educational costs to these conflict-ridden territories and their inhabitants. For Palestinians, conditions have gotten worse following these series of conflicts as they faced continual oppression, ethnic cleansing, internal and external refugees, displacements and fragmentation, partitioning and usurpation of their land, and living under continual occupation (Howell, 2007; Pappé, 2006). The overwhelming, unbearable consequences led to the birth of national movements towards liberation and empowerment. Under these circumstances, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in an effort to reclaim the Palestinian land, identity, and self-determination. Established in 1964 in Jordan, the PLO combined several nationalist groups and organizations under the

banner of regaining the Palestinian land that was handed by the United Nations to Israel (Pace, 2012; Trueman, 2015). Initially, the PLO was not associated with violence until it became dominated by the Fatah Movement that undertook the task of armed struggle and liberation in response to the growing Israeli military might that enhanced the Jewish State's intransigence in relinquishing the Palestinian occupied lands (Trueman, 2015). Nonetheless, the compounding geopolitical events have made the PLO take violent turns, a counterproductive approach, in an attempt to gain recognition and legitimacy for its cause in the international arena (Pace, 2012). In fact, this intensified the conflicts with the Jewish state and resulted in more wars, bloodshed, and turmoil in and around Israel and the Palestinian territories it occupied (Bregman, 2002). Ultimately, Israel invaded southern Lebanon to defeat the PLO militias and attempt to secure its borders, especially from the north. Shortly after the expulsion and neutralization of the PLO in the early 1980s, the Israeli military was taking hold in the Palestinian territories captured in the 1967 war (also known as The 1967 Arab-Israeli War), coupled with increased settlement activities on Palestinian lands.

Consequently, the Palestinians' lives under occupation had become almost unbearable (Abu-Duhou, 1996; Pappé, 2016). Their social and educational institutions became dysfunctional and were micromanaged by the military rule. The Palestinian youth saw no hope on the horizon as day after day living under occupation, their lives became a curse that even tested the strongest faith. The deteriorating conditions and despair ignited daily protests, school closures, violence, human loss, death, and destruction, and collective punishments that provided an impetus for a bloody uprising known as the first *intifada* during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Under the backdrop of the crushing consequences of these events (Akesson, 2014), the so-called peace process was born as a result of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Under the auspices of the United Nations and the United States, along with the support of the European Union and the Russian Federation, the Declaration of Principles Agreement was signed in 1993 after the famous handshake between the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Leader Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn. Both the Israeli and Palestinian politicians viewed this move as a strategic choice for existence and survival. This paved the way for a series of negotiations to resolve outstanding issues that can never be resolved by military means. Most Palestinians saw this opportunity in the hope of self-determination and a step they hoped to lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

By 1995, the Palestinian National Authority was formed and gradually took charge of the social and educational institutions. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) was created to revive the educational process, transform schools and curricula, and invest in teacher preparation within the new sociopolitical realities and conditions. Several initiatives were implemented with an education agenda that revolves around the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Many educational plans and initiatives were created within national and global frameworks and goals. Frequent arising emergencies and crises often overshadowed educational efforts and halted the educational mission of the MOEHE. As Nicolai (2007) pointed out:

The Palestinian education system has emerged through the midst of ongoing crisis and repeated emergency. When a fledgling MOEHE was first established in 1994, it took over a neglected and dilapidated system. Over the next 5 years, as the ministry struggled to establish basic mechanisms for planning, budgeting and coordination, it coped with student growth and a crisis in access. But then, in 2000, just as focus was beginning to shift to improving quality by creating a new curriculum and improving teaching, a new emergency hit in the form of the second *intifada*. (p. 20)

With the advent of the new millennium, the peace process continued to stall and a second vicious uprising (*intifada*) erupted as Palestinian attacks and counterattacks took a heavy toll on both sides despite the imbalance in military might. In addition to the devastating impact on the Palestinians, the Israeli response to the second *intifada* resulted in immense costs on the entire Palestinian educational system both at the human and structural levels (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, 2013).

Chronic Crisis

Despite efforts during the past two decades to revive the ailing peace process, no substantial success has been achieved. The geopolitical events in the world and region have been fluctuating along with the global shifts in power. Meanwhile, the Palestinians continue to suffer from the chronic crises that shapes their daily lives and their institutions, including schools.

They have become foreigners in their own lands, surrounded by settlements, barriers, and walls (Khalidi, 2006). They have become used to coping with various forms of socioeconomic, political, geographical, and national fragmentation, which adversely impacts their national aspirations and dreams. Their institutions are in shambles, lacking the minimum means for sustainability and survival. The chronic crises are

manifested in many shapes and forms and plague all walks of life in the Palestinian territories. Recognizing this grim reality, the Palestinian Authority (PA) in its latest document titled *Sustainable Development Goals: Palestinian National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* summarizes the current picture in the Palestinian territories:

Palestine continues to be locked within a series of vicious circles; the most vicious circle, of course, is the prolonged Israeli occupation. This year (2018) marks 51 years of the Israeli military occupation with no end in sight to the conflict. After more than 100 years since the Belfour Declaration, 70 years since the Nakba, and 30 years since the first Intifada, Israel continues to pursue its colonial regime and perilous annexation agenda and devastating occupation policies and practices unabated. Settlements continue to spread and expand rapidly across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, killing any hope to materialize the two-state solution. Israel, the occupying power, has already constructed 257 illegal settlements on Palestinian public and private lands, where all together encompass 46% of the West Bank. Palestinians are increasingly shut out of Area C, which constitute 64% of the West Bank and encompasses the majority of Palestine's natural resources. The Wall hives off around 10% of the West Bank and entrap over 350,000 Palestinians between the Wall and the 1967 borders. (State of Palestine, 2018, p. 10)

In addition, the document provides a much gloomier account of the situation inside the predominantly Palestinian-inhabited east Jerusalem as well as the Gaza Strip, which has been under a crippling Israeli military blockade for almost two decades, with frequent devastating clashes, military attacks, and counter attacks accompanied with destruction of social and educational institutions, including schools. Nonetheless, "the Palestinian Government continues its efforts to provide an internal enabling environment essential to the achievement of the sustainable development goals and the national priorities of the Palestinian people" (State of Palestine, 2018, p. 11).

In his preface to the document, Palestinian Prime Minister, Rami Hamdallah, acknowledged that the axiom for the 2030 SDGs and agenda, as well as leave no one behind, cannot be achieved for the people that "the whole world is leaving behind, a country that lives under a protracted and ongoing occupation that imposes restrictions over its government and hinders its access to serve its people wherever they are" (State of Palestine, 2018, p. 5).

It must be pointed out that the next chapters of the Palestinian lives are full of foreboding. Only time can tell if there is light at the end of the tunnel. Still, the Palestinians have managed to survive, despite the chronic crises they are facing, as they search for solutions to everyday problems and challenges. It is worth noting that the Palestinians echo the plight of indig-

enous peoples elsewhere whose homelands have been colonized in places such as Canada and the United States. For example, they share experiences of Canada's First Peoples (e.g. see *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* in relation with the First Peoples: <http://www.trc.ca/>), and America's Native Americans (e.g., see the *Link* published by *Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.*: <http://ameu.org/getattachment/bb3b4b3e-b645-4f82-a6e6-c2c2ccb435cd/Native-Americans-and-Palestinians.aspx>) whose lands were taken and were subsequently subjected to physical, cultural, and educational genocide. Nonetheless, the Palestinian experience is unique in many ways given the long and hard way ahead.

As we focus our attention on the place of education in the Palestinian territories and efforts to implement the goals of SDG4 and its targets, it is important to keep the sociopolitical and historical context in mind. In particular, within these contexts, we address some of the key questions that include: What are the challenges facing Palestinians in their educational agenda as outlined in the 2030 Agenda? How can educational quality and equity dictated by SDG4 be achieved within the Palestinian contexts? What opportunities and alternatives are available for Palestinians to enhance their educational system and achieve the 2030 vision?

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In order to address the overarching questions, our methodology and approach that underlie the study are multifold. Based on Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological approach, we seek to provide a scientific account of the particular phenomena through the authentic lived experiences of the Palestinian people within the educational community along with their interactions, behaviors, perspectives, and struggles as they cope with barriers and challenges facing schools in the occupied territories. In addition to providing an account of the lived experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to give voice to the members and their experiences in the social unit under study by letting "things speak for themselves" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 180). As an epistemology that sheds light on social realities and life experiences of individuals and groups who seek to understand their lives and survival (Van Manen, 2007), the approach used in the study is most fitting to examine the context of the Palestinian's educational system along with daily challenges and conditions.

Van Manen (1990) proposed six research activities that can explicate and portray pertinent phenomena and the related dimensions. These include:

1. Turning to the nature of a phenomenon of interest.

2. Investigating the experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon. Writing and rewriting the description of the phenomenon of interest.
5. Maintaining a strong relationship with the phenomenon.
6. Considering the parts and the whole as a means to achieve balance (pp. 3031).

In our approach, we use these activities to account for voices of participants and their lived experiences in the context of daily realities, challenges, and hopes that shape the Palestinian educational system. We used masking techniques to conceal and protect the identity of participants who voluntarily participated through an informed consent process; interviewees were assured of confidentiality and were informed about the risks and benefits of the study. Codes are used to reference their responses as they appear after each excerpt. These voices are reflected through a series of open-ended interviews with various participants across the Palestinian educational spectrum. Recurrent themes with excerpts will be interwoven contextually throughout the discussion. We used a series of guiding questions about the current state of the educational system along with its direction in light of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with special focus on SDG4. The primary questions revolve around three themes: sustainability of education in the territories, challenges facing schools, and potential educational opportunities given the complex conditions and contexts.

The second strategy used is integrating a hermeneutic interpretation of the main elements in existing key educational documents, research and literature, and other resources that provide an account of the Palestinian education system, its structure, agenda, initiatives, and the like. In particular, themes from the current documents, using the SDGs, including SDG4 as an overarching framework for social and educational reform, are integrated within the context of the discussion throughout the chapter.

Moreover, we draw on our personal experiences, observations, attachments, and contributions to teacher education throughout our professional lives in and outside the territories. In addition to insights from interactions, field notes and visits, and reflective conversations with professional colleagues, anecdotal records are embedded in the discussion. Furthermore, as active participant observers, we have participated in the recent implementation of various teacher quality initiatives in the Pales-

stinian territories that are funded by various grants and government entities. Our keen personal and professional connections to the Palestinian educational system are strong since we both completed our early basic K-12 education in the occupied territories.

Consequently, many researchers (see, e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) have underscored the value of *personal experience* and the *self* as a *positioned subject*, rather than *detached*, when engaging in researching and interpreting sources of evidence and literature, especially in hermeneutic phenomenology genres. For example, Rosaldo (1989) spoke about the importance of “life experiences” in enabling “particular kinds of insight” (p. 40) in the process of conceptualizing and accounting for an epistemology about given phenomena.

SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND PROMISING TRENDS

In light of the historical context of the Palestinian educational system, schools face enormous challenges and obstacles. These challenges are intricately related to other aspects of the Palestinian society’s social and political realities. In the unpacking and implementation of SDG4, it is critical to keep in mind the intricate interrelationships among all elements and various SDGs as they relate to education. Therefore, it is “necessary to go beyond silo approach and ensure that the education sector is better articulated with other development sectors” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016, p. 29). This is especially true in the context of the Palestinian education system since conducive economic, social, environmental, geographical, political, and other conditions should be present as a prerequisite for an effective functioning of schools. For example, the sustainability of a sound educational agenda will hinge on the sustainability of governing structures as well as the sustainability of the Palestinian’s overall autonomy. Recently, voicing his frustrations over the state of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), Saeb Erekat (2019), an influential figure in the PNA and chief peace negotiator, indicated that it is virtually impossible to sustain the Palestinian authority and its institutions under the current conditions. Accordingly, in chronically conflict-infected Palestinian areas, it is very difficult to establish sustainable educational priorities since energies, resources, and efforts are depleted by mere survival to keep the sociopolitical and economic structures intact.

These concerns are in the minds of all Palestinians, including educators, parents, and students. The lived experiences of daily sufferings speak for themselves. Palestinians have to cope with aging inadequate

school facilities, frequent school closures, harassment and violence, immobility due to checkpoints, and their overall safety and well-being. These conditions impede access to education and have detrimental psychological and educational consequences. Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (2013) reported:

Moreover, children lack protected access to education and face a range of dangers and obstacles on their way to and from school. They must travel long distances and are confronted with long delays and harassment during searches at military checkpoints along the Barrier and within the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They must navigate around other types of closure obstacles and pass through closed military zones while being exposed to the risks of settler and military violence on their school commutes. (p. 6)

In its report chronicling recurrent incidents and case studies, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (2013) provided a summary of the crosscutting humanitarian issues that hinder access to education in the Palestinian territories. Some of these include:

- **Harassment and Violence by Israeli Soldiers and Settlers:** experienced by students at checkpoints, on the commute to and from school, and even at school. This is a leading factor for student dropout, especially for girls, and psychosocial distress amongst children of both sexes.
- **Long Commutes along Settlement Bypass Roads:** where cars have hit commuting students and/or students had dangerous objects thrown at them by passing settlers. This is a leading factor for family separation and/or displacement, as families become inclined to move to communities that are closer to their children's schools or at least send their children to live in these communities.
- **Demolition and Stop Work Orders:** that prevent communities from building adequate facilities to educate their children; thus, making these students commute to other communities to access education, and along these commutes they may experience the harassment, violence, and dangers mentioned above (p. 26).

Speaking of these daily challenges, participants in our study echoed many of the same concerns. A couple who teach at the same school, whose commute is less than five miles from home, stated that they have to leave home a few hours before the school day starts, around 8:00 A.M.

we never know what to expect as we leave to work, we fear road closures, being turned away at check points ... being delayed for hours ... and if we