

# EDUCATION IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS: PALESTINIAN CHILDREN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN HEBRON<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – *This paper presents the plight of Palestinian primary school children in the city of Hebron in the West Bank, and documents the attempts of the Palestinian community to provide an education against all odds. Drawing on fieldwork, observations and interviews carried out by the author in November 2001, the case study provides a background and context, highlighting the difficult situation that Palestinian families find themselves in due to the curfew restrictions imposed by the Israeli Military during the second Intifada. The paper then goes on to describe the way the Palestinian community mobilised itself, with UNICEF support, in order to ensure that children do get the basic education they are entitled to, largely through the development of the Distance Remedial Education Project (DREP). Details of the DREP are given, particularly in relation to the development of self-learning education worksheets, extension remedial programmes, and the use of local TV stations to broadcast lessons. The case study of self-help, decentralised programmes with a high level of school community involvement using locally-available resources and materials shows great promise in the challenge of providing educational services in the context of political conflict and violence, as well as in more regular situations. Not only did students attain the minimal competencies expected at their grade level, but also by far the greater majority remained engaged with the school cycle. Interviews with education officers, heads of schools, teachers, parents and the students themselves also suggest that aspects of the programme provided psychological and social support to students who would have otherwise been even more vulnerable to the distressing effects of the political violence that they witness in their daily lives.*

## Introduction

**T**he present account of the educational initiatives in a context of political conflict and violence – in this case in Hebron, West Bank – is part of a UNICEF series of case studies of successful basic education innovations. The aim behind this series is to give greater visibility to such initiatives, both because they deserve to be highlighted in the educational community regionally and internationally, and also because that same community can learn from the efforts of individuals and groups that creatively respond to new situations and challenges by developing

novel educational practices. In describing and analysing such innovations, UNICEF is also responding to the call made at the ARABEFA<sup>2</sup> 2000 Assessment Conference which took place in January 2000 in Cairo, where the need for qualitative information on basic education successes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region had been both recognised and stressed.

The description of the Hebron Distance Remedial Education Project (DREP) is important for another reason. The past two decades have seen a proliferation of armed conflict in several parts of the world. There has been an increasing concern about the impact that such conflict has on the educational process, a concern that has been most comprehensively signalled by Graça Machel's omnibus study *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, and presented to the United Nations in 1996. Armed conflict is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. However, in the past, governments and humanitarian agencies have tended to prioritise such critical needs as food, water, shelter and medical care, with education being seen more as a long-term development concern (Lowicki, 1999). Donors too have tended to be wary of prioritising education in the initial emergency phase, fearing long-term commitments (Hammock, 1998). In some cases, governments may not even allow such interventions, either because they consider educational needs less pressing than other priorities, or because of lack of consensus over curricula. Additionally, the importance of education may not even be recognised, particularly in the areas of health, psychological and social well-being and protection. Increasingly there have been calls for educational responses to situations marked by political violence, and for a better understanding of the ways in which educational provision at the outset of an emergency can provide structure, stability and a sense of normality to the lives of children (Boyden & Ryder, 1996; Machel, 1996; Ghaffar-Kucher, Pagen & Zakharia, 1999).

In the sections that follow, the focus will be on precisely these issues and concerns. We will first look carefully and in some detail at the situation of Hebron in the West Bank, caught up as this is in the conflict of the second Palestinian *Intifada*. We will then give an account of the educational responses of the Palestinian Hebronite community in a situation marked by political violence, with a focus being largely placed on the basic rather than secondary education level. Finally, we will highlight some of the most important achievements of the set of initiatives described, and will tease out the lessons that can be learnt from the Hebron case study, and that might guide policy-makers in responding to the educational needs of children internationally, whether these are caught up in war situations or other emergencies. The point will also be made that there is much to be learnt from the DREP that is applicable to regular situations as well.

Given the qualitative nature of the present study, it is important in this context to at least provide an overall idea of the extent and nature of the fieldwork. The

data was collected in the course of a three-week visit to the West Bank. A first aspect of this data collection exercise involved desk research; this included the perusal of official documents, analysis of educational material, and viewing of a sample of 15 half-hour recorded TV programmes – all related to the remedial education project. A second aspect of the research involved observations of the situation in Hebron during two field visits on two different days (29 and 31 October 2001). A third and related aspect included semi-structured interviews, which were held with key people from UNICEF (Jerusalem office) and the Ministry of Education (Ramallah), and with five education officials (one of whom was female), five head teachers (four females), 18 teachers (14 females), 60 students (40 females) and 14 parents (eight mothers, five fathers) in Hebron. Interviews in Hebron lasted from 20 to 50 minutes, and were generally held in the context of focus groups, though much information was also gathered from individuals informally, in offices or in streets while walking to the schools that were visited. Further information was offered spontaneously by teachers and students during classroom and school visits. Four of the five schools visited were situated in the old Hebron area, and were primary level establishments. The fifth was a large secondary school for girls situated outside old Hebron (although this school was not directly involved with the project that is the subject of the present case study, it provided a useful contrast as well as fresh insights and sensitising concepts).

Visits to Hebron were made under tight security measures because of the volatility of the situation. Even though violence had abated during the week in which the visits were made, during the second visit a house in Hebron was shelled by an Israeli helicopter, killing a Hamas activist, and leading to the evacuation of students in the schools in the surrounding area.

## **Hebron in the context of the second *Intifada***

*Every morning, at dawn, you hear the voice of Israeli soldiers on the loudspeakers, in jeeps or in tanks, shouting out ... in Arabic ... 'Stay inside your homes ... Do not go out ... You will be shot' ... (Teacher, basic school, old Hebron)*

### *The Al-Aqsa Intifada*

The conflict between the state of Israel and the Palestinians is now several decades old, and has gone through periods of negotiated settlements and tense peace accords to outright armed conflict under various guises, be these frontal attacks, guerrilla-like incursions, or *Intifadas* (i.e., popular uprisings against the occupation by the Israeli army of the Palestinian territories). The second *Intifada*

– also known as the *Al-Aqsa Intifada* – started in September 2000, and has had an impact on all sectors of life, intensifying the psychological and social distress that comes with exposure to violence and repression.

From September 2000 up to November 2001, at least 998 people had been killed. Of these, 797 were Palestinians, 190 were Israelis, and 11 were foreign citizens (see Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories [B'TSELEM], 2001; Palestine Red Crescent Society [PRCS], 2001). A total of 194 children under 18 years of age had been killed, with 166 being Palestinian, 27 Israeli, and 1 foreigner (Defence for Children International – Palestine Section [DCI/PS], 2001). Thirty-five percent of these children and youths died from injuries sustained to the head, while 31% were shot in the chest (DCI/PS, 2001). As many as 16,570 Palestinians had been injured, including more than 7,000 children (PRCS, 2001), while the corresponding number for the Israelis is 1,810, of which 517 are soldiers, 1,240 civilians, and 53 children (B'TSELEM, 2001). An estimated 2,500 Palestinians will experience long-term disabilities because of their injuries, including some 530 children (Solidaridad Internacional, 2001; World Bank, 2001a).

The escalation of violence and repression has led to the deterioration of the quality and conditions of life of many Palestinian households, with important negative consequences to the delivery of health services, including immunisation and polio testing. At the time of the writing-up of this study, 43% of households had reported problems in accessing health services, while 59% have experienced difficulties in paying for the cost of treatment (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics [PCBS], 2001). There had been a 15% increase in home deliveries of babies, with postnatal care dropping by 52% (UNRWA<sup>3</sup>, n.d.).

Curfews, closures, and intensification of restrictions on free movement through the multiplication of checkpoints have also had a major impact on the Palestinian economy. Forty-eight percent of households have lost more than half their usual income, with 46% of households in the WBGS expected to fall below the poverty line by the end of 2001, compared to 21% prior to the conflict (World Bank, 2001b). Unemployment rose from 10% before the crisis, to 24% in the second quarter of 2001 (UNSCO<sup>4</sup>, 2001). Child poverty increased by 55% between September and December 2000 (World Bank, 2001b).

### *The second Intifada and its impact on education*

Palestinians have made major investments in educational infrastructure and in the delivery of quality education to their children, and despite a great number of adversities, have managed to chalk up a number of impressive achievements, both by MENA and by international standards (see Sultana, 2000 for an overview; also

UNESCO, 1995; Diwan & Shaban, 1998). Many of these gains have been jeopardised, particularly as the evidence suggests rather strongly that schools and education have fallen into the line of fire of Israeli troops, with as many as 275 schools being situated close to flash points in the current conflict (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2001). As a result, by the time this study was carried out,

- Ninety-three schools had been shelled, with 6 schools being obliged to close down for a period of one to two months during the first eight months of the *Intifada* (MOE, 2001);
- An estimated 31,117 student school days had been lost in the West Bank in the last school year, and 7,400 in Gaza (MOE, 2001);
- Thirty-six percent of 5-17 year-old students indicated that their school day was reduced due to the conflict (PCBS, 2001);
- Achievement scores had fallen in main subjects. In UNRWA schools in the West Bank, for instance, passing grades declined from 71% to 38% in Arabic and from 54% to 26% in Mathematics from 2000 to 2001 (UNICEF, 2001).

## **The *Intifada*, Hebron and education**

### *Hebron – a city under siege*

While all districts in the West Bank and Gaza were affected by the *Intifada* crisis, some areas were more strongly marked by violence and repression than others. In the West Bank, for instance, Hebron, Nablus, Jericho and Ramallah were the most affected districts. In this case study, the focus is on Hebron. Here, schools have had to reschedule 45 days of schools to make up for lost time due to curfew conditions. Eighteen percent of students in Hebron could not attend classes regularly compared with 6% nationally. Twenty percent of teachers in Hebron could not get to their school on a regular basis, compared with 9% nationally (MOE, 2001).

Hebron – or Khalil al-Rahman, as it is known among Arab communities – is one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in the world. The town's name, in both the Hebrew and Arab version, ironically conjures up images of fraternity and love, referring as it does to Abraham as 'God's friend'. The old part of the city hosts one of the holiest sites dear to both Jews and Muslims, with the Tomb of the Patriarchs – a cave believed to contain the remains of Abraham and his family – being topped by the al-Haram al-Ebrahimi mosque. The mosque itself has been occupied by Israeli forces, with Muslims having access to only a small area for their prayers. In that sense, there is arguably no stronger symbol of both the

closeness and distance between the two religious and political communities than this site, where reverence to the prophet Abraham is both a source of devotion and of conflict. The tension is strongest in the old quarters around the mosque, a hostility that has been fed by the demographic imbalance between the two communities: thus, 120,000 Palestinians attempt to co-exist with 400 Jewish settlers.

Hebron is now divided into two parts: H1 is controlled by Palestinians, while H2 is controlled by Israeli settlers supported by the Israeli army. The two zones are marked by concrete blocks placed in the middle of streets, and it is part of the surreal nature of these borders that it is often possible to have one foot in H1 and another foot in H2 as one goes around the so-called 'contact points'. Israeli soldiers occupy the surrounding high ground, with machine guns placed atop houses and other buildings, and trained on roads and open spaces. Signs of the conflict are everywhere, with the market place and square, as well as several buildings such as shops and schools, bearing the telltale pockmarks of rifle and machine-gun fire. Israeli soldiers patrol H2 on foot, in jeeps, and occasionally in tanks.

At the height of the crisis, closure, curfew and strict security measures were imposed in Hebron. City entrances were closed, with the town increasingly living a siege-like reality, and with mobility outside one's home being severely restricted for adults and children alike. Economic activity came to a standstill, with shops and stores often remaining closed. Unemployment and poverty have mushroomed, and the economic and social consequences of restricted mobility can easily be imagined.

### *Education in old Hebron*

The Education Directorate of Hebron has overall responsibility for 165 government schools catering for 73,883 pupils, who receive instruction from a staff complement of 2,896 teachers. In 2001, there were 39 private schools, 75 kindergartens and 23 cultural centres. While some of these establishments were visited during the field research period, the attention was focused rather more on the schools in old Hebron, and particularly on those primary level institutions that are at, or close to, the 'contact points' in the H2 zone. Old Hebron has 32 schools in all, with 11,650 pupils and 450 teachers. Five of the schools are situated at the contact points, and these establishments cater for 2,357 students, with 87 teachers on their staff list. Three of these schools, normally serving 1,835 elementary level pupils, have been taken over by the Israeli army and turned into military camps and warehouses for storing weapons and other military equipment. These schools were still occupied by the Israeli soldiers at the time of fieldwork, with students

being redirected to other schools where a shift system had to be adopted to cater for the new influx of pupils.

The 29 schools still functioning in old Hebron suffered the consequences of curfew restrictions, and of being targeted by Israeli forces. Several interviewees referred to the fact that teachers and students were shot at on the way to and from school. Up to 20 February 2001, 300 students had been injured, while nine had been killed. Gas and sound bombs are regularly thrown into schoolyards, with several schools being shelled, both at night and during school hours. Israeli soldiers stop pupils and teachers at check points, searching and occasionally confiscating their bags. During the most intense period of the *Intifada*, between September and December 2000, attendance in non-secure schools in the contact areas plummeted. At the start of the new scholastic year in September 2001, attendance fluctuated between 80% and 90%, depending on the intensity of shelling or gunfire.

Interviews with pupils in both primary and secondary schools, as well as with some of their teachers and parents, provide us with an insight into the way lives are lived in conditions of direct and indirect exposure to conflict and violence. Movement was severely restricted. Children spoke of their fears and insecurities, about going around feeling that *'you could be shot any time, anywhere, for no particular reason at all.'* At home, they were constantly told to be careful not to linger behind windows, because they could be shot. Children said they felt angry seeing Israeli soldiers *'walk around happily'* and the settlers *'going about freely'* when they could hardly leave the house to play with friends for fear of being beaten up. They were terrified when they heard soldiers on the roof of their house, setting up a machine gun post there, and *'throwing their rubbish around.'* One 9 year-old boy said, *'They take our freedom for themselves ... They block roads and streets ...'*

Going to and returning from school was difficult at the best of times. Mothers spoke of the way they watched carefully from behind doors to wait till soldiers moved away, *'and then we tell our son: 'Quickly! Now! Rush to school!''* An 8 year-old girl exclaimed, *'Israeli soldiers stop us ... all we have are our books ... They don't need to do that!'* Another spoke about the way *'Settlers harass us on the way to school ... They throw gas bombs in our house ... They shoot at us. They even burn our clothes when mum puts them out on the line to dry!'* One girl who lived in a refugee camp recounted how settlers tried to run over her several times on her way to school. Others described how settlers and soldiers *'curse us and use bad words when we come down to the school – all we want is to get an education – even going to our mosque is difficult. The soldiers sometimes run after the girls...'* A 15 year-old girl told me, *'You see the tanks in front of you, in front of your house ... the Israeli soldiers in the street ... and you keep going on ... that's*

*what we have to face ... how many children our age would have to face something like that? ... and then they call us terrorists!*' One 8 year-old girl claimed to have confronted a soldier telling him, *'Don't you want your children to go to school? Why won't you allow me?'* She had become an instant celebrity among her friends and in her neighbourhood, with the story reaching an education supervisor who recounted the story with evident admiration and delight. Another 8 year-old girl got so frightened when followed by soldiers that she preferred to jump down a terrace in order to get away from them, breaking a leg and an arm in the process, and having to be hospitalised.

But even when students did make it to school – a place normally associated with safety and security – students did not feel at peace. It was clear that schools were being targeted by Israeli troops – a long-standing feature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Goodwin-Gill & Cohn, 1994; Azzam, 1996). All the institutions visited in the course of the present research had bullet marks in windows, walls, and furniture. Water tanks on school rooftops were an easy and tempting target. Gas and sound bombs were thrown into schoolyards, and occasionally Israeli soldiers did not allow students to leave the premises. One primary school reported that soldiers poked their rifles through classroom windows that looked onto streets and alleyways, scaring pupils and teacher alike. In a secondary school outside of the H2 zone, students recounted how there was a sudden panic when shots were fired into classrooms during lessons. Children panicked, *'but the teachers told us to stay down on the floor, and those of us who came from H2 and who were used to hearing shooting helped the others calm down ...'*

Teachers too were being harassed – a not unusual phenomenon in situations of armed conflict because teachers are often regarded as important members of the community, and also tend to be more politicised than other citizens (Graham-Brown, 1991; Boyden & Ryder, 1996; Richardson, 1999). Children were regularly exposed to scenes of violence, some reporting that they had witnessed the beating up of their own teachers, or the shooting and killing of a person in the street.

But schools too tend to relay images of violence to the children. Most schools visited had pictures of children and youths that had been shot dead by Israeli: these posters of 'martyrs', as they are commonly referred to, were prominently displayed on office and classroom doors and on walls, icons signalling resistance to occupation, and graphically proclaiming the value of laying down one's life for an ideal. Visual aids hanging in classrooms and corridors, and portraying confrontations with Israeli soldiers and tanks, also reminded children of the violence prevailing outside. Adults found it difficult to restrain themselves from expressing hostility toward those who were daily constraining their lives and injuring loved ones. Student visits to Palestinian victims in hospital were

organised by schools, and while this is again an understandable reaction, it does highlight the difficulty – if not impossibility – of inculcating peaceful values in children when adult role models are built on conflict.

### *The impact of conflict and violence on children*

A context strongly marked by conflict is not conducive to healthy and balanced lives. Despite the fact that there is some evidence that children adapt to situations of ‘normal abnormalcy’ (Martín-Baró, 1990; Flores, 1999), this does not mean that continued exposure to violence does not have a major detrimental impact on the children’s psychological and social development as well as on their education. Nationally, there are reports showing that in the areas most affected by the conflict (i.e., Salfeet in the north West Bank, north and south Gaza, Hebron and Bethlehem), 75% of adults think children are experiencing greater emotional problems and behavioural change. That finding is supported by two separate opinion polls that found that some 80% of parents think that their children’s behaviour had changed (Birzeit University Development Studies Programme Survey, 2001a, 2001b; Ministry of Social Affairs [MOSA], 2001). The MOSA study also indicates that repeated exposure to the sounds of shelling and shooting is the major cause of psychological problems among children. In Hebron, parents told counsellors that their children manifested a series of problems in reaction to the situation of political violence. Among these were repeated nightmares, bed-wetting, insomnia and irregular or changed sleeping patterns, increased fear of darkness, parental clinging, fear of sleeping alone, inordinate anxiety related to leaving the house, to meeting strangers, to loud noises and to sudden movements. Some children develop phobias, especially of the sources of violence such as tanks, soldiers, helicopters, and settlers. Many children – particularly the younger ones – act out their fears through imitating soldiers, and often project their fears while at play, and when drawing.

Other problems that have been reported include stress, anxiety and irritability, accompanied by the appearance of psychosomatic symptoms including headaches, stomach cramps and skin diseases. Children find it increasingly difficult to concentrate and remain focused on a task. Some children also withdraw from friends and family, engage in risk-taking behaviour, rebel and reject authority, become aggressive or depressed and pay less attention to personal care. Others show high levels of anxiety, fearing the loss of their parents. Many children have less social and recreational activity, and as a result experience boredom, are more prone to brooding about life, tend to watch more TV and as a result see more of the violence. Increasingly children feel trapped, discouraged, tense, hyperactive, sad about life, angry, and distrustful of authority. While the majority

of young people do their best to avoid direct clashes with Israeli troops, others are propelled to risk acts of rebellion because of a complex mix of anger, bitterness, frustration, patriotism, fatalism and excitement. The results can be violent, unpredictable, and tragic.

In a situation so deeply steeped in conflict, learning suffers. Children lost interest in schooling, preferring to stay at home watching television, or doing their own thing. Mothers interviewed noted a marked deterioration in their children's achievements at school. Teachers and heads also noted that the achievement of children had been much affected, and this showed up because they knew that their colleagues in H1 schools were managing to cover much more of the syllabus than they themselves were managing to do in H2 schools.

Teachers too reported that the situation of conflict had had a major impact on their personal and professional lives. Some reported being beaten up. One of the female teachers interviewed was severely hit to the extent that she still found it painful to walk one week later. Another teacher, over 50 years of age, had physically injured herself when trying to run away from a soldier on her way to school. Many teachers reported that they were always alert and expecting to be hit by a bullet. Teachers noted that soldiers were no longer differentiating between men and women, with one saying that, *'They're willing to shoot at us as much as at the men ... They just want to occupy, settle, evict ...'* Like the children, teachers too reported feeling distracted and incapable of focusing, often forgetting what they wanted to teach as they used up a lot of their personal energies and resources just to avoid soldiers on the streets, by taking a round-about way of getting to school. As one teacher said, *'Instead of teaching I find myself often looking through the window, wondering what's happening, who's getting hurt ... It's difficult for teachers to concentrate these days ... you try to concentrate on the curriculum, but other things which are more important come up.'*

They noted how their roles changed, from being teachers to being guardians of the pupils in their class. They said, *'We go out before sending the kids home, to see if it is safe.'* They felt worried when seeing the children off, wondering if they would get into trouble. Some hid children in their own homes, waiting until the roads were clear of soldiers. One headmistress, accompanying a group of children home, came across a tank in a street. As the tank kept moving toward them, *'The children were terrified, and we stayed flat against the wall of a house ... When the tank arrived next to us, it honked its horn ... and we all jumped out of our skin with fear ... But there was something wrong with the horn, and it sounded like a beep, so I made fun of that in order to help relieve the children from their fright ... And we all laughed and the next day the children told their friends at school, 'The tank beeped!''*

## The Palestinian response to the educational challenge

*The Israelis want to stop us from sending our kids to school ... That's why they keep harassing us and our children. They want to drive us out of here, so that they can move in. They want to create an uneducated generation ... but it's going to be difficult for them to do that ... Education will help us achieve our goals ... I want my children to be better than I am ... to have a better life ... to be free. (Father, interviewed in a boys' primary school in H2)*

*We are determined to get an education ... the pen is our gun ... we will not be stopped by the Israelis ... they want us to miss education, in order to have us ignorant, for us not to understand ... (15 year-old girl, from a secondary school in H1)*

### *The importance of education to Hebron*

Initially the *Intifada* and the Israeli reaction to it caught the Directorate of Education in Hebron off its guard, with students missing several days of schooling because of the violence on the streets and the targeting of schools. *'But we soon learnt ... ,'* said one education supervisor. Teachers and students were instructed to go to the nearest secure school, and a TV campaign was launched with the assistance of UNICEF to encourage students to return to school. Students from needy families whose economic situation became even more precarious due to the crisis were provided with school bags, and were exempted from paying fees. The whole Palestinian Hebronite community was mobilised to ensure that resources would flow toward the educational effort, with US\$ 150,000 being collected in a few weeks, and with homes and mosques being made available to function as schools. As one headmistress of a primary school situated at a contact point said, *'The school building does not determine schooling ... You can learn anywhere ... That's our motto.'*

There is little doubt that, like many other Palestinians, the Hebronite community values education. Whatever their socio-economic background, Palestinian mothers invariably aspire that one of their children becomes a doctor or a lawyer. But education has more than an occupationally instrumental value for the Palestinians in Hebron. For the Directorate and for parents, education is a key strategy for keeping children out of violent clashes, since having young people at school helps reduce the risk of confrontation with Israeli troops and settlers. They also have the opportunity to socialise and to be involved in doing something other than brooding all day long. As one education supervisor noted, *'There is a sense of seeing the school as a source of support. Kids have an opportunity to talk, to tell their friends what they are going through and what they feel, to play ... '*

But education has also come to be the act of resistance of a people who will not be put down. Nothing catches more powerfully the determined pursuit for education in Hebron than the *Fatayyat Al-Asatih* – or the ‘roof-top girls’, as they have come to be called by teachers. These gritty primary-age girls, scrambling from one roof-top to another in order to get to their school, thus beating the Israeli soldiers at their own game, powerfully symbolise the resoluteness with which Palestinians are pursuing their right to education under very trying conditions.

### *The Palestinian response*

The loss of school days due to curfew conditions, the difficulty of focusing on education in a situation of conflict and violence, the psychological and social distress related to the daily experience of violence or expectation of violence – one and all and more led, as can only be expected, to difficulties in the delivery of education. These same difficulties inspired educators to imagine alternative strategies to ensure that students in old Hebron made up for the missed schooling, and to remain engaged in learning the set curriculum. The Directorate asked heads and teachers in the non-secure schools to suggest ways of responding to the situation, and a set of inter-related initiatives started emerging and taking shape. As one education supervisor noted, *‘Reality itself led to these initiatives ... things you never thought of doing before ... the situation pushed you to think of innovative ways of responding ...’* A project management committee was set up at the Directorate in October 2000, soon after the outbreak of violence, with the implementation phase kicking into gear in January 2001. The committee was made up of 15 members and included education supervisors, subject specialists, head teachers, teachers and parents.

The three key elements of what came to be known as the Distance Remedial Education Project (DREP) all had a separate but linked committee. The first took responsibility for the remedial self-learning worksheets, the second took charge of the remedial after-school programme, while the third directed the TV programme initiative. Each committee was made up of five to six members, and in the first two cases led a team of 50 teachers. On its part, the TV programme committee led a team of 15 teachers. Teachers had a key role at all the phases of planning and implementation of the initiatives, because, as one supervisor said, *‘they are the ones who are in touch with the pupils after all.’* Parents too had an important role to play, and their views and reactions were channelled through the very active Parents-Teachers Associations (PTAs), and their regular informal contact with schools. Evaluations of the different aspects of the project were carried out by Hebron education officials and presented to the Ministry of Education (MOE). Financial support was provided by UNICEF, which gave a grant of over

US\$ 50,000 to the project, of which nearly US\$ 30,000 were provided in cash, and the rest covered supply assistance and training. UNICEF also provided technical support, in the design of the project, as well as in the development of the self-learning worksheets, besides, of course, giving national and regional visibility to DREP, a factor that actively contributes to the dynamic evolution of any innovation. A key MOE official indeed felt that the project could not have happened without the support that UNICEF was able to provide. Table 1 gives an overview of the statistics involved in the project.

TABLE 1: Statistics relating to the different aspects of the Distance Remedial Education Project (data provided by the District Education Office in Hebron)

Number of	Activity	Primary Grades	Secondary Grades	Total <sup>†</sup>
Schools involved in:	worksheets	30	2	32
	after-school sessions	15	2	17
	summer camps	4	0	4
	TV programmes	30	2	32
Teachers involved in:	worksheets	470	30	500
	after-school sessions	65	15	80
	summer camps	65	0	65
	TV programmes	12	10	22
Teachers trained to prepare/lead:	worksheets	500	0	500
	after-school sessions	65	15	80
	summer camps	65	0	65
	TV programmes	12	10	22
Students who took part in:	worksheets	10,000	2,000	12,000
	after-school sessions	1,548	539	2,087
	summer camps	800	0	800
	TV programmes	10,000*	2,000*	12,000*

<sup>†</sup> There are overlaps in the number of persons or institutions involved in the different aspects of DREP.

\* Targeted, but not necessarily reached.

It is important to give details of each aspect of the DREP, and to also understand the ‘distance education’ and ‘remedial’ dimensions of each initiative. It must be noted that prior to the *Intifada*, the idea of distance learning had not seemed to be relevant, because of the smallness of the Palestinian territory – though it must be noted that distance learning and distance teacher training were first introduced by UNRWA among Palestinian refugees following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (Inquai, 1990). ‘Distance’, however, is a relative term, and in the context of H2, as has been pointed out, even a few hundred metres can represent a major obstacle to mobility, an obstacle that can only be overcome through the use of tools made available by distance education strategies – including pre-planned and pre-packaged teaching and learning materials which give prominence to work assignments and learning by oneself at home. The term ‘remedial’ has at least two meanings in the context of the DREP – it is remedial both because its aim was to make up for the deficit in learning caused by the crisis, and also because it set out to help the least achieving to keep up with the curriculum relevant to their age group. As will be seen, the project’s scope widened as it went from the planning to the implementation phase, and as ideas moved from the drawing board to the complex crucible of classroom and community life.

### *The self-learning worksheets*

The idea of preparing self-learning worksheets had already been raised by some Palestinian educators in the context of the first *Intifada*. That that idea was revived in Hebron in the second *Intifada* is partly due to UNICEF’s proposals for a contingency plan that had been tabled to the MOE, and which had suggested the use of such worksheets as a flexible response to a number of educational scenarios that could arise in the context of further political upheaval.

The basic idea behind a self-learning worksheet is that the regular curriculum is presented in the form of exercises that the pupil can fill in at home on his or her own, or under the guidance of parents or elder siblings. Worksheets had both an evaluative and an extension element to them: they helped evaluate whether a pupil had learnt a particular curricular unit, and also extended his or her knowledge in a specific area of study. In the context of the DREP, worksheets were initially trialed out with Grade 1 children and then extended up to Grade 7, and while they were largely aimed at primary level pupils, worksheets for higher grades were also prepared.

### *Preparation of the self-learning worksheets*

In the early stages of the project, 230 worksheets covering all curricular areas and different grade levels were prepared as samples of instructional material by 35 teachers who had followed a one-week training course for the purpose. Table 2 provides a breakdown of these worksheets by subject and grade level.

TABLE 2: The DREP worksheets

Subject	Grade Level	Number of Worksheets
Arabic, Mathematics, Science, Religion	1 - 4	80
Arabic Language	5 - 12	30
Mathematics	5 - 12	25
Science	5 - 12	25
English Language	5 - 12	30
Social Studies	5 - 12	20
Religion	5 - 12	20
Total number of worksheets produced		230

All the worksheet samples were perused in the course of the present research, and both on the basis of this analysis, as well as from comments made by teachers and supervisors during interview sessions, one can deduce the set of educational principles underpinning their design. The worksheets were generally visually and pedagogically attractive, so that children could enjoy filling them in, and could more easily take their mind off the conflict-related concerns and anxieties and focus on learning. The emphasis was placed on providing a wide variety of activities in each worksheet, and to ensure an association between learning and fun. Good worksheets were characterised by several interviewees as those having clear instructions as to what is to be done by pupils, a focus on one topic, a range of activities that involved play and activity, and which had drawings or pictures.

Each worksheet announced the topic as well as the grade level it was meant for. Many of the activities were of the ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ type, but some of the more innovative drew on experiential learning strategies. Worksheets required the use of materials that are often found in most households. Each worksheet had to connect and build on the regular curriculum, and indeed often referred pupils to specific pages in the school textbooks in order to avoid the danger of creating a parallel non-formal educational initiative that did not reinforce regular and formal schooling. The worksheets also included detailed guidelines and clear instructions on what to work on every week and how. Parents and elder siblings or members of the extended family were invited to supervise the children while these filled in the worksheets at home.

Evaluation of early material showed that teachers tended to introduce themes from the conflict in the worksheets, both because that was never far from their own personal preoccupations, and because some felt that it was pedagogically sound to build on the reality of the prevailing situation. They were however discouraged from this practice, since one of the targets of the exercise was the healing of the psychological and social distress caused by exposure to violence, and it was felt to be inappropriate by some to constantly draw the children's attention back to the conflict and to use school-related activities to represent images of violence.

Utilising a cascade model, the 35 teachers trained in preparing sample worksheets trained 465 other teachers between March and June of 2001. Teachers were encouraged to be creative and to develop their own style in designing worksheets, and to work in teams wherever possible in order to share ideas, to learn from each other, and to encourage a more holistic approach to the curriculum, keeping the model samples as a rough guide. Much of the work was done voluntarily by teachers, with UNICEF resources being used to cover the costs of reproduction of material for students.

Worksheets were either filled in at home, or else used during after-school remedial 'camps' or 'programmes' – another aspect of the DREP which will be described below. The delivery and collection of worksheets to and from homes proved to be quite a challenge for teachers at times. Depending on the severity of the conflict, worksheets were generally picked from schools whenever curfew was lifted – to allow people to go out shopping, for instance. Occasionally, however, worksheets were delivered by teachers directly to the pupils' homes. Since the situation was often totally unpredictable, the teacher-pupil contact could not be regulated, so every window of opportunity was made use of to flexibly respond to needs and to deliver such services as the correction of worksheets and remedial work.

### *Reactions to the self-learning worksheets*

The self-learning worksheets seem to have been very well received both by students and parents. Teachers were obviously proud of their achievements, and were very keen to show off the worksheets they had designed to visitors. Indeed, education supervisors claimed that some of the material prepared by teachers in schools – even when this was designed by hand, without the aid of a word processor – was superior to the model samples that had been prepared at the outset of the programme by specially trained staff using computers. Heads invariably praised teachers for the effort they had put in preparing the worksheets, claiming that the enthusiasm and creativity of the staff had increased after the initial demoralisation that overwhelmed many after the start

of the crisis. As one headmistress of a basic school in H2 said, *'Because we have to work in such difficult circumstances, achievement is sweeter ... we organise our school and the learning sheets according to the needs of the different families – and the focus is on what each child manages to achieve ... not on criticising: we constantly emphasise achievement, the positive.'* The only complaint from teaching staff was that schools were often in short supply of the kinds of materials that were needed to produce the worksheets and activities linked to them – including library resources, art supplies, educational games, transparencies, and so on.

Parents too showed a good deal of enthusiasm for the self-learning worksheets, feeling that the Directorate and the school really cared for the well-being of their children, and had come up with a simple but effective strategy to overcome some of the difficulties that arose during the *Intifada*. During a focus group interview with seven mothers in a boys' primary school, for instance, satisfaction was expressed at the fact that the worksheets distracted their sons' attention from the conflict. *'We try to isolate them from this reality, to get them away from the window where they keep watching what the Israeli soldiers are doing, and placing themselves in danger.'* These mothers felt that the worksheets gave continuity to schooling, and encouraged children to remain focused on education. They also helped them understand what their children were expected to learn by organising the knowledge in understandable units. *'I used to find the curriculum difficult to understand,'* said one parent, *'but the worksheets have made it easier for me.'* *'They summarise the curriculum,'* said another, *'and are a good organising tool.'*

Many parents were relieved that the worksheets gave them something 'tangible' to do with their children, with fathers noting that they too got caught up in working with their boys and girls. *'It gave us something to do together when we were cooped up in the house all day long ... other than quarrelling ...'* said one dad. *'... and producing even more children!'* rejoined another, with a twinkle in his eye – referring to one unintended consequence of curfew, confirmed by an education supervisor who pointed apprehensively at the maternity wing of the hospital in old Hebron saying that it had been *'producing one classroom a day'* ever since mobility restrictions had been enforced.

Some parents noted that it would have been a good idea for the school to have given them some basic training in understanding the worksheets and the role that they were expected to play. While many had caught on, they knew of some parents who themselves had literacy problems, and who had experienced difficulties, not quite knowing what to do and how to help their children. They did however acknowledge the fact that there had been a lot of informal contact with teachers, and that guidance and help was given in that way.

## *The remedial learning workshops*

The remedial classes – which were sometimes referred to as ‘camps’ or ‘workshops’ by teachers and parents – complemented the learning achieved through the self-learning worksheets. The ‘distance learning’ element came in because teaching was often done away from the formal context of the students’ regular school. The remedial classes were initially conceived as educationally supportive interventions focused over a short period of time, and aimed at those students who had fallen backwards in the coverage and integration of the curriculum due to their own learning difficulties, which had become exacerbated during the *Intifada*. Schools in old Hebron were divided into nine clusters, in which at least one remedial education centre was established to help lower attainers keep up with curricular requirements. Five of these centres were schools, two others were housed in homes made available by the community, while another two were mosques. A total of 17 schools (15 primary, two secondary) were involved, with 80 teachers (65 primary, 15 secondary) trained to lead remedial sessions that involved a total of 2,087 students (1,548 primary, 539 secondary). The focus with the primary students – with whom this case study is largely concerned – was on mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills, or making up for some achievement delay due to lack of school attendance.

An extension of the remedial education in centres was also planned as a ‘summer camp’ – and indeed four primary schools managed to organise such camps for two weeks between June and July of 2001, involving 800 pupils. Other schools had planned to follow suit, but with the intensification of the conflict over the summer, had to give up on their plans, and instead organised the ‘remedial camp’ after regular school hours. In most cases, that meant starting regular classes at 07:00 in the morning instead of 07:45, with the remedial shift starting at 12:00 and lasting two hours.

The rationale behind the summer and after-school interventions was quite similar, in that the main goal was to engage students in further learning in a social context marked by activities, games, music, and theatre that were both educationally sound and enjoyable at the same time. Prizes were also given as further incentives to students. Both modalities in the delivery of the remedial programme involved teachers as well as student helpers from higher grade levels (referred to as ‘*mustajadat*’). Self-learning worksheets were used to structure the formal, curricular aspect of the programme, but these were supplemented by informal educational activities such as trips and visits outside H2 and Hebron whenever possible, as well as plenty of physical and recreational activities. UNICEF provided children with a cap and T-shirt to wear, which helped to give an identity to the project, and also distributed refreshments every day. ‘*Whenever*

*you feed them, they're happy,*' said one teacher with a big smile. *'So many of the fathers are not working, and it's really getting tight for most of us.'* UNICEF also subsidised a stipend of US\$ 5 an hour for teachers who taught in the after-school programme, an extra income that was greatly appreciated and scaffolded sagging morale.

### *Reactions to the remedial education camps and workshops*

Both summer camp and after-school workshops lasted two weeks, but feedback from parents and teachers encouraged the Directorate to consider extending the after-school programme to a one day a week initiative lasting all year through. At the time of the fieldwork, the Directorate was also thinking of including other elements in the programme, such as a communal meal to which parents would also be invited, and a variety of cultural events.

Once again, a great deal of enthusiasm for the remedial education programme was expressed by heads, teachers, parents and students. Indeed, while initially the intention was to only have students in need of remedial help on the programmes, this soon had to be modified in most centres due to the demand on the part of other students to join in. Initial parental concern about the lengthening of the school day and the consequent increase in the time of exposure to danger soon changed to a high regard for the programme. Parents felt that the Directorate, heads and teachers really cared for their children, and were competent and professional enough to respond flexibly and creatively to a challenging situation. Parents invariably noted that both the psycho-social and the educational goals were being met by the remedial initiative. They were pleased to see their children rediscovering a motivation to go to school and to engage in learning, spiced as this was with fun and social activities. *'It dissipated the element of fear,'* said one mother, *'and it occupied the kids and gave them something fun to do.'* *'It was a break from routine and from the shooting – a way out ... it provided incentives: there were trips, food, games and activities – it would be really good to have this one day a week throughout the year,'* said another. A father noted that when it was the day for the remedial workshop, *'the boy is really keen to go to school.'* Another dad said, *'It took them out of the prison they were in – even though it extended the school day by two hours.'* The levels of enthusiasm were probably highest for this facet of the overall Distance Remedial Education Project, with parents, teachers and students expressing disappointment when the two-week programme came to an end, and all wanting it to be extended over a longer period of time.

Both parents and teachers preferred to have the remedial classes offered in the children's regular schools by the children's regular teachers, rather than in other remedial centres by teachers unknown to pupils or parents. On their part, teachers

felt that some special training for the remedial project would have helped them in their work, and that the one-day orientation programme organised by the Directorate had focused largely on the logistical rather than on the educational aspects of the initiative.

## **Remedial lessons on local TV stations**

This third aspect of the Distance Remedial Education Project was, for the Hebron community and possibly for the West Bank and Gaza overall, the most innovative and challenging, both technically and professionally speaking. Three Hebron TV stations – *Al-Amal*, *Al-Majd*, and *Al-Nawras* – agreed to broadcast lessons from the curriculum related to all subject areas for several grade levels. Twenty-two male and female teachers with a reputation for excellence were invited to deliver half-hour lessons in a studio environment. Each lesson sequence was filmed and transmitted twice, once at 16:00 hours, and then again the next day at 09:00 hours.

The TV production schedule was spread out over two stages: the first stage lasted from November 2000 to January 2001, and involved all three stations. A total of 43 lesson sequences in Arabic, Mathematics, Science and English were broadcast to secondary level students. April 2001 saw the commencement of the second stage of broadcasting, with *Al-Amal* TV station transmitting 39 lesson sequences in Arabic, Science, Mathematics and English to primary level classes, and Physics to secondary level classes.

Lessons focused mainly on those topics requiring a greater effort on the part of the learner to acquire the new knowledge. Teachers did this work on a voluntary basis, proud of the fact that their abilities had been recognised and were being put to good use in a community in crisis.

The media environment for the broadcasting generally followed one of two formats. One format involved a teacher giving a lesson, with the style being mainly expository in nature, and with use being made of white board and chart. This was largely used in the first phase of broadcasting, with lessons aimed at secondary level students. Other than zooming in and out on the teacher in order to either highlight the face, or the writing on the whiteboard or chart, few if any filming techniques or resources were used to enhance the visual appeal of the lesson. There were no photo or video-clip inserts to illustrate the session, and no use of overhead projectors or computer-generated images. This was TV broadcasting at its most basic, utilising a ‘talking head’ approach that does not exploit the potential of the TV medium or the more recent advances in education and information technology. Having said that, in most cases teachers’ diction was

clear and poised, with an emphasis being placed on a carefully paced delivery, and with several examples used to ensure comprehension. This was competent if traditional teaching where the emphasis was on subject matter, with teachers drawing on their experience of pedagogical content knowledge to facilitate learning on the part of the viewers. When one keeps in mind that none of these teachers had received any formal training in TV broadcasting, and that the studio resources were quite negligible, then their achievement, however modest, can be more easily appreciated.

The more attractive format involved a teacher giving a lesson to a small group of ten primary level children sitting in a classroom environment. The latter format was more interactive in nature, with the teacher – generally a female – using a wider repertoire of teaching strategies and resources. The more successful sequences had the teacher use flash cards, colourful posters and charts, singing, and many other resources, with pupils being asked to come out to the white board, to put on masks while they role played or sung, and with peer tutoring being encouraged. Students appearing on the programme had clearly been carefully selected, and while some of the lessons were recorded in schools that were not under curfew, the overall atmosphere created never seemed to approximate to a ‘real’ classroom environment – admittedly difficult under any circumstance.

### *Reactions to the TV programmes*

Notwithstanding the great deal of effort that must have gone into preparing these broadcasts, feedback about them from the field was less enthusiastic than for the other elements of the DREP. Despite prodding on my part, few heads, teachers, parents or students referred to the TV programmes. One parent contrasted the learning worksheets with the TV lessons, noting that while the first were interactive, the second were rather static. Another parent said that there were problems of who wanted to watch what in a context of large families – particularly in a situation where, as one MOE official later noted, the main focus when watching TV was on ‘breaking news’, with channels being changed all the time to discover what reporters had to say about the situation in the West Bank and Gaza. Some households had problems with good reception. The main problem however seemed to be that children did not have the patience to watch the lesson sequence from beginning to end. *‘There was little to excite one’s interest ... you often see nothing but the teacher or her back ... my boy became quickly bored, even though he was at first intrigued by the fact that there were children his age on TV, and that he could recognise some of them and even some of the lessons that had been covered at school,’* said one mother. It is of course possible that the TV programmes were more successful with secondary level students who, being more

self-disciplined and motivated, and possibly less restless, could cope with a less than stimulating broadcast. One aspect which might have limited the impact of the TV programmes was the fact that the links with the other components of DREP (i.e., the remedial classes and worksheets) remained weak and under-developed.

Despite these limitations, the TV broadcasts certainly have potential, particularly in a situation marked by conflict. In the first instance, there is no limit to the impact of the remedial lesson sequences transmitted: interview material with education supervisors suggests that students other than those targeted were watching the programmes, both in the H1 area in Hebron, and elsewhere. Indeed, one supervisor reported that some teachers in Gaza had watched the TV programmes and recorded them, because they had a good reception of some of Hebron's channels over there.

## **Achievements and lessons learnt**

*Teachers, parents and students have risen to the challenge – we note higher levels of motivation because of the challenge ...* (Education supervisor, Hebron Education Directorate)

In the last part of this paper the focus will first be on the achievements of the DREP, whether these results were intended and purposefully planned, or whether they are unintended, arising out of the dynamic processes generated by the project as it evolved through different implementation phases. In addition, an attempt will also be made to tease out the implications that this project might have for those who are called upon to provide educational services in the context of political conflict and violence in other parts of the Palestinian territories or internationally. The point will also be made that education policy-makers generally have much to learn from the DREP experience, even if they are operating in a context of regular schooling.

### *Impact on students*

The fundamental *raison d'être* of the DREP was to facilitate student achievement, despite the debilitating context of political conflict and violence. It is to the impact on learning that we therefore direct our attention first.

Given the difficulties of the situation, there is no hard and fast statistical evidence that shows with a high degree of certainty that student involvement in one or more aspects of the DREP made progress in assimilating the curriculum. The assessment unit at the MOE could not function due to the chaos caused by the crisis, and the relevant statistical information could not be collected in a regular

or reliable manner. But over and above these limitations, one should perhaps point out that any causal claims in education are difficult to make with any degree of 'scientific' accuracy because, even in regular situations, it is all but impossible to reproduce laboratory-like conditions to control for all the variables that might be said to be responsible for varying degrees of achievement. Nevertheless, if one goes by reports that are available, there does seem to be some evidence that, if considered cumulatively, suggests rather strongly that students did benefit greatly from the availability of the different initiatives that made up the DREP. Let us consider these one by one.

Different elements of the DREP were reported to have re-engaged students in learning, regenerating interest and motivation which had been weakened or lost due to the situation of political conflict, and the stress that went along with it. This re-vitalisation of the learning process could be seen both formally and informally. Formal evidence refers to achievements at the final examination of each grade level, where in one remedial education programme, for instance, out of the 57 children enrolled, only one failed his final examination, and that despite the fact that students had only followed half that year's curriculum in a regular classroom. Even though this case study is mainly concerned with primary education levels, it should be noted that in secondary schools, results obtained in the *Tawjihi* (i.e., matriculation) examination at the end of Grade 12 had, according to the Directorate, never been better. Formal evidence also refers to rates of attendance and drop-out rates, which remained normal, taking a downward turn only when levels of conflict intensified and made movement either impossible or unwise.

Informal evidence refers to the qualitative, impressionistic type of reporting made by teachers and occasionally parents and with reference to the positive impact or otherwise of the remedial education efforts. While not 'reliable' in the precise and scientific meaning of that term, the cumulative evidence of positive reporting by different actors in various interviews does add up to a clear vote of confidence and approval of DREP – especially since there was no hesitation in pointing out and criticising the weaker elements of the initiative, as has already been seen. Supervisors, heads, teachers and parents, while noting that H2 students were at a disadvantage, and thoroughly cognisant of the fact that less of the curriculum had been covered by those in their care than that covered by their H1 counterparts, nevertheless expressed a great deal of satisfaction at what had been achieved. Students had remained engaged with the curriculum, and a pragmatic set of solutions had been found to structure learning around the main themes and units that were appropriate for their grade level.

That sense of satisfaction was also strongly expressed in terms of the psychological and social benefits for students involved in DREP. Parents were particularly relieved to see their children occupied, their attention drawn away

from the violence, and with plenty of activities in which to participate that not only channelled restless energy, but also helped avoid any perilous encounters or confrontations with Israeli soldiers or settlers. Children had not become 'TV-addicts' due to their increased confinement at home, but were rather involved in the completion of meaningful tasks that must have contributed to the building up of self-confidence, particularly in the case of those students who had fallen back in their learning.

### *Impact on teachers*

Supervisors and heads of schools that were interviewed were unanimous in their appraisal of DREP as a source of professional development for teachers. When this view was expressed, they were not only referring to the formal training that some of the teachers had received in preparation for the various elements of DREP. Rather, they were highlighting the fact that teachers rose to the challenge of being innovative in very challenging circumstances, evincing a great deal of creativity in designing learning worksheets and other educational material that could benefit students in the remedial programmes. There seemed to be a greater understanding on the part of the educational community that children could do a lot of learning on their own, supported by well-prepared and appropriately structured educational material, and by helpful siblings, elder students, and parents. This is a major development in an educational system characterised by a curricular culture of top-down, 'teaching by preaching' approach, where little if any credit is given to the role of the pupil as an active learner (Sultana, 2000; UNICEF & Palestinian Authority, 1995). Equally important are the skills developed and the confidence attained in utilising experiential, activity- and game-oriented teaching/learning methods, as well as in creating one's own resources and visual aids – a particularly critical set of competences given that many schools are under-resourced in ready-made and commercially produced materials. Some of the heads also reported that teachers understood better how homework could be more creatively set and utilised for learning purposes.

Education leaders were careful to note that the remedial project initiatives built on skills and attitudes that had already been present – teachers had used a broad repertoire of teaching methods prior to their involvement in DREP – however, these were developed further through training, practice, and emulation. One headmistress pointed out, for instance, that many of her teachers were varying their pedagogy to reflect some of the ideas and practices promoted by the self-learning worksheets that the Directorate had made available as samples. An education supervisor echoed this saying that teachers had also learnt a lot just by watching their colleagues teaching on TV.

Educational research on innovations tends to strongly suggest that initiatives are most successful when teachers change their perception of their professional roles. Such perceptual shifts and changes are more likely to help teachers restructure their ‘routines of practice’, nudging them out of comfort zones that they had become habituated to (Sultana, 2001). In this case, teachers were clearly keen to try out new strategies in a situation where necessity becomes the mother of invention. Teachers reported that they had been pushed to do research in order to come up with interesting and stimulating worksheets, which they proudly showed off to visitors to the school. They reported that they were more likely to discuss their work with colleagues, to share ideas for improved professional practice, and to make connections between curricular areas in the preparation of their self-learning materials. After-school remedial programmes, as has already been noted, led teachers to reconceptualise their role, becoming more open to the idea of mixing fun and pleasure with the business of teaching and learning, and being more ready to develop closer relationships with children, who responded warmly to their teachers, whom they were seeing in a different light. Indeed, it was very clear that students and their parents were touched by the risks teachers were taking on their behalf, and by their exemplary caring and dedication that often went beyond the call of duty.

Another important perceptual shift that seems to have taken place among the educational community in Hebron, and which has major implications for the definition of roles, is the increased trust in the ability of teachers and heads to respond to situations in an educationally sound way. The notion of ‘subsidiarity’ – by which is meant the conviction that those who are closest to the challenge are more likely to be able to come up with strategies to address the situation – overlaps the notions of ‘decentralisation’ and ‘empowerment’. This marks a particularly central transformation in attitudes and practices in a system that, like many others in the MENA region, has been locked in a centralist mode of government that has tended to make it both rigid and unresponsive to real needs.

### *Impact on parents*

Mention has already been made of the important fact that the DREP set of initiatives reinforced – indeed increased – the trust that parents had in the Education Directorate. There was an evident sense of appreciation and gratitude toward educators for taking so many risks and going to such lengths in order to ensure that their children remained engaged with learning. Parents became even more convinced that the Directorate had the education of their children at heart, and the tense situation that prevailed served to bridge the gap between the school and the home. Teachers and heads reported that the PTAs had never been as active

as under the second *Intifada*. This was not just due to improved relations, but also because parents now had a much more specific and direct role in the education of their children, given that they were expected to supervise and support their offspring in the filling in of the self-learning worksheets. As one mother declared during a focus group interview in a boys' primary school in H2, '*All this made us get closer to the school ... students now rely a lot on their family for their education.*' It seems that parents often went to school to ask teachers as to how to deal with some of the issues that arose in the worksheets, and that several of the PTA meetings in schools focused on both the educational process and on learning strategies to help children to cope with stress and anxiety. Both the situation and the increased educational interaction seem to have had a positive impact on parent-child relations.

While no opportunity arose to delve deeper into the matter, it appears that a number of illiterate or semi-literate parents became engaged in learning to read and write as they supervised their children, with the TV sessions proving to be particularly effective in this regard. Others, it seems – impressed by the community effort in investing in education against all odds – were less prompt to channel their children into paid work, even though falling family income made this option particularly tempting.

## **Lessons learnt**

### *... Lessons for educators working in situations of armed conflict*

The Distance Remedial Education Project, then, seems to have left a positive impact all round. It not only ensured a degree of continuity in the provision of education, but also contributed toward the normalisation of children's lives, despite a situation marked by political conflict and violence. This is a major achievement, and one that has implications both for other parts of West Bank and Gaza that have seen an escalation of political violence, as well as for other situations internationally that are experiencing a situation of armed conflict. This achievement can best be appreciated when one takes into account the conclusion of a relatively recent historical study on education in conflict zones. The author, noting the dearth of studies on the subject, concludes that such an 'absence can have an extremely negative impact on children and youth. It is time that the devastating impact of schooling disruption receives the recognition it deserves' (Richardson, 1999, p. 733).

Certainly, at the most fundamental level, the decision by the Palestinian community in Hebron to tenaciously provide education under what can only be

described as siege conditions is admirable and worthy of emulation in any similar context. The emphasis on continuity in schooling is valuable not only because it signals a profound belief in the empowering potential of knowledge, but also because it is one of the best-known antidotes to the psychological and social distress caused by the daily experience of political violence. In many cases worldwide it has been reported that communities, and particularly international aid agencies, tend to adopt the discourse of trauma when dealing with the situation of children caught in armed conflict. This conveys the idea of victimhood and a victim-identity, which is counterproductive to healing (Beirens, 2000; Boyden, 1999). Indeed, many well-meaning agencies use a trauma terminology that leads to the pathologisation of the population, even though such terminology, whether used by the community or by agencies, can be very effective in drawing attention or financial support (Beirens, 2000).

While the Hebron community did highlight the psychological and social impact of the violence on children, and indeed provided counselling support and organised workshops for parents in order to train them to help their offspring cope with stress, it did not stop there. The set of strategies that were put into place to maintain the delivery of education ensured that children remained engaged with the curriculum, while at the same time providing them with an opportunity to process their experience through the use of imagination, story-making, drama, play, and the arts.

### *... Lessons for educators more generally*

The DREP initiatives also have implications for educational situations that are not marked by political conflict and violence. After all, it does not need – indeed, it *should not* need – an emergency situation to generate the creativity, flexibility, sense of shared purpose and commitment that are the hallmarks of this particular project. Regular educational contexts have much to learn from the DREP experience, in the way curriculum and materials development can happen at the level of the school and the classroom, in the way teachers can produce excellent educational resources when motivated and trained to do so, even if they have limited access to technology and to funds. Indeed, it is a well established fact that the most up-to-date, expensive and sophisticated educational resources and materials – including computers, for instance – will not necessarily have the desired impact on the way teachers teach, either because these were provided without any concern for what educators wanted or were prepared and trained to use, or because they fail to connect with the realities of the context in which they are to be applied. It is notoriously difficult to shift teachers from the assumption that a single type of learning programme suffices for all, that knowledge should

be handed down, and that mastery comes through acquisition, internalisation, rehearsal and digestion – a shift that, in many cases, has not been achieved despite the introduction of new information and communication technologies in the classroom (Salomon & Almog, 1998; Salomon, 2000). And yet, the DREP initiatives seem to have managed to do just that, with the situation jolting teachers out of comfortable pedagogical routines, pushing them to extend their repertoire of teaching strategies – a leap in professional practice which could happen because of a clear vision and sense of mission, and thanks to the support provided by further training, parents, effective leadership and a modicum of funding.

The DREP case study, therefore, provides a significant model of good practice, one that should encourage teachers everywhere to believe in their ability to develop strategic responses to educationally challenging situations. Distance education strategies, for instance – such as self-learning worksheets – can be a simple, cost-effective, yet immensely valuable way of providing educational opportunities to children who would otherwise be hard to reach, or to students who drop out before the official school-leaving age. While not an alternative to regular school programmes, they can be a useful interim measure to ensure that children who are barred from attending schools – such as girls, for instance – do at least have access to the minimal curricular competences that they have a right to. After-school programmes that put a premium on the use of attractive and effective educational resources, and on the use of a broad range of pedagogical strategies that include games, peer tutoring, experiential learning, and so on, can help provide remedial education opportunities and second chance schooling, building up self-confidence and fundamental curricular competences in children who might otherwise give up on formal learning. TV and radio programmes – especially if they are linked to other distance education strategies such as self-learning materials – can cross boundaries of space or prejudice in a most effective manner to deliver an education that would otherwise be denied.

The Hebron initiatives underscore the value of decentralisation or ‘subsidiarity’. Local educational communities can be surprisingly innovative when they feel they have the power to develop their own responses to challenges that they have to face. Systems that operate as command centres encounter major difficulties in motivating educators to proactively and creatively engage problems. This is largely due to the fact that they tend to encourage institutional and professional cultures that are dependent on chains of commands that pass through complex and bureaucratic hierarchies. Participatory approaches, on the other hand, believe that those most familiar with the situation are more likely to develop ecologically sound responses to challenges. They therefore function as support systems, providing training, funding, resource persons, useful contacts and so on, which scaffold homegrown initiatives. As the Hebron initiatives show, such

participatory and empowering approaches lead teachers to own a project, and to invest it with their own professional and even personal identities. It is these high levels of motivation and professional pride that ensure the continued success of innovative practice.

The DREP initiatives also highlight the importance of parental involvement, especially when this is not a public-relations exercise in ‘power-sharing’ and ‘community empowerment’ that is more symbolic than real. The Hebron initiatives are therefore another important example confirming growing international consensus around the fact that genuine parental involvement can have a most positive impact on the levels of learning achievement of young children. Parents in Hebron showed that they could rise to the occasion when they were given the opportunity to do so, and that they were ready and keen to learn new skills and to expand their supervisory roles to ensure that their children did register progress. Traditional and conservative educators tend to perceive parents as intruders, ever ready to criticise the efforts of schools. This is not the way parents came across in Hebron – rather, as genuine partners, they supported teachers in the most difficult of circumstances, were ready to share the burden of the responsibility for educating their children, and expressed gratitude and esteem for excellent teachers who were clearly showing concern, care and commitment toward their sons and daughters. The bridging between school and home went beyond formal representation of parental concerns through PTAs: while the latter institutions are important, and certainly need to be a regular feature of any school community, it is the sense of purposeful partnership that grew between teachers and parents in an attempt to face a common challenge that is most edifying.

### *Replication*

High levels of involvement and commitment on the part of teachers, parents, and education officials generated a sense of communal pride, as well as high standing in the national community: ‘*Many experts have come to see what we have done and achieved,*’ noted the Director of Education at one stage, with a great deal of satisfaction. The reputation of DREP has grown to such an extent that the Palestinian Authority’s MOE has declared its intention to extend the project to other directorates, with Hebron providing its own staff to train others in communities in both the West Bank and Gaza, who were living in the same situation of closure. Even though, of course, and as one high ranking MOE official noted wryly, the hope was that improvements in the political situation would make such replication unnecessary.

These developments – together with the idea that one can ‘learn lessons’ from a successful innovation – raise the complex issue of replicability. Many

innovations are successful because they are ecologically linked to the situation in which they are embedded. They respond to challenges in a manner that is appropriate, taking into account the material and human resources available, and in a way that is in tune with the cultural codes and expectations of the community. There is often a keen sense of purpose, driven by an excitement that comes with the satisfaction of developing imaginative and creative solutions to problems that others may have found intractable. Thus, for instance, one can understand why teachers will tend to be more motivated if they are using self-learning worksheets which they themselves designed and produced, than if these are provided as part of a ready-made package that has been pre-prepared for them by other educators.

The sense of excitement and the dynamic synergy that is a feature of innovative contexts are immensely difficult to transport to other environments, where a different community's motivation is expected to ignite because the innovation they are being encouraged to adopt has worked well elsewhere. Certainly, the distance education strategies adopted by the Palestinian Hebronites may serve as an inspiration to other communities. Educators will here find useful ideas as they attempt to come up with their own flexible and innovative responses to the challenge of barred schooling – whether this is due to political violence, gender discrimination, natural disasters, or whatever. Each community, however, has to develop its own strategies, ones that are appropriate to the ecology of the situation, and which makes best use of the human and material resources that are available. In the case of Hebron, for instance, the options chosen emerged from the socio-economic as well as cultural reality of the community itself. As such, some of the strategies pursued there can only be replicated in contexts that are similar. It is only in middle-income countries, for instance, that there is likely to be an already existing broadcasting infrastructure that can be used to transmit lessons, or where families have easy access to television sets. Similarly, the self-learning worksheets could really only work well in Hebron because each school had its own photocopying facilities, and access to at least a minimal amount of resources such as paper, colours, and so on. Furthermore, not all communities will have a majority of literate parents who are capable of supervising their children's education at home.

The fact nevertheless remains, however, that the Palestinians in Hebron provide the international community with an inspiring account of how initiatives led by educators and parents can counter challenging situations marked by political conflict and violence in order to ensure that their future generations do get what the world has agreed – both through its Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and the commitments at the Education for All conference – that is theirs by right.

## Notes

1. This is a revised version of a case study first published by UNICEF as a MENA Occasional Paper. Thanks are due to UNICEF for permitting me to share the results of that research with a wider community of readers. Responsibility for views expressed in the paper remains entirely with the author. The paper does not refer to the deterioration of the situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs) during the last several months.
  2. ARABEFA has been formed as UNESCO's Arab regional Education for All (EFA) entity for the follow-up of EFA activities.
  3. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 established UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to carry out direct relief and work programmes for Palestine refugees.
  4. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator (UNSCO) was established in June 1994 following the signing of the Oslo Accord. The objective was to enhance the presence and involvement of the United Nations system during the transition process.
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